

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 19 March 2024 at 1.00 pm

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## SUPPLEMENTAL AGENDA

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# DELIVERING DEVOLUTION TOGETHER



Final report 2019 to 2024

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**NORTH OF TYNE**  
~~~~~  
**COMBINED AUTHORITY**



# FINAL REPORT OF THE NORTH OF TYNE COMBINED AUTHORITY

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**WHY WE CAME TOGETHER...?  
TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF  
OUR RESIDENTS.**

## OUR TOP ACHIEVEMENTS



**5377+**  
new jobs in the  
pipeline for  
growing businesses



**£126m**  
invested in projects  
to enable growth  
and innovation



**115 000**  
courses for  
people to get  
good jobs



Supported  
**569**  
businesses to  
go digital



Pledged support to  
**62**  
community projects  
through North of Tyne  
Crowdfunding



Unlocking space for  
**2023**  
new homes across  
the region



Attracted  
**1.8m**  
visitors to events  
and festivals

# FOREWORD

## WELCOME TO THE NORTH OF TYNE COMBINED AUTHORITY'S FINAL REPORT



**MAYOR  
JAMIE DRISCOLL**  
North of Tyne

In May 2024 the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) will be absorbed into a new, North East Combined Authority. This will be a historic moment for the region. The new deal is now worth £6.1 billion and gives us the power to develop and control our public transport system. We secured the best funded devolution deal in England because of our excellent track record of delivery at NTCA – the organisation I have been proud to be elected to lead for the last five years.

In those five years we have taken a collaborative approach towards solving the problems our communities face. We have developed strong partnerships and have a focus on co-designing projects and policy. I call this 'open-source democracy', but essentially it means we listen to the people closest to the issues. When you do this, you get better results. Our Citizen's Assembly on climate change has shaped our approach to net-zero policies. Our Equalities Assembly has deepened our understanding of the barriers faced by marginalised groups. We act on these insights and make sure that no one is left behind.

When we set up NTCA we were given one main target from central Government – create 10,000 new jobs in 30 years. Our progress? 5,377 new permanent, full-time jobs, all backed by our Good Work Pledge. An additional 3,277 jobs have been safeguarded by NTCA investments. That's 16 years of progress in under 5 years.

When we talk about an inclusive economy, that means ensuring there is opportunity for everyone – adult skills is a big part of this. When central Government was administering the adult skills budget, they had 21,885 course enrolments a year. We took control of adult skills provision in 2020 and by listening to learners and course providers we increased enrolments to 35,230 a year – on the same budget.

That's a 60% increase in taxpayer value for money and more people getting the skills they need to progress their career.

We've backed our green industries, investing £40m in offshore wind and renewable energy, a Green New Deal fund and retrofitting and engagement programmes, to support a zero-carbon future. We're helping build 2,034 new homes on brownfield sites, with eco and affordable housing. We're running a ground-breaking child poverty prevention programme in 100 schools, because the good green jobs of tomorrow will not be taken by kids who are too hungry to learn today. We've also invested in community hubs and our creative industries – enriching the fabric of our societies whilst boosting our regional economy.

And we've done all of this without charging a penny in council tax. As Mayor, I have the power to put a precept on the council tax, but instead we've funded our projects by negotiating extra investment from central Government and matching it with hundreds of £millions from the private sector. A prime example is the new Northumberland Line – the only new passenger railway to open in England in decades. A true testament to what can be achieved when the North East works together.

The North East is a wonderful place to live, with such friendly and hard-working communities. Our landscape is stunning, and our history and heritage receive global recognition. We still have many challenges to overcome and much work to be done. However, I want to pause at this historic moment and pay tribute to my cabinet colleagues and wonderful, hardworking, North of Tyne Combined Authority team. Together we have shown that devolution can change lives and help to build a greener, more prosperous, fairer, North East for all.



**DAME  
NORMA REDFEARN**  
DEPUTY MAYOR  
North of Tyne

If the North of Tyne Combined Authority has been about anything, it's been about taking those first steps to work together, to collaborate and to create a happier, healthier, better-connected and more prosperous North of Tyne.

It's less than five years since we started on this journey. Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland came together with a powerful goal of improving the lives of our people. No journeys are ever simple, and we soon found ourselves in the middle of the pandemic, and a cost-of-living crisis. Yes these are difficult challenges, but working together as a combined authority we have been able to do what's right for our region.

We can now say that devolution works, and that it delivers. From education to skills, to good jobs, to progression and success – we know our collaboration is making a difference. I'm proud of many things;

from the poverty prevention programme working with over 100 schools to help families where they live, to the thousands of new jobs; from the 61 small projects funded in our communities with their support and contributions, to the millions we invest in skills with ever increasing take up. We are making a difference.

We have proved what can be achieved in just five busy years. As we wrap up NTCA and present this final report, we know that this is not the end, it is in fact another beginning.

It is now time to take the next steps to even deeper collaboration and wider partnership. This year we will come together to start a new journey as a bigger region, creating more jobs for local people and becoming a stronger, more ambitious and confident North East.

**Dame Norma Redfearn is the Elected Mayor of North Tyneside Council**

## AND OUR CABINET MEMBERS



**COUNCILLOR  
NICK KEMP**  
Leader of  
Newcastle City Council



**COUNCILLOR  
GLEN SANDERSON**  
Leader of  
Northumberland  
County Council



**COUNCILLOR  
KAREN KILGOUR**  
Deputy Leader of  
Newcastle City Council



**COUNCILLOR  
RICHARD WEARMOUTH**  
Deputy Leader of  
Northumberland  
County Council



**COUNCILLOR  
CARL JOHNSON**  
Deputy Mayor of  
North Tyneside Council

# FOREWORD



## DELIVERING DEVOLUTION TOGETHER



**HENRY KIPPIN,  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**AS THE FIRST AND ONLY TERM OF THE NORTH OF TYNE COMBINED AUTHORITY COMES TO AN END, IT IS RIGHT THAT WE TAKE A MOMENT TO PAUSE AND REFLECT.**

Five years overseen by a cross-party Mayor and Cabinet have been eventful! A lot has been achieved, and there are lots of lessons we can learn for the future.

I am proud of the work that has been done by our team, partners and stakeholders across the region. We have established and grown a new organisation, adapted through Covid-19 and delivered investments that are already bringing positive change to the region. We have convened and worked closely with our partners to build a platform for wider devolution. We have innovated in delivery – creating new delivery models and innovative financial vehicles that are nationally recognised. And we have done all of this whilst caring about and nurturing a supportive working culture – the North of Tyne Combined Authority is an accredited ‘Great Place to Work’ and home to many creative, driven and empathetic people.

The key to doing this has been collaboration. No-one achieves anything alone. A Combined Authority is as good as its relationships, and on that score we have benefitted from brilliant partnerships for which I am truly grateful. Our Cabinet has provided consistent, collective political leadership and oversight beyond party lines. Our local authority partners have mobilised to deliver during an incredibly difficult financial period. And we have built relationships with businesses, charities,

universities and other public sector organisations that I know will stand the test of time.

At the heart of this has been a team of people that care deeply about the outcomes that we are trying to achieve. Inclusive growth that benefits the whole region and creates new routes into skills, jobs and better lives. Better infrastructure and access to resources which allows our key sectors to grow. And a relentless focus on progressing devolution – so that the structural limitations of the North of Tyne Combined Authority become a stepping stone to something bigger and better. Ultimately, we can point to actual people doing actual jobs that would not have happened without the collaborative work we have been part of – and that is something to be celebrated.

I have always wanted us to be open about what can be learned, and what can be better. As we head into a wider North East region collaboration, we need to be more ambitious, convene more boldly and draw in even more investment from the public, private and social sectors. We need a clear focus on building capability and expertise where the region needs it – for example in closing the investment gap in research and development, and business growth. We also need even more creative ways of supporting people into skills and work – recognising the societal pressures that Covid and a weak economy have reinforced.

The North East has a lot to be confident and hopeful about. Our job now is to make sure the North of Tyne Combined Authority is the prelude to a true regional renaissance.

## INVESTING IN OUR REGION



We put jobs and innovation, creating an inclusive economy, and getting to net zero at the heart of our investment plan.

From 2019 to 2024 we invested **£126m** into our economy from our investment fund.



## A GREAT PLACE TO WORK



We are officially a ‘Great Place To Work’! In 2023 we were awarded the sought-after national kitemark, a first for any Combined Authority. Staff overwhelmingly said they were proud to tell others where they work and how we contribute to our community.

