

# Sheffield Poverty Truth



**“What if people who struggled against poverty were involved in making decisions to tackle poverty?”**

This question is our starting point and one that we will be seeking the answer to. **At the heart of our approach is the belief that better responses to poverty can be made if they involve and include the experiences and opinions of those people who have lived it.**

Like other Poverty Truth Commissions (PTCs) across the country, Sheffield Poverty Truth will bring together two groups of people. Around half of the people with lived experience of poverty and the other half comprised of decision and policy makers from civic and business sectors. Together, they will work to understand the nature of poverty, how it is perceived, the underlying causes and explore creative and practical ways of addressing them.

Underpinning all of this are the relationships that are forged between the people involved and it is through these that we build trust, understanding and empathy. The process of a Poverty Truth Commission ensures and nurtures a space where everyone taking part is listened to and feels comfortable and supported when sharing their experiences, knowledge and expertise.

## **What difference does this approach make?**

The Poverty Truth Commission approach is well established. Since the first in Scotland in 2009, more than 10 areas have set up their own PTCs including Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham. Other locations such as Hull are currently involved in establishing their own Poverty Truth Commissions. The Poverty Truth Network<sup>1</sup> brings together the different PTCs from across the country and provides support and guidance.

Across the UK, **the impacts of PTCs have been numerous and wide-ranging** and have helped bring about changes for individuals and organisations, at a policy level and in helping to alter the ways people think about poverty.

The focus of each PTC is different as it depends on the issues that the people involved decide to explore.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://povertytruthnetwork.org/>

## Examples of outcomes from PTCs across the UK:

- **Manchester:** work was done to understand the impact of digital exclusion on peoples' everyday lives these issues were raised in the development of the city's digital exclusion strategy<sup>2</sup>
- **West Cheshire:** one social housing provider reported a 75% reduction in evictions since it changed its approach to managing tenancies. It moved from a reprimand approach to offering a well-being service which focuses on early intervention and supporting people to sustain tenancies.<sup>3</sup>
- **Morecombe Bay:** the PTC worked with the Council in re-wording letters to make them less intimidating and to encourage people to phone and access support.<sup>4</sup>
- In **Scotland**, the Commission instigated a mentoring programme for civil servants through which those who have direct experience of poverty coached senior policy leaders. This programme is now being developed more widely.<sup>5</sup>

## A Transformative Approach '*Nothing about us, without us, is for us.*'

Despite the term 'Commission', a PTC is not a short, time-defined evidence-based exercise. Underpinning PTCs is the idea that social change can only happen when those who experience struggle participate in creating change. This is not just about transformation at a policy level as often for those involved **the process can be as valuable as the outcomes**; it empowers people with lived experience in a way that they may not have experienced before. It can also change the way those from civic and business sectors work, how they reach decisions, understand the impact of those decisions and how they understand and perceive the experience of living in poverty. These types of outcomes are often difficult to quantify but they are often where the biggest transformations take place:

*"It makes us feel more important, like we can actually go into a room and sit with these professional people without feeling we shouldn't be there, that we had no right to be there we feel like we are humans and should be there just like them."* (Maggie, Morecambe Poverty Truth Commission.)<sup>6</sup>

*"The biggest impact on me as someone who leads an institution but also has a civic responsibility, is to think about what impact my decisions have on people's life chances."* (David Moutry, Director of Culture for Manchester, Chief Executive at HOME)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Manchester Poverty Truth Commission 2019-2021: Key Findings and Impact Report  
<https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/manchesterpovetrytruth/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://povertytruthnetwork.org>

<sup>4</sup> Morecombe Bay Poverty Truth Commission: Reflections and Learning (2017-2020)  
<http://www.morecambebaypovertytruthcommission.org.uk>

<sup>5</sup> <https://povertytruthnetwork.org>

<sup>6</sup> Morecombe Bay Poverty Truth Commission: Reflections and Learning (2017-2020) (page 39)

<sup>7</sup> Manchester Poverty Truth Commission 2019-2021: Key Findings and Impact Report (page 4)

## The Process: How does it work?

There are **4 phases** to a holding a Poverty Truth Commission. The process usually takes around two and a half years.

