

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Impact of Cost of Living Crisis on Women and Disadvantaged Communities– Follow Up report to the themed April debate	
REPORT OF Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Council	DATE 17 th July 2023
SUMMARY OF REPORT This report provides an overview of the Full Council themed debate on 26 th April 2023. The report summarises the key points made by the 6 speakers, and the subsequent debate at Full Council. The report highlights the next steps from the discussion and with implementing the recommendations of Camden Women’s Forum’s Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Women and marginalised community. Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information The following reports were used to produce this report: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Camden Women’s Form Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Women Themed Report 2) April Council Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Women and Marginalised Communities Themed Debate Report Contact Officer: Florence Henry, Policy Designer, London Borough of Camden, 5 Pancras Square, N1C 4AG, 020 7974 6568, florence.henry@camden.gov.uk	
RECOMMENDATIONS The Council is asked to note the report.	

Signed: Nadia Shah, Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion

N. Shah

Cllr Richard Olszewski. Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living

Richard Olszewski

Date: 5th July 2023

1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The cost of living crisis is a short and long term issue. In March 2022, the Council heard an update on our work to address financial vulnerability for households following the pandemic. In July 2022, the Cabinet agreed a Cost of Living Crisis fund to support residents in financial hardship. In November 2022, the Council held a Full Council themed debate on the crisis, where Angela Mason, co-chair of the Women's Forum updated Full Council about Camden Women's Forum inquiry.
- 1.2. Camden Women's Forum was established in 2019 and brings together partners across the borough to look at issues affecting women and girls. It is co-chaired by Helene Reardon-Bond, Camden's politically appointed gender equality champion and Angela Mason, former Cabinet member for Best Start in Life. Camden Women's Forum operates like a select committee and engages with women and girls directly about the issues affecting them.
- 1.3. To mark one year on from the start of the Cost of Living Crisis, the Council held a Full Council themed debate on the Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Women and marginalised communities on 26th April.
- 1.4. Camden Women's Forum started their inquiry into the impact of the Cost of Living on Women in October 2022 and launched their inquiry report on the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on women and marginalised communities in March 2023 for International Women's Day, and the Council's Cost of Living Cabinet Sub-Group endorsed and accepted the recommendations on 23rd March. The Council's budget in March already aligns with these recommendations.
- 1.5. The accompanying report to the Full Council Debate in April details the progress in implementing the recommendations of Camden Women's Forum, following the launch of their inquiry report on 6th March 2023 for International Women's Day.
- 1.6. This report provides an overview of the Full Council debate on the Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Women and Marginalised Communities on 26th April 2023. It summarises the views of speakers and subsequent debate within the Chamber. The report provides further details on the issues raised and sets out an update on some of the actions the Council is taking to respond to the Cost of Living Crisis and Camden Women's Forum's report.
- 1.7. The Council was grateful to have six speakers join the debate, including two residents who had contributed to Camden Women's Forum Inquiry as part of the 100 women they spoke to as part of their inquiry on the impact of the cost of living crisis on women:
 - 1) Helene Reardon-Bond, Co-chair of Camden Women's Forum
 - 2) Reeve – resident

- 3) Fateha – resident
- 4) John Hayes – Headteacher at Gospel Oak School
- 5) Shabna Begum – Head of Research, Runnymede Trust
- 6) Emma Stewart, Co-Founder, Timewise

2. SUMMARY OF FULL COUNCIL DEBATE

- 2.1. The debate was introduced by Cllr Nadia Shah, Cabinet Member for Voluntary and Community Sector Cohesion and Equalities. Cllr Shah opened by thanking Camden Women's Forum for their leadership on Women's access to employment, which resulted in a fund to translate qualifications from abroad to UK equivalents to support them into work, and an additional £400,000 per year of investment into Violence Against Women and Girls following their inquiry on domestic abuse. Cllr Shah outlined that Camden's Cabinet have already fully endorsed the Women's Forum recommendations on the Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Women, and that the work had been discussed by the Cost of Living sub-group. Cllr Shah outlined how Camden have invested in Universal Free School Meals for all Primary School students, and an additional £2 million into Cost of Living Crisis fund.
- 2.2. Cllr Shah also outlined that the cost of living crisis does not impact our communities equally and risks widening the gap further between the richest and poorest communities in Camden and disproportionate harm is being done to marginalised communities. Cllr Shah noted that 49% of children in lone parent families are in poverty, and children from Black, Asian and other Ethnic groups are more likely to be in poverty. Cllr Shah also talked to the challenges faced by local VCS organisations who are facing decreased resources, increased costs and increasing resident needs, with some charities no longer able to provide solutions to manage their debt. Cllr Shah talked about the Council investing an additional £60,000 to groups working with women, Black, Asian and ethnic communities, disabled people, Older People and carers. Cllr Shah also outlined that Camden have extended partner funding for 18 months, with a further £1.1 million resilience fund, and presently Camden are currently putting in place funding of over £3 million per year to support our Voluntary and Community Sector. Work is underway across the Council to implement the recommendations of Camden Women's Forum, but Cllr Shah acknowledged there is always more to do to support communities.
- 2.3. Helene Reardon-Bond, co-chair of Camden Women's Forum, outlined that Camden Women's Forum had spoken to over 100 women in Camden about the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Women. Helene thanked the women for their bravery, and thanked Reeve and Fateha for taking part in the debate today. Helene outlined that the focus groups showed the resourcefulness and strength that existed in the community, and women in crisis who weren't eating so their children could eat, and women who couldn't find flexible work around childcare commitments despite looking for this for years and women feeling a lack of agency. Women in Camden earn 86p for every £1 a man earns, 38% of women have a lower pension and 83% of women in a YouGov survey said that they had the major responsibility for food shopping and were more likely to go without meals on a daily basis. Helene outlined that the local recommendations