Great Place to Work works uses staff surveys and research methods, in thousands of organisations with millions of employees, across the world to identify what organisations are doing right and how they can continually improve.



## OUR VISION



**OUR VISION IS OF A DYNAMIC AND MORE INCLUSIVE ECONOMY, ONE THAT BRINGS TOGETHER PEOPLE AND OPPORTUNITIES TO CREATE VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND A HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, NARROWING INEQUALITIES AND ENSURING THAT ALL RESIDENTS HAVE A STAKE IN OUR REGION'S FUTURE.**

We have worked in partnership, creating connections between programmes and projects, developing an inclusive approach to investing in our region. Devolution has given us the chance to make our own decisions about our future, so we targeted investment where we knew it was most needed, making a strong connection between economic growth and providing people with the skills, education and confidence to benefit from every opportunity.

# SOCIAL ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES



## CREATING MORE INCLUSIVE AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES THROUGH INVESTMENT, ENGAGEMENT AND CO-DESIGNED PROJECTS.

We put decision making powers back into the hands of local people and asked for their bright ideas.

Our £566k community fund brought communities together to run projects which celebrated their local area and restored a sense of pride and belonging.

We co-designed new initiatives with residents, asking how money should be spent, listening and responding. We ran

a Poverty Truth Commission to understand the impact of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, putting the building blocks in place for future growth to make sure no one is left behind.

In 2021 we became the first Combined Authority to run a Citizen's Assembly asking residents to help us agree our climate change priorities and in 2022 we were praised by the Local Government Association for our approach to engaging with communities.



## INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY HUBS



***"The hall was almost unusable during the winter months as there was no gas and electric. Heaters were needed to heat the building, which was expensive, and it was impossible to keep warm. Our electricity bill will now drop by £1,500 next year and there is additional income from people using the hall."*** - Volunteer

Community hubs were a lifeline for many communities during lockdown and we invested £1.5m to make sure they could continue to bring people together and play a central role in the recovery of the region.

A 170-year-old village hall in Great Whittington received a £10k grant, which they combined with other funding, to purchase and install a heat pump, solar panels, and a battery backup. The hall is warmer and more pleasant for residents and has resulted in three times as many winter activities and bookings than previous years.

**Pledged support to 62 community projects through North of Tyne Crowdfunding**

## NUCASTLE COMMUNITY HUB



### Education and employment support for children and young adults.

We invested £2.6m to support young people's futures with an amazing new facility in Newcastle's West End, as part of our commitment to improve and expand community hubs across the region.

The incredible innovative, three-storey NUCASTLE Community Hub, was made possible through a collaboration with our partners, Newcastle Building Society, and Football charity Newcastle United Foundation.

The grant provided a huge boost to Newcastle United Foundation's Futures Programme, which works to transform the lives of young people and the new facility near St James' Park, is an accessible and inclusive centre for learning, recreation, exercise, personal development and community work.

Sarah Medcalf, Deputy Head of Newcastle United Foundation, explained: "Together, we aim to equip around 12,000 teenagers and young adults with the skills they need to gain employment through NU Futures – particularly within digital, financial, professional business services and STEM careers and industries."

## COMMUNITIES GET CROWDFUNDING



***"Just to walk down the back alley, which has been greened as part of the project, is a treat. It looks so beautiful now, like you're really proud of it."*** - Volunteer

Our Crowdfund North of Tyne project gave local people the opportunity to celebrate and improve their local area through funding initiatives which had the backing of their community. Grants from between £1k-30k were available to run projects which helped support wellbeing and mental health, reduce the impact of poverty, help people into jobs and promote lifelong learning.

We funded 62 bright ideas, from community beekeeping to the nation's first ever Stottie Cake Week. We helped people with food poverty, funded days out for kids, made beaches accessible for wheelchair users and even saved a choir. All with the aim of creating more vibrant and inclusive communities.



## NATIONAL STOTTIE CAKE WEEK



The Big River Bakery used funding to show how food can bring communities together to tackle food poverty.

They taught families how to cook from scratch, delivered free stottie making kits and gave out 1,000 breakfast bags to school children. They also established the UK's first ever national Stottie Cake Week in February 2024, a week-long celebration of free events and food across the region in celebration of the origin of the North East staple.

## NORTHUMBERLAND'S OUTDOOR KITCHEN



Volunteers in Amble received £9,871 to create a new women-focused community garden, to help reduce social isolation during the cost-of-living crisis.

Women's Workshop brought local women together to improve their confidence and knowledge by running workshops teaching how to grow and cook through the seasons, DIY, woodwork and crafting.

The funding was also used to transform an outdoor space with flowers, recycled planters and an outdoor seating area, providing a quiet space for new connections and friendships.

## PEOPLE POWER – CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY



**“We now see that climate change is a credible, urgent and real threat. It threatens all we value: our families, our communities and our planet.”** – Assembly member

In 2021 we were the first Combined Authority in the country to commission a Citizens’ Assembly on climate change. The question the Assembly considered was:

**“What should we do in the region to address climate change and its causes, fairly, effectively and quickly?”**

The Assembly consisted of a group of randomly-selected but representative group of residents. They spent 30 hours considering the issue including learning about the topic, hearing evidence from expert witnesses, weighing policy options and making actionable recommendations.

It was overseen by a panel of experts from local authorities, trade unions, businesses, the voluntary sector, environmental groups, scientists, and academics to ensure that the Citizens’ Assembly was fair and balanced and took into account a range of ideas and opinions.

The Assembly produced 30 recommendations on housing, transport, energy, financing carbon reduction and raising awareness of the climate emergency.

As a result we expanded funding for its existing programmes in offshore wind and agreed an additional £1m in funding to support small businesses to decarbonise and make a start on retrofitting the North East’s housing stock.

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**“We now see that climate change is a credible, urgent and real threat. It threatens all we value: our families, our communities and our planet. We must all be involved in tackling the climate emergency, putting Climate Change at the forefront and heart of every single decision.”**

**“In deciding our action, we must place fairness at the centre ensuring that those of us who are vulnerable and marginalised are not further disadvantaged.”**

**“We have a responsibility to act urgently and leave a fair legacy to conserve what we have and value now. If we don’t act it will be too late. It is imperative that we speak on behalf of future generations as they have no voice. It is through our community spirit and resilience that we will tackle this crisis together.”**



## OPEN THE DOOR A LITTLE WIDER THE MAYOR’S EQUALITIES ASSEMBLIES



**“Recruitment processes should be less competitive and more equitable. Just open the door a little wider.”** - Participant.

Using people’s lived experience when designing policies, results in more effective outcomes and in 2022 we held the first Mayor’s Equalities Assemblies with 46 residents who had experienced challenges finding good work. The aim was to understand the real barriers people face when finding a job and to support employers to be better able to recruit and retain a diverse workforce.

Working with Voluntary Organisations’ Network North East (VONNE), we were able to reach specific groups who often felt excluded and designed the forum so that their voices could be heard. A further Equalities Assembly for employers was held in 2023 to understand their challenges.

**“The groups seemed to take strength from each other and over the course of the day the room got louder and louder.”** - Facilitator

**3,276 residents engaged through our events**



### VOLUNTEERS TAKE THE REINS



Established 25 years ago, Ouseburn based Stepney Bank Stables received £6,400 to teach almost 50 children and young people how to care for and ride horses.

Many of the children who volunteered at the sanctuary struggled to remain in mainstream education and the funding helped the stables to provide a much needed safe and welcoming space where volunteers could be themselves and improve their confidence, as well as learn important life-skills such as time management.



### TACKLING FOOD WASTE



Zero-waste shop ‘Buy the Kilo’ in North Tyneside had been on a mission to support people to make greener choices.

They used community grant funding to hire out the local community centre and run a free environmental day for families.

Ethical businesses and local artists ran crafting workshops, a clothes swap, a kid’s treasure hunt and screened films to share ideas and help people understand how they could do their bit to save the planet.





# HOUSING, LAND AND DEVELOPMENT



## ACCELERATING THE DELIVERY OF NEW HOMES, REGENERATING OUR PLACES AND MAXIMISING THE OPPORTUNITY OF NEW INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT.

From dementia friendly homes in Blyth, ground works in Northumberland and giving old developments a new lease of life in Newcastle, our £32m brownfield land fund helped to unlock previously developed and unused sites across the region, paving the way for new and community-led homes.

In 2024 we announced almost £1m to deliver an at-scale retrofit programme, providing advice to 1,200 households to support them to make their homes more affordable and energy efficient.