<b>1</b>	<b>START-UP</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>A start-up working group is established</b> consisting of organisations and individuals who work to establish a PTC in their area. The group secures funding and <b>recruits a facilitation team</b> whose responsibilities include supporting the people who will be involved, supporting the connections between the different organisations involved and organising meetings and events.</li></ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>RECRUITMENT AND LAUNCH</b> <p><b>This is where the 'two groups' of people are recruited.</b> Poverty Truth Commissions refer to these groups as 'Commissioners.'</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) <b>'Community Commissioners'</b> – 15 people with direct experience of poverty are recruited. The commissioners meet for a period of 6 months, get to know one another, and decide what they want to communicate about their experiences.</li><li>2) <b>'Civic and Business Commissioners'</b> – 15 people from civic and business sectors are also recruited.</li></ol> <p>This phase ends with a <b>public launch event</b>, where Community Commissioners share their stories and experiences and meet the Civic and Business Commissioners.</p>
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMISSIONERS MEETINGS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The two groups of commissioners now meet on a regular basis.</b></li><li>• The topics/issues of the PTC are decided.</li><li>• Commissioners think of ways that could impact peoples' experiences and make a real-life difference to those impacted by poverty.</li></ul>
<b>4</b>	<b>EMBEDDING THE WORK</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The Closing event:</b> the work of the PTC is shared and communicated with the wider public.</li><li>• <b>Work continues to be embedded</b> into communities, organisations and institutions</li></ul>

## Next Steps in Sheffield

Since 2010, Sheffield has seen the levels of poverty increase and we are expecting it to continue to do so. In 2019, Sheffield was the 57<sup>th</sup> most deprived local authority (out of 317 in England.) In the same year, reports told of how 26.5% of Sheffield children were living in poverty and that in some areas such as Burngreave this was as high as 53%.<sup>8</sup> The picture is likely to get much worse due to changes to welfare policies, the rising cost of food and fuel and the impact that the Covid pandemic has had on people across the city.

There is already a substantial amount of work happening in our city to understand and address the issues of poverty and support people who need help. Examples of this work include emergency food support, the work of Citizens Advice Sheffield and the citywide response to the cost of living crisis. However, we are still seeing the devastating impacts of poverty on people living in our city and we need better answers about how we respond to it, and answers that are developed by those who have experience of poverty. The Poverty Truth Commission is an established process in which we can do this.

Sheffield Poverty Truth is currently working between 'Phases One and Two' of the flow chart referred to above. We have a very impressive Steering Group made up of experienced people with a background in working in some of our low income areas in the City. The group is chaired by Pam Daniel with Adam Yousuf, Debbie Mathews, Martin McKervey, Charlotte Killeya, Colin Havard & Ryan Wileman as members. The project is supported by Manor & Castle Development Trust who are acting as Host Organisation. We are also delighted to have seconded Ryan from the Salvation Army for one day a week to Coordinate the project and have also agreed deals with Andy Freeman from Space to Breathe and Zara Makinta from Adira to work as Facilitators of the project. Ryan, Andy and Zara are just about to start liaising with local community organisations to recruit people with lived experience against the struggle against poverty to act as Community Commissioners and are just beginning to look at which Civic and Business Leaders may be interested in being involved in the project when it kicks off in mid 2024.

We are very grateful to have received enough money to start the process and are appreciative of Sheffield City Council, the Integrated Care Board and Poverty Truth Network for helping us to secure approximately £45k in funding. We do, however, need about another £100k over the next three years to help us run the Commission well and finish the process with some meaningful outcomes and are actively seeking additional funding for this

Like other PTCs across the country, Sheffield Poverty Truth cannot work in isolation and is dependent upon working with partners; it is a multi-agency approach. We have an established link

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2019/>  
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with Poverty Truth Network who provide support and guidance with the process. We are building upon and exploring links with Voluntary and Community Sectors, Sheffield City Council, Education and Health services, Food banks and other food providers across the city, employment and welfare services and local businesses and employers.

## **Ways for Sheffield Food Banks to be involved**

- 1)** Commissioners – we are looking to recruit Community Commissioners (people with lived experience of poverty). Can you recommend participants? If so, please contact our Facilitation Team, Zara Makinta or Andy Freeman (details below) to discuss this in more detail
- 2)** 'The Welcome of the City' – We need help to spread the word about Sheffield Poverty Truth and put us in touch/engage with different organisations.
- 3)** Keep in Touch – It's important to us that we share the work and progress of Sheffield Poverty Truth and that we keep in touch with organisations across the city.

## **Get in Touch with Sheffield Poverty Truth**

If you are interested in getting involved or want to know more, please contact:

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