had been fully endorsed by Camden Council, and thanked Camden for this and for Camden's officer's support. Helene outlined women felt Camden was an excellent Council, but did not feel they had access to the communication they need. Helene outlined schools were having to make difficult funding decisions, and that the cost of living crisis risked increasing the divide between richer and poorer families, as young people miss out on cultural capital from wider enrichment activities which is assessed by Ofsted.

- 2.4. Reeve, a local resident, spoke on behalf of the HOPE Survivors Group, a local group of domestic abuse survivors who meet weekly to discuss life after domestic abuse. Reeve outlined that there was frustration from local survivors that they were required to repeat their stories to different professionals whilst trying to access housing, employment and benefits support. Reeve also spoke about women feeling they were trapped in their roles as carers, and that there was a need to communicate new policies, timescales and their impact to domestic abuse survivors to foster better relationships between residents and the Council.
- 2.5. Fateha, a local resident shared her experiences both as a resident, and also as a member of Cooperation Town. Fateha outlined that in response to the Cost of Living, Corporation Town in Gospel Oak have been running a living room, which has received reached local residents, had positive feedback from residents and received external funding. The living room also has a free community laundrette and a community garden, as requested by residents and have plans to widen this out.
- 2.6. John Hayes, Headteacher at Gospel Oak Primary School and also Executive Headteacher at Netley Campus, as a way of reducing management costs in response to school budget cuts. John outlined the ways the Cost of Living Crisis is affecting families at his school, with families struggling to cope. He outlined that the school have awarded 200 food vouchers over the last period to families and £93,400 in Cost of Living Hardship funds. Gospel Oak Primary School have also had to set up a food bank in their school, where parents who can afford to donate food to restock the food bank. John outlined the importance of a broad and balanced curriculum, with school trips offering important enrichment for child, but with costs attached. John outlined that Gospel Oak ensure that every child who wants to take part in the Year 6 residential trip can do, as parents donate the cost of trip to another child and a hardship fund. John outlined that one of the unintended consequences of universal Free School Meal could be a reduction in pupil premium and school budgets. John outlined that school budget cuts had resulted in Gospel Oak Primary School losing 8 members of support staff in the last 2 years, almost entirely women.
- 2.7. Emma Stewart is the co-founder of Timewise, a social enterprise focused on tackling labour market inequalities by making flexible working the norm. Emma outlined both the national and local picture – nationally, only 3 in 10 jobs reference flexible working at the point of hire, and 1 in 10 are part time at the point of hire. Camden Council has been working with Timewise for the last few years to ensure all Camden jobs are flexible by default, training managers around flexible working and providing support to labour market intermediaries.

- 2.8. Shabna Begum, the Head of Research at the Runnymede Trust, outlined the intersectional nature of poverty and the Cost of Living crisis - with black and minority ethnic people disproportionately falling faster and further below the poverty line amidst the cost of living crisis. Shabna outlined how race and gender intersect to create hardship, and how the design of our benefit system, and regressive tax system have had a disproportionate impact on women from black, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds, who are more likely to be in poverty. Austerity has meant that public services have been stripped back, with women and those from Black, minority and other ethnic backgrounds are more likely to feel the consequences of this, and pick up additional responsibilities as a result. Black, minority and other ethnic women are more likely to be exposed to zero hours contracts, and not have liveable incomes.
- 2.9. There were questions from Cllr Berry around the provision for young people in Camden. Cllr Hardwick and Cllr Umeadi also both outlined the challenges for women around low-paid work with increases in the cost of living and the high costs of childcare.
- 2.10. Cllr Olszweski closed the debate by thanking Camden Women's Forum and thanking the 100 women who had been a pivotal part of the work in sharing their stories. He acknowledged that the cost of living is a deep crisis, affecting people in many different ways, and that Camden has done a lot to respond and support families, but outlined the challenges that austerity and cuts to Council funding have had on the Council's spending power.

3. NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 Following the debate, Camden Women's Forum have continued to promote and share their report with key partners and stakeholders across the borough to raise awareness of the disproportionate impact of the cost of living crisis. The debate talked about the importance of amplifying the voices of local women, and their intersectional experiences of the cost of living crisis. In May, Camden Women's Forum shared the report with the North London Waste Authority (NWLA) to explore opportunities for collaboration around period poverty, school uniform and flexible employment. And, Camden Women's Forum have written to the Women and Equalities Select Committee sharing the report, and asking them to launch an inquiry looking at the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Women and disadvantaged communities.
- 3.2 The costs for families of school uniforms, school meals and the school trips and enrichment were discussed in the debate. Camden have invested £1.3 million in a family support fund, focused on tackling food hunger in secondary school, helping families buy school uniforms and providing free healthy school breakfasts to children from low-income families, extending the borough's holiday food voucher scheme and investing another £2 million in our cost of living crisis fund to help residents who can't afford essentials like food or energy bills. A report is going to Cabinet in July on the Council's response to the Cost of Living Crisis, and this includes an update on the Family Crisis Fund. Following the debate, work has also begun to look at how to increase the uptake

of free school meals in secondary schools. The work is a partnership with Public Health and local schools, and taking a design-led approach to find ways to increase uptake in Camden. The council is also doing work to understand the barriers and encourage more families to apply for free school meals. Work is also ongoing on school uniforms.

- 3.3 Camden's participation team are also working on an affordable school uniform scheme, looking to share second hand school uniforms to promote sustainability and reduce costs to parents. The project is also approaching retailers to access surplus stock to redistribute to families and young people in need in the borough. Following the debate, local women who took part in Camden Women's Forum's Cost of Living Inquiry were also invited to take part in a further focus group in June to shape how this school uniform swap scheme can best support local women and families with school uniform costs.
- 3.4 During the initial research phase, there were common themes from women in our Somali and Bangladeshi communities about a lack of knowledge of support and how support is communicated. Camden's communications team subsequently organised a follow-up communications workshop in collaboration with women at British Somali Centre to learn more. Themes discussed included: free school meals, help with school uniform costs, help with food, mental health and communications. Following the workshop, clearer messaging was immediately developed and shared re free school meals, along with information on all of the issues discussed. Feedback on all of the issues raised was also shared with relevant service colleagues to inform their work. Another communications workshop is being planned in collaboration with Hopscotch. The communications team is also considering the feedback regarding communications and what more we can do to collaborate more closely with all of our communities on communications – including plans to establish a community advisory board for major communications and campaign activities.
- 3.5 At the debate, the specific challenges faced by Domestic Abuse survivors were discussed. Following the debate, there have been further discussions between the HOPE survivors group to ensure those with lived experience are shaping the Council's work on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). A lived experience panel for Camden's VAWG Board met for the first time in June, and local survivors of domestic abuse are attending the July meeting to ensure that survivors can hold partners to account and shape Camden's work on VAWG.
- 3.6 Camden Women's Forum have also been working through the next steps for the Forum. As the cost of living crisis continues to impact women in Camden, Camden Women's Forum co-chairs are keen to build on their existing work, to deepen understanding of some key areas as the Cost of Living Crisis continues to impact women, and national government legislative changes take effect. From September, employees will have the right to flexible work from Day 1 of employment and from April 2024, as part of wider government reforms on free childcare eligibility, children aged two years and up will be entitled to 15 hours of free childcare a week. Camden Women's Forum are keen to continue to get women in Camden's views of planned and new legislation, and the impact of them.

- 3.7 Planned work over the next few months includes data analysis updating quantitative and qualitative data on women's economic position, including flexible working and childcare following on from Camden Women's Forum first inquiry. Camden Women's Forum also are keen to network across the borough and continue to make links with women and community organisations across Camden. Camden Women's Forum co-chairs, Helene Reardon-Bond and Angela Mason, are also members of Camden's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Board and through this work are interested in reflecting and marking progress around White Ribbon Day, on 25th November 2023, which will be 2 years since their Domestic Violence and Abuse report was published in December 2021, and an additional £400,000 per year of funding for VAWG was approved by Cabinet.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no legal comments.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The Director of Finance has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no expected environmental implications.

7. APPENDICES

- 7.1 There are no appendices to the report.

REPORT ENDS