It's not just new homes we have focused on; towns and high streets are being revitalised in Newcastle East End, Ashington and Wallsend, thanks to an £7.7m investment to develop long-term plans, helping local traders and bring empty buildings back into use.



### LIFETIME HOMES IN LYNDON WALK



£400k of our Brownfield Housing Fund has been invested into the Lyndon Walk site in Blyth to bring back into active use, an area of land which has sat vacant for a long time. This will provide much needed affordable housing for the local area and will unlock the development of 13 two-bed bungalows, providing accommodation specifically for adults diagnosed with dementia. The site will benefit from air source heat pumps as part of our ongoing commitment to reduce the carbon impact of new housing.

### PARTNERING WITH HOMES ENGLAND



We signed an ambitious agreement with Homes England in 2023 to accelerate the construction of homes as part of the region's bold plan for growth.

With a focus on strategic economic corridors, such as the Northumberland Line and the North Bank of the River Tyne, the agreement set out plans to work together to unlock resources and accelerate development on some of the region's most important housing sites.

The partnership is working and in 2024, working alongside us, Homes England acquired Quayside West one of the most significant brownfield regeneration sites in Newcastle with capacity for around 1,100 homes and potential to transform the area.



Unlocking space for 2023 new homes across North of Tyne

### NEW HOMES IN NEWBIGGIN



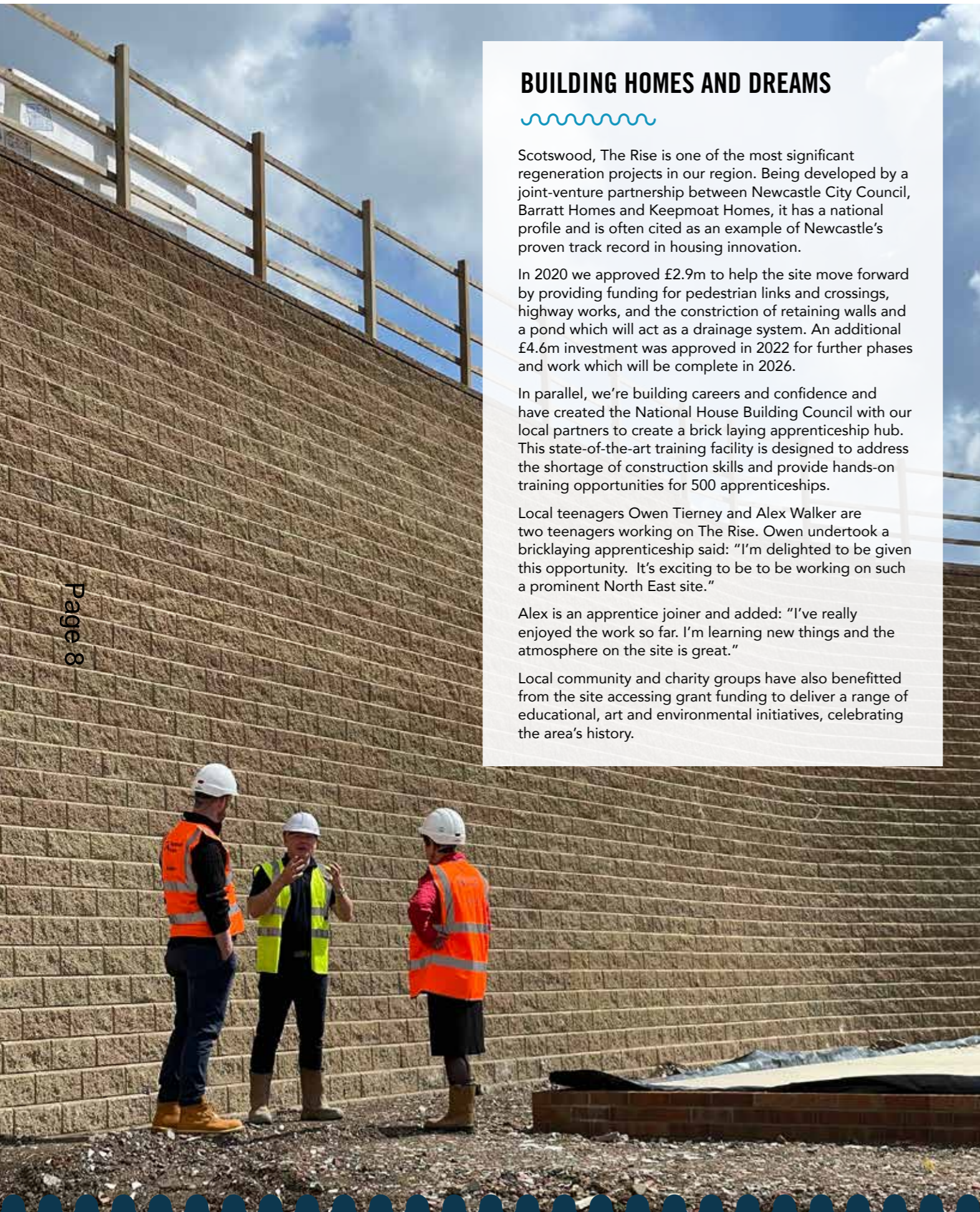
With support from our investment new affordable homes are being built on derelict land in Newcastle at Newbiggin Hall. We have invested £500k to enable the construction of 43 new homes on the estate, as part of a wider £6m investment.

Our investment paid for the demolition and clearing of the old shopping centre, which was in disrepair and had become a magnet for antisocial behaviour.

The new homes are being built by Newcastle City Council for Your Homes Newcastle and will be available as affordable housing with shared ownership, rent to buy options and some council housing. The homes will have solar panels on the roofs and air-sourced heat pumps helping future residents tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

Due to be completed in 2024, the development has been designed to be within easy walking distance of a new doctors' surgery for the residents and the local shops.





## BUILDING HOMES AND DREAMS



Scotswood, The Rise is one of the most significant regeneration projects in our region. Being developed by a joint-venture partnership between Newcastle City Council, Barratt Homes and Keepmoat Homes, it has a national profile and is often cited as an example of Newcastle's proven track record in housing innovation.

In 2020 we approved £2.9m to help the site move forward by providing funding for pedestrian links and crossings, highway works, and the construction of retaining walls and a pond which will act as a drainage system. An additional £4.6m investment was approved in 2022 for further phases and work which will be complete in 2026.

In parallel, we're building careers and confidence and have created the National House Building Council with our local partners to create a brick laying apprenticeship hub. This state-of-the-art training facility is designed to address the shortage of construction skills and provide hands-on training opportunities for 500 apprenticeships.

Local teenagers Owen Tierney and Alex Walker are two teenagers working on The Rise. Owen undertook a bricklaying apprenticeship said: "I'm delighted to be given this opportunity. It's exciting to be to be working on such a prominent North East site."

Alex is an apprentice joiner and added: "I've really enjoyed the work so far. I'm learning new things and the atmosphere on the site is great."

Local community and charity groups have also benefitted from the site accessing grant funding to deliver a range of educational, art and environmental initiatives, celebrating the area's history.

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## NORTHUMBERLAND LINE



Construction of the new Northumberland Line railway is well under way between Ashington in Northumberland and Newcastle Central Station. We supported this major development with an economic investment plan that will leverage in £130m of investment to transform towns and communities along the route.

Restoration of passenger services on the route between Ashington and Newcastle Central Station will create a new "economic corridor" sparking a regeneration of the towns it runs through.

Our £10m investment goes beyond the engineering work. Our economic plan will help bring forward new development sites, look at opportunities to accelerate growth and ensure that new line provides people with easier access to jobs and training opportunities in key sectors such as the region's thriving clean energy sector.

So far, we have invested in capital works around stations and along the route of the line. Large investments have been made of £2.5m for Newcastle Central Station improvements and £5m for a new road bridge at Blyth, this will replace a level crossing and ensuring the town and port remain easily accessible.

We have also funded projects focused on local transport links around the new stations, for example ensuring it is easy to cycle from the line to the Energy Central Campus in Blyth.

More investment is being planned, for example we are looking at ways to connect to 'Waggonways' in North Tyneside, develop a masterplan for the Manors area of Newcastle, and making investment into improving Ashington Wansbeck Square.



Investing **£7.7m** in revitalising our towns and highstreets



## NEW STATION AT BLYTH



On the Northumberland line a new station at Newsham in Blyth is under construction – with anticipated journey times of just 25 minutes from Blyth to Newcastle.



## RETROFITTING HOMES



While getting to net zero is a priority, spiralling energy costs are also a major factor in the cost-of-living crisis. To help tackle these joint issues we commissioned a report from the Energy Saving Trust, to build a robust evidence base for a future large-scale housing and building retrofit programme, to make them more energy efficient. The report looked at our regions' housing stock, the best ways to achieve net zero and the potential impact on local employment. It shows that up to 3,500 jobs could be created, but that the scale of investment needed for this work is vast and we will continue to talk to government to unlock funding.

# JOBS, INNOVATION AND GROWTH

## BUILDING OUR CAPACITY TO INNOVATE AND CREATE FUTURE JOBS, THROUGH MAJOR INVESTMENT IN OUR TRANSITION TO CLEAN GROWTH, GREEN JOBS AND A MODERN, DIGITALLY CONNECTED ECONOMY.

4,334 more people in the North of Tyne are in good work today thanks to an investment in innovation and growth and a further 5,377 jobs are in the pipeline.

In 2020 we created our Good Work Pledge setting the standard for good work in the region. Today, 150

employers have committed to providing good work to 80,500 employees with 150 more employers in talks to join us soon.

We also launched a £3.5m fund to support more businesses to expand and create jobs and hire more people in the region.

We also supported 569 small and medium sized businesses across the North of Tyne become more successful and resilient by adopting digital technology, providing one to one support to help them understand and make best use of their data.

## 150 COMPANIES AWARDED OUR GOOD WORK PLEDGE

One of the ways we are helping our region bounce back from Covid-19 is through the provision of better work.

We created The Good Work Pledge in 2021, a simple and free framework, to recognise and celebrate good employers and to ensure more people have access to work that is reliable, pays a decent wage and supports their health and wellbeing.

150 businesses employing more than 80k people in the North of Tyne have been awarded the accreditation to date, with 150 more companies in talks to join the programme soon.

Rothwell Plumbing Services, a family run business which has been established for over 35 years, became the 150th business to be awarded the Good Work Pledge.

Recognised for their commitment to creating local employment opportunities, the plumbing company has created 180 apprenticeships, provided valuable work experience and demonstrated a commitment to developing their workforce through training, volunteering and inclusive recruitment practices.



**Attracted businesses to the region, bringing 1739 new jobs**

## INWARD INVESTMENT FUND

We championed North of Tyne as a place to do business on a national and international stage. In 2019 we launched a £10m fund to generate inward investment from the Electrification, Offshore Renewables, Corporate Services and Health and Life Sciences sectors and, to help companies relocate to the region, expand and grow.

Working closely with our partners to complement the existing investment support available across Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland, our investment enabled a package of support including: relocation advice, tours, sector research, recruitment advice as well as connections and introductions to make the move to the region as smooth as possible. The fund has been particularly successful at attracting digital, commerce and cloud-based technology businesses to the region including Credera and its parent company Omnicom media group, Monstarlabs, Thoughtworks, Xplor and Version 1 who are all experts in digital products and consulting. Through the fund we have supported the creation of 1,739 high quality jobs.



## VERISURE CONTINUES TO GROW

With our support, global security firm Verisure established a base in North Tyneside on the Quorum Business Park in 2020 and since then, they have expanded rapidly twice as fast as expected. They have recruited over 650 people and in 2022 relocated into an even bigger building on the park, which could eventually house 1,200 employees.

The firm has roles in customer services, sales, operations, data analysts and technical advisors on site. It is also looking to expand into services offering 'first responders' who can handle emergency situations. Managing Director Gabino Sanchez endorsed the region: "The North East has proven to be the perfect place to have a major arm of our business. The city, the culture and the people. Our aim is to continue to grow."

## GRID FINDER

Our innovative equity investment model has reaped rewards with Grid Finder, a Tyneside based gaming startup company. After successfully taking part in our digital start-up programme, Ignite Accelerator, Grid Finder received an additional £100k in 2023 to continue their growth. Working with Creative UK our investment helped Grid Finder to create more jobs in the region. The start-up and has now been acquired by US based RAFA racing club.

Grid Finder Founder, Thomas Stapley-Bunten, said:

"I am so grateful for the tech and start up support eco system that is being championed in the North East of England. It's been great to feel part of a growing movement of creative thinkers in Newcastle and I'm so glad that we're able to continue to hire from our local talent pool."

## GROWING MERIT HOLDINGS, CRAMLINGTON

Headquartered in Northumberland, with further offices in Glasgow and London, Merit is the UK's leading industrialised construction and digital manufacturing specialist.

The company produces bespoke modular industrial units at its manufacturing facility in Cramlington which are then transported for final assembly on location. Merit specialises in sectors requiring clinical or clean room grade facilities such as health and life sciences, electrification, aerospace and semiconductor manufacturers and have delivered the design and build of Berwick's £35m community hospital, Moderna's new £25m laboratory in Oxfordshire and the UK's first CAR-T cell lab - a complex and specialist cancer fighting manufacturing facility in Stevenage.

The benefit of this style of construction is that the time taken from design to finished product is much less than using traditional construction methods and Merit's proven successful track record has seen them grow significantly in recent years.

In 2019, we invested £500k to enable Merit to continue their growth and expand further, acquiring a 100,000 sq ft facility in Cramlington which had stood empty and derelict for some time. The company moved quickly to re-develop the site and bring it back to use creating over 200 new jobs to support its expansion plans.

Despite Covid-19, the company delivered on its growth targets and exceeding the requirements for grant funding, which was part funded by the European Regional Development Fund. Over the last four years Merit has seen an increase in turnover of over 100% and increase in staff of over 200. They are now building on their successes and exploring the opportunity to expand overseas which could see the creation of 1,500 new jobs if successful.

Page 10



Supported **569** businesses to go digital

## £10M INVESTED TO SUPPORT THE REGION'S DIGITAL SECTOR

As part of our £10m commitment to support the growth of the digital sector we invested in six programmes in the North of Tyne area.

With our partners we delivered support across the digital sector to break down barriers for start-ups, grow the talent pipeline, support scaling businesses and attract companies to the area. We also provided support pathways for non-digital businesses to access expertise from digital specialists so they could adopt new technology, improve efficiency and create new jobs.

Small and medium sized businesses had free access to six programmes:

- 01 NATIONAL INNOVATION CENTRE FOR DATA**  
 Academics and industry experts helping businesses understand the value of their data, find efficiencies, create new products and helping businesses to grow.
- 02 DIGITAL PATHFINDERS**  
 Informative events and expert one-to-one support to adopt digital technologies.
- 03 DIGITAL INWARD INVESTMENT**  
 Attracting new businesses and tech investors to the area to support the growth of the digital sector and creation of new jobs,
- 04 DIGITAL CLUSTER**  
 Bringing clusters of businesses together to collaborate and innovate. Connecting businesses to market opportunities and bespoke support such as market access and finance.
- 05 IGNITE NORTH EAST**  
 Increasing the number of digital and tech start-up businesses in the region and helping entrepreneurs and new business founders turn ideas into viable businesses through workshops.
- 06 TALENT ENGINE**  
 Driving collaboration between employers and training and education providers to support the creation of meaningful digital roles and training people in industry relevant skills.

# CREATIVE, CULTURE AND RURAL

**DELIVERING YEAR-ROUND EVENTS, TOURISM AND INNOVATION ACTIVITIES WHICH CREATE JOBS, SUPPORT SECTOR GROWTH AND BOOST THE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF OUR CREATIVE, EVENTS, TOURISM AND RURAL INDUSTRIES IN A POST-COVID WORLD.**

We helped to build the profile of the region, investing £2.3m in a festivals and events programme to increase access to arts and culture. From a film and media festival in Berwick to 1900 years of Hadrian's Wall, Illuminated Sheep and even a North Sea Weekender, we attracted 1.8m visitors.


We provided £8m of business support, training and small grants to rural businesses, helping them to scale their existing businesses, launch new products and services, and build sustainability and innovation into their future business plans.

Our support for the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise and the Rural Design Centre will provide a focal point for future business resilience, innovation and strategy to unlock the potential of the rural economy.

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**Investing 8m to support rural businesses communities and environments to thrive**



**Celebrating our area by bringing over 1.8m visitors to local events**



**207 cultural and creative businesses supported to thrive**



## CULTURE AND CREATIVE ZONES

We boosted the recovery of the culture and creative sector post-pandemic, through investing £5.1m in three Culture and Creative Zones (CCZ), helping writers, artists, actors, film makers, creatives of all kinds to grow their businesses, access low-cost and free workspaces, fund new ideas and projects and develop new skills.

We have set up designated areas across the region to support people and grow businesses working in the cultural and creative industries. We have invested in supportive environments for the creative sector to locate, start-up, grow, and flourish and ensure that no matter where in our region an independent artist, creative professional or business is located, they have access to the networks and support to enable them to grow further.

We have connected creatives with business skills. Each CCZ zone typically provided an availability of creative workspaces, business training and skill development, and engagement planning to connect their work to local communities.

Working in partnership with our local authorities we have invested £1.7m in each CCZ zone over five years. Each CCZ zone is developed at a different pace and took a different approach unique to its area and community. The overall programme brings all the CCZ zones together so opportunity and knowledge-sharing can take place across the region.



### CREATE BERWICK, NORTHUMBERLAND

Create Berwick started with a fund offering up to £5,000 to bring cultural organisations, creatives, artists and residents together to run creative projects which develop skills, grow businesses, and engage people in creative activity; making Berwick a beacon for culture and creativity. Projects in the pipeline include creative hubs, a community radio station and plans to celebrate the 400th anniversary of The Old Bridge. This comes on top of our £170,000 investment in the Berwick Film and Media Festival.



### CREATIVE CENTRAL, NEWCASTLE

In Newcastle we are supporting Creative Central run by Newcastle City Council. The zone is working around Clayton Street to develop a vibrant hub of creativity, directing funding and support to artists and creative businesses to help them set up shop. With our £1.7m investment so far, Creative Central has awarded £350,000 to projects aiming to develop creative skills and support artists to make a living without taking on second or third jobs. Future plans include an art residency project with the homeless and a creative hub on the Scotswood Road.



### CULTURAL QUARTER, NORTH SHIELDS

Launched in 2024 at the newly-refurbished Exchange Theatre, the Cultural Quarter in North Shields forms a focal point for creative industries in the area. It works with artists, creative practitioners and cultural businesses to co-produce a programme of projects and events that give residents and visitors the chance to enjoy high-quality artistic experiences. We are proud to have invested in this important cultural renewal.



1

- 1 We supported Northern Pride in July 2023 by investing in the Community Village at Newcastle's Town Moor, making it free to all. Adding to the Pride parade, the village had a stage of singers, drag artists and DJs, plus many other activities to take part including an alcohol-free space.
- 2 Inspired by the Gospels' themes of light, sheep and pilgrimage, our Illuminated Sheep arts trail encouraged locals and thousands of visitors to find their inner shepherd in preparation for the arrival of the Lindisfarne Gospels to the region in 2022.
- 3 Over 56,000 visitors attended The Laing Art Gallery's landmark 2022 exhibition. 'The Lindisfarne Gospels' celebrated the most spectacular surviving manuscript from early medieval Britain as it returned to the North East.



3



6

- 4 We celebrated the 1900th anniversary of the Hadrian's Wall, our UNESCO World Heritage Site, throughout 2022. Over 3,000 events took place driven by communities and local arts organisations bringing visitors to the region. Apertura was an interactive sonic sculpture featuring wind chimes at Walltown Country Park as part of the festival.
- 5 Under the Stars was a series of free, spellbinding outdoor events telling stories through building projections, sound installations and fire commissioned by us. It was held in March 2022, attracting over 44,000 visitors to the region.
- 6 The Rugby League World Cup Cultural Festival took place in Newcastle in October 2022 to support the tournament. This ambitious free festival on the streets of Newcastle brought together audiences for sport and art featuring dance, music and aerial performance.



2



4



7

7 The world's first ever Morph art trail - Morph's Epic Art Adventure - hit the streets of North Tyneside from January to April 2022, attracting over 60,000 visitors.



8

8 Everyone knows the Great North Run and we supported it in 2022 to help mark its 40th celebrations in style. Particularly important as our communities emerged from the pandemic. That day the BBC TV audience was 5 million and the event was distributed to 127 countries.



5

9 Thousands of people attended the second North Sea Weekender in 2022 on the North Tyneside coast over September and October, funded by through our festivals and events programme and designed to extend the visitor season. Activities included surfing, kayaking, food and music events.



9

# EDUCATION, INCLUSION AND SKILLS

## SHAPING THE SKILLS OF THE FUTURE AND WORKING TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE ECONOMY, BY WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS, COLLEGES AND PROVIDERS TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS, CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

Since 2020, we've invested over £95m from the devolved Adult Education Budget which has created over 115,000 opportunities for adults to gain the skills and confidence to get into good work and further learning.

A further £5m has been invested in employer-led skills provision in growing sectors such as construction, green

skills and health and social care, among others, to create a workforce fit for the future.

And over £14m has been invested in Skills Bootcamps which has, so far, helped over 2,200 adults to train and gain skills quickly to improve their job prospects. Over 340 employers are engaged in Skills Bootcamps across the region either designing or co-delivering courses, offering job vacancies or co-funding existing employees.

Through our Employability Plan and programmes, we've helped 10,495 people to get work-ready, find employment, change careers, or get the skills they need to move into good jobs, including helping 296 carers return to work.

## OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

We put skills at the centre of our economic ambitions to create an inclusive economy for all our residents. To succeed we believe there needs to be a collaborative approach to planning, with providers and employers working together to make the most of their specialist strengths and sharing resources where appropriate.

From 2020 to 2024 we invested **£125m** into skills and training.

**£95.2m** for adult education - to upskill residents in basic skills and access to Level 2 and Level 3 vocational training

**£4.1m** for the Multiply numeracy programme - to strengthen peoples' capability and confidence at dealing with numbers

**£14.7m** for Skills Bootcamps - targeted training, focused on economic growth areas where current job vacancies exist

**£5m** for specific industry training - for work in the green, digital and creative sectors training, focused on economic growth areas where current job vacancies exist

**£5.6m** for a range of Level 3 Free Courses for Jobs



I lost my business in lockdown, but I've built back better since Skills Bootcamp.

Andy, 35.

## FREE SKILLS BOOTCAMPS

A successful self-employed landscape gardener of 10 years, Andy found his business on the brink of collapse during Covid-19 when he could no longer visit people's homes during lockdown.

Struggling to survive on benefits, feeling lost and relying on foodbanks, Andy spoke to his local job centre who suggested he try a free Skills Bootcamp funded by the North of Tyne Combined Authority.

Having previously worked in construction Andy was able to complete a free four-week course with construction training academy RMF in Northumberland to renew his Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card and get back into work. This course would usually cost around £2,000.

There was no cost for Andy to complete the training and it even included a free minibus to take him to and from the site each day. Once completed he was offered a role as a Trainee Heavy Plant Operations Instructor with RMF.

Andy said: "I'd never been on benefits before, and it was probably the lowest point in my life but it [the Skills Bootcamp] gave me a reason to get up in the morning. I live on my own and I'd been skint for months, so I hadn't been out much or seen my friends for ages. I used to have a good social life, and I'm a real people person, so being able to sit with a group of lads every day and have a bit of craic was great. And I got on straight away with the instructors, too. They started me on a good wage - £30k as a trainee - and I'm now training on all the other machines as well and being taught how to deliver the courses. It's going well. I'm loving it."



## INVESTMENT IN MATHS ADDS UP FOR EVERYONE



**"I'm here because I want to learn and grow as a person and grow my knowledge within health and social care."**  
Kerianne, Multiply Programme Learner.

We received £4.1m in 2022 from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund to teach practical maths skills to adults, to boost their chances of succeeding in employment.

The Multiply Programme in Byker, focused on building confidence through teaching practical and real-world maths skills such as managing household finances, helping children with homework, understanding maths in cooking and making more sense of the facts in the media.

Open to anyone who needed to improve their numeracy, many of the learners on the programme were either not in work or in roles which maths had become a stumbling block.

Delivered by Winnovation, a local training provider, the programme also specialised in improving numeracy skills in the Early Years and Health and Social Care Sectors helping learners understand how to use data, the figures on their payslip, and calculate medications.

Billy Doherty, Winnovation Managing Director said: "It's been refreshing working with the North of Tyne Combined Authority as it feels very much like a joint partnership, and out of our first cohort of learners, we've already seen five go on to employment and one into further education."

"Using maths is an everyday task, especially in employment, and the programme benefits employers because it creates a workforce that understands how to use maths to support their clients to have a better quality of life."

**£4.1m to improve adult numeracy skills**



## INCLUSIVE TRAINING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CREATIVE AND FILM INDUSTRIES



We have always known the North East's story is a powerful one, and now we are training our young people to tell it through creative film and writing skills.

Making Creativity Works was a free skills training course to equip young people for a career in film, television or video production.

The course covered an introduction to video and editing, storyboarding and working together as a production team before progressing on to specialist skills training and career advice, including help and support to apply for further film and media training.

Delivered in partnership with Signpost Productions and Beacon Films, two North-East production companies who are committed to improving diversity in the screen sector, the course was particularly aimed at students, unemployed young people who identify as deaf or disabled.

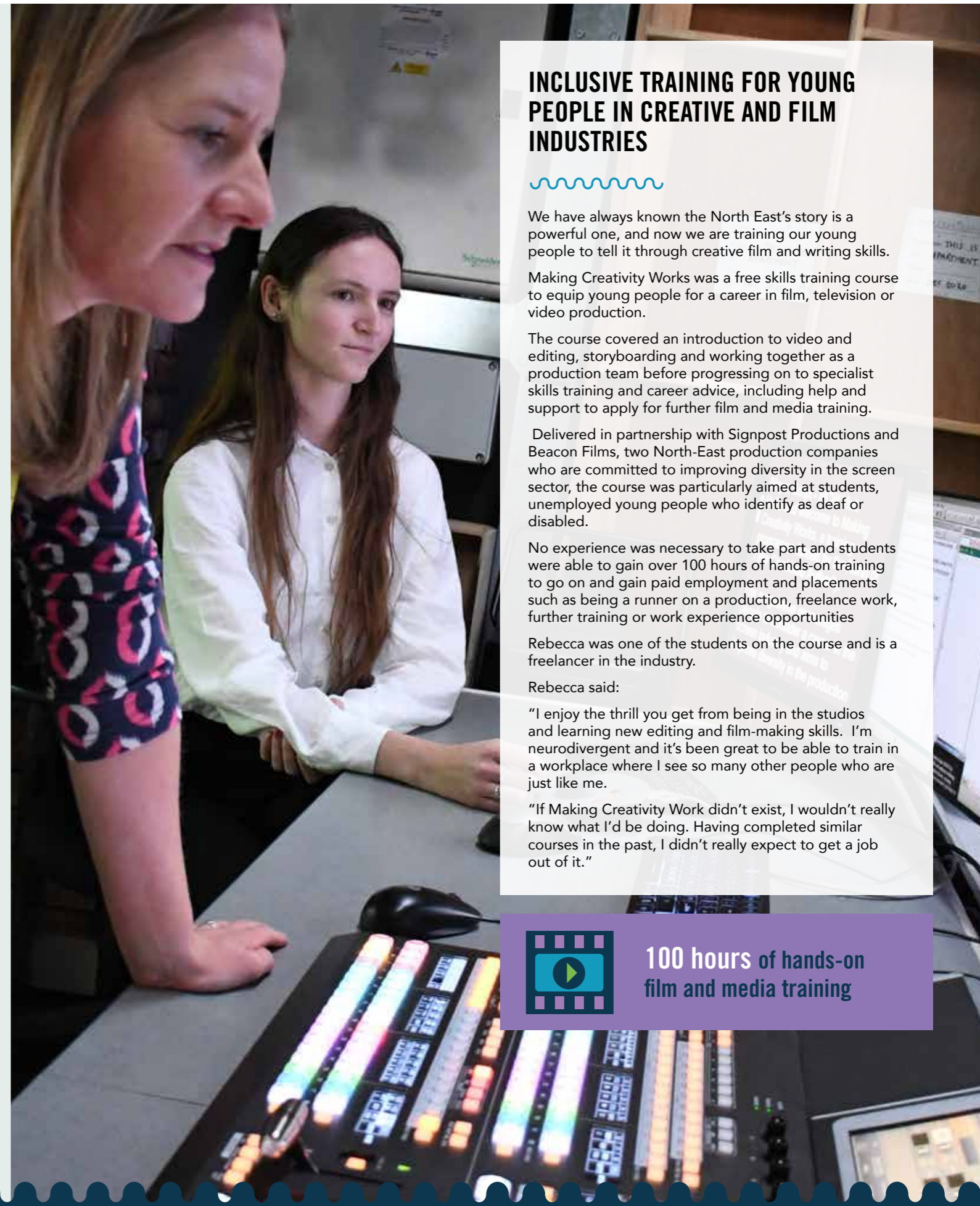
No experience was necessary to take part and students were able to gain over 100 hours of hands-on training to go on and gain paid employment and placements such as being a runner on a production, freelance work, further training or work experience opportunities

Rebecca was one of the students on the course and is a freelancer in the industry.

Rebecca said:

"I enjoy the thrill you get from being in the studios and learning new editing and film-making skills. I'm neurodivergent and it's been great to be able to train in a workplace where I see so many other people who are just like me.

"If Making Creativity Work didn't exist, I wouldn't really know what I'd be doing. Having completed similar courses in the past, I didn't really expect to get a job out of it."



**100 hours of hands-on film and media training**



# CHILD POVERTY PREVENTION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME



**BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY, WHERE OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO REALISE THEIR POTENTIAL AND BE PART OF THE REGION'S FUTURE SUCCESS.**

We invested £4.3m to support this vision. We convened cross-sector partners to identify challenges, agree priorities and co-design innovative solutions.

Our Child Poverty Prevention programme delivered practical interventions in over 100 schools and brought welfare and benefits advice into 50 schools, resulting in

over £1.2m in unclaimed benefits for families. We also supported employers to better support over 23,041 employees and funded baby essentials for 750 vulnerable new families.

Our Education Improvement Programme supported 266 schools, getting pupils back on track after Covid-19, providing teachers

with access to high quality professional development opportunities, launching a School Mental Health Award as well as delivering literacy and oracy projects, employer engagement in careers, transition support and climate change education.

## SUPPORTING SCHOOLS TO TACKLE POVERTY



**"Poverty is all-consuming and unless there is someone to help at the right time, in the right place, there just isn't the space to pursue it. This programme addresses all those issues and enables access to a service that would not otherwise be accessed - even in crisis."**  
Children's Community Centre Lead

From family learning to welfare and benefits advice, after school clubs to poverty proofing audits, 100 schools across the North of Tyne area had access to a range of options and support to choose from. The adaptable design of our programme allowed school staff to create a tailored support package which best supported their pupils and their families.

This included:

- Family learning courses to help get families and schools back on track post-pandemic.
- Poverty Proofing® audits to help schools to understand the unique barriers poverty can present for their pupils and families.
- Specialist welfare advisors to help struggling families make ends meet. We funded specialist advisors to work 1:1 with 50 schools and families, providing drop-in sessions and appointments to help with benefit entitlement, crisis support and debt advice.
- Fully funded afterschool clubs to ensure every pupil has access to high quality extra-curricular opportunities.

All of this, alongside our School Mental Health Award, an oracy education programme 'Voice North of Tyne', and professional development opportunities for teachers.

**"I really appreciate the help and can see the difference it makes having input from someone who knows what type of questions to ask."** Parent

**"I loved how we learned what our children were learning and how we can assist this."** Parent



## 750 BABY BOXES FOR FIRST-TIME PARENTS



The fourth pillar of our Child Poverty Prevention Programme focused on the first 1,001 days of a child's life, which are the days from conception to their second birthday.

Working with the Children's Foundation, we funded a pilot to provide 750 new parents in the North of Tyne region a box of baby essentials to support them during the first few critical weeks and months.

Packed full of stimulating toys and books, the boxes have been designed by healthcare professionals to encourage brain development through playing, laughing, reading, singing and counting. They also contain essentials such as a blanket, changing mat, bath towel and thermometer to help reduce some of the financial pressures associated with starting a new family, giving our youngest residents a chance to thrive.



## HELPING PUPILS BE HEARD



According to the Department for Education, over a third of pupils starting primary school across our area, achieved below expectations in early language and communication. But not for long.

Since November 2023 we have been working with the national oracy education charity, Voice 21. Together we have launched a fully-funded 'oracy programme' for 100 schools – the largest of its kind in the UK. Being able to express yourself, engage with others, listen and speak is fundamental to being human. This oracy work increases confidence and enables children to better understand and hear other people's points of view.

Teachers and leaders are receiving professional development and support to equip them with the knowledge and skills to embed oracy into their classrooms, ensuring young people across the region benefit from the confidence to speak well.

An estimated 21,000 students will benefit from this programme, putting the deliberate and explicit teaching of spoken language at the heart of teaching.

**"Unlike other approaches to improving outcomes, the North of Tyne Combined Authority acknowledges the multiple barriers that children, young people and their families can face. I am delighted to be part of these initiatives and I am proud to be a Headteacher in a region with such unparalleled vision and ambition."** Headteacher



## CLEAN ENERGY

### BOOSTING THE INVESTMENT READINESS AND INNOVATION POTENTIAL OF OUR WORLD-LEADING CLEAN ENERGY SECTOR.

We used our powers from central Government to work more closely with partners to accelerate plans for clean energy growth.

We made major investments to support river and port infrastructure and developed a £20m pipeline of projects in supply chain innovation, demonstration and research assets; bringing new and exciting products to a global market.

In 2021 we accelerated the development of low carbon energy in our region, making £18m available to small businesses to help them implement low carbon initiatives and go green. From electric vehicle charging solutions, building retrofits, and low carbon heating systems, small changes made a big difference in our drive towards net zero.

We also championed research into batteries, heat networks and geothermal energy projects and offshore wind manufacturing, servicing and innovation.



## INNOVATION IN ENGINEERING

The offshore wind sector is a major strength in our region, offering huge potential to create good green jobs.

We partnered with Offshore Renewables Energy (ORE) Catapult in 2020 to deliver a £6.1m programme to boost supply chain growth and productivity in the North of Tyne and wider North East England region's offshore wind and subsea sectors

Large scale grant funding was provided to nine companies to develop and test new products to help them bring innovative technology to market and accelerate projects that could deliver significant cost savings; improved operational performance; safer working environments as well as create jobs and drive growth in the sector

Transmission Dynamics in Cramlington, Kinewell Energy in North Shields, SMD in Wallsend, Trident Dynamics and Unasys, both in Newcastle all took part in the programme, receiving advice, support and access to testing and demonstration facilities at ORE's National Renewable Energy Centre in Blyth.

The project was a huge success, bringing 10 new technologies to market such as subsea and remote robots, creating 22 jobs and safeguarding many others. The programme generated £4.41m for the economy and is forecast to create an additional 118 jobs over the next five years as companies continue to reap the benefits of the programme.

All five companies will now take part in phase two of the project which launched in 2024 and will build on the success of the first phase.

Jenny Hudson, Business Development Director of Transmission Dynamics said: "The funding has not only enabled the research to take place but will also lead to our growth as a business and the creation of new jobs. We would not be able to commit to this ambitious industrial research project without funding support."

## TECHNOLOGY THAT LEADS WORLD ENERGY SECTOR

Kinewell are an award-winning company which uses AI and advanced mathematics to create software solutions that accelerate and reduce the cost of the transition to net-zero. Based in North Shields and exporting their products globally, they are a success story of our investment into offshore renewables using funding to develop three new products with a fourth in the pipeline and on-track to doubling their growth each year.

Kinewell works with our universities including Newcastle and Northumbria - strengthening the region's reputation in the renewables sector and their rapid growth is securing good green jobs and increasing traineeships for local people.

**£20m invested in offshore renewable energy**

## TRAINING PEOPLE TO LEAD THE GREEN ENERGY REVOLUTION

In 2022 we backed plans for the development of brand-new state-of-the-art training centre at the Port of Blyth, moving one step closer to leading the UK's clean energy revolution from the North East.

The £13.6m Energy Central Learning Hub is set to open its doors later in 2024 and will deliver science, technology, engineering and mathematics related T-Levels and, courses in advanced manufacturing and renewable energy, powering the next generation of engineers and technicians.

Energy is a major sectoral strength of the North of Tyne region, with the existing offshore energy, subsea and marine technologies supporting thousands of jobs. As well as providing a clear pathway for young people embarking on a career in the clean energy sector, the hub will support those wanting to retrain and upskill, bridging the gap between employers, education institutions and residents.

The Energy Central Learning Hub will also build on the success of the existing Energy Campus and play a key role in developing a workforce that can meet the current and future needs of the industry around the Blyth estuary.

The combination of the Port of Blyth's sector experience and a mature on-site supply chain, alongside world leading test facilities and conferencing spaces, has been instrumental in attracting new investment from clean energy related companies and will help to provide a route for local people to gain the skills needed to land a job in the rapidly growing, clean energy sector.



## PORTS, QUAYS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

We are investing in our ports and quays' infrastructure to harness the power of the offshore wind and subsea supply chain in the region.

We have committed over £14.5m and with our partners, we have set out a shared ambition to be a world leader in the offshore and renewable energy sectors. So far we have invested in the following companies: Bates Clean Energy Terminal, Battleship Wharf, Swans Energy Park and the Offshore Renewable Energy Technology Development Centre all in Blyth.

# CONNECTIVITY



## INCREASED SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH BETTER-CONNECTED COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVED ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND JOBS.

Devolution gave us the opportunity to make decisions about our future and target investment where we needed it most. We focused on improving digital connectivity for all our residents, leading the way in 5G and digital inclusion.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we worked with our Local Authorities to help 2,751 residents continue to access education, employment and key services who otherwise would have been digital excluded.

We used a further £7m investment to drive digital innovation, talent and inward investment, leveraging over £16m of additional funding for our region.

These projects included a share of £4m from the Government's Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator programme and £12m to connect 271 rural properties to full fibre broadband in Northumberland; paving the way for onward connection to thousands of other homes.


## ACCELERATING THE ROLL OUT OF 4G/5G IN THE NORTH EAST

Page 17



In 2022 we were chosen to lead on a Government trial to boost 4G/5G connectivity in the region, creating a new partnership to deliver a joined-up approach to streamlining access and processes, creating simple standard commercial agreements across the region that will help accelerate the transformative roll-out of 4G / 5G capability to people and businesses.

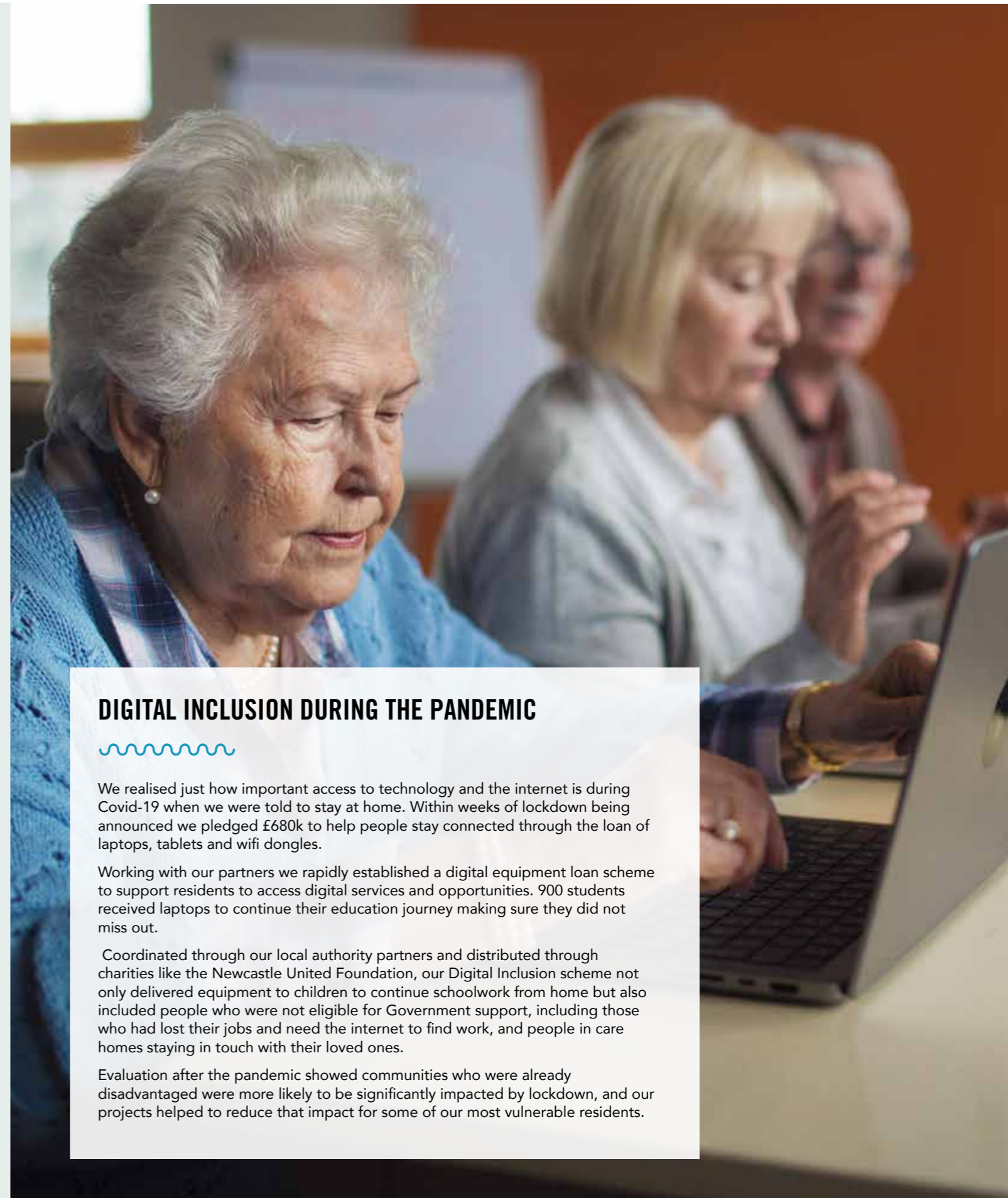
This acceleration and standardisation will make it cheaper for operators and communities to deploy digital infrastructure, meaning communities in the North of Tyne region can expect to benefit from faster and more reliable mobile coverage sooner than would be expected and it could mean there is less need for new masts which can often take longer to build and set up.

**£12m to connect 271 rural properties to broadband**



**£680k to support communities during Covid-19**



## DIGITAL INCLUSION DURING THE PANDEMIC



We realised just how important access to technology and the internet is during Covid-19 when we were told to stay at home. Within weeks of lockdown being announced we pledged £680k to help people stay connected through the loan of laptops, tablets and wifi dongles.

Working with our partners we rapidly established a digital equipment loan scheme to support residents to access digital services and opportunities. 900 students received laptops to continue their education journey making sure they did not miss out.

Coordinated through our local authority partners and distributed through charities like the Newcastle United Foundation, our Digital Inclusion scheme not only delivered equipment to children to continue schoolwork from home but also included people who were not eligible for Government support, including those who had lost their jobs and need the internet to find work, and people in care homes staying in touch with their loved ones.

Evaluation after the pandemic showed communities who were already disadvantaged were more likely to be significantly impacted by lockdown, and our projects helped to reduce that impact for some of our most vulnerable residents.

## GOVERNMENT GATEWAY REVIEW



### 'THUMBS UP' FROM WHITEHALL AS NORTH OF TYNE COMBINED AUTHORITY PASSES THE FIRST OF ITS 'GATEWAY REVIEWS'

In 2023 we had to demonstrate to Government that in the five years since the North of Tyne Combined Authority was created, we were delivering what we had been tasked with - to pursue a distinctive economic growth mission.

Our original Devolution Deal with Government set out our ambitions and targets. From a standing start in 2018, as a new organisation working across a new administrative footprint, with no legacy projects or pre-existing investment pipeline in place, we have worked collaboratively with our constituent local authorities and other stakeholders to design and deliver our North of Tyne Investment Fund (NTIF).

We used the fund to kickstart and scale-up investment in established regional priorities, maintaining momentum and delivering on long-term regional ambitions, such as continuing and ramping up investment in our growing renewable energy sector.

The period since our initial devolution deal in 2018 has been a turbulent one with major external events shaping our local economy and operating context, including the transition from EU exit, the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the current cost of living and inflation challenges.

Our approach to delivering inclusive economic growth was based on evidence, we focused investment on our economic strengths such as renewable energy, digital, tourism, culture, our world leading innovation assets, and our natural rural capital to accelerate the transition to Net Zero, unlock the benefits of innovation, and deliver inclusive economic growth for the benefit of our residents and businesses.

The fund has been a crucial resource in delivering our vision and priorities. The annual £20m of investment funding it provided, enabled us to deliver transformational change in the North of Tyne and has been a key driver in building regional capacity to deliver critical investment projects. Our investment fund complements our other significant devolved funds which also played an important role in delivering our priorities, including the Adult Education Budget, Skills Bootcamps, Brownfield Housing Fund, Community Renewal Fund, and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

We have worked hard to strike a balance between investing funds in our long-term inclusive economic growth vision, alongside making responsive investments to support our businesses, people, and communities through the pandemic and short-term inflation pressures.




**OUR APPROACH TO DELIVERING INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH WAS BASED ON EVIDENCE, WE FOCUSED INVESTMENT ON OUR ECONOMIC STRENGTHS SUCH AS RENEWABLE ENERGY, DIGITAL, TOURISM, CULTURE, OUR WORLD LEADING INNOVATION ASSETS...**

Following the Gateway Review we were given the green light for £100m of investment over the next five years, unlocking £20m of central government funding per year until 2027-28. This will be folded into the new devolution deal which the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority will deliver from May 2024 and will play a crucial role in enabling strategic investment to continue to achieve our vision and deliver on devolution deal commitments.



# WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED

Supported  
**62**  
community projects  
through North of Tyne  
Crowdfund



Engaged with  
**3,276**  
residents through Mayor's  
Question Time, Equalities  
Forum and Commonplace



Investing  
**£8m**  
to support rural  
businesses communities  
and environments

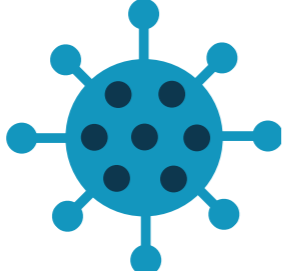


Investing  
**£10m**  
in communities along the  
Northumberland Line Economic  
Corridor to support digital  
infrastructure, housing, skills  
and business growth



**115,000**  
courses delivered to  
help people get good jobs

**£5m**  
invested to support  
businesses recover  
from COVID-19




**£304.3m**  
private sector  
leverage



Attracted businesses  
to the region, bringing  
**1,739**  
new jobs



Investing  
**£7.7m**  
in revitalising our towns  
and highstreets



Celebrating our area  
by bringing over  
**1.8m**  
visitors to local events



**£20m**  
invested in offshore  
renewable energy

Unlocking space for  
**2,023**  
new homes, including a  
strong mix of affordable and  
community-led homes, across  
North and South of the Tyne




Supported  
**569**  
businesses to go digital

**£5m**  
invested in training for our  
growing sectors, helping  
create a workforce fit for  
the future of work




Helped  
**10,495**  
get work-ready



**£16m**  
additional investment to  
bring enhanced connectivity  
to businesses and residents



**207**  
cultural and creative  
businesses supported  
to thrive



**5,377**  
Jobs in the pipeline

**GOOD WORK  
PLEDGE** ✓  
**80,500**  
employees working in  
organisations recognised  
for providing Good Work



**279**  
schools supported  
to improve the lives of  
children



Investing up to  
**£500,000**  
to unblock barriers to jobs,  
skills and productivity along  
the river Tyne through the  
Tyne Taskforce



**£32m**  
Brownfield  
Land Fund

# AND SO MUCH MORE...

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# NORTH OF TYNE

# POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

REPORT  
FEB 2024

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NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US, IS FOR US

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COMBINED AUTHORITY



poverty truth network

JRF  
JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION



Community Foundation

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# PROCESS



## Encounter

This initial phase involves recruitment of the Community Commissioners and raising awareness of the Poverty Truth Commission. Local organisations were contacted and asked to share promotional material with their service users. It was important within this process to ensure understanding around in work poverty as part of the recruitment process. Prospective Community Commissioners were offered 1:1 meetings with facilitators to find out about the Poverty Truth Commission and following this make a decision if they would like to be involved in the project.

## Explore

This is the most important part of the process as it lays foundations for the entire commission. This takes time and commitment from all involved and is often not given the emphasis required when working together. Building relationships, getting to know each other, being open and honest and willing to be open up to each other and the unknown journey ahead of

This required all to take part wholly and trusting in the process and acknowledging that this was different from usual working practices.

Initially it was important to create a safe, consistent and nurturing environment for the community commissioners this involved check ins and check outs at every meeting to ensure everybody was able to authentically express how they were feeling, then leave the

meeting acknowledging the emotional challenges they had experienced.

The facilitators worked hard to ensure this process was repeated when the Business and civic commissioners joined the community commissioners. They role modelled behaviours that encouraged trust and authenticity, such as removing lanyards.

**“When I come here I dress differently, I dress as I do at home and not as I do for work and I make sure I clear my diary to make sure I have the rest of the day free as the meetings are so emotional.”**

**Business/Civic Commissioner**

## Experiment

This involves exploring different ideas and discussing what is good about processes and procedures, when something has worked well and thinking about why it worked well. Testing out whether something that has worked in one way, will work in another and what might need changing to make that happen. Using the wealth of knowledge and experience of all the commissioners to plan out how to investigate a concept in a wider remit.

The facilitators encouraged Commissioners to share positive experiences and acknowledge when something had worked well, which was extremely challenging due to the nature of poverty and difficulties it brings to accessing services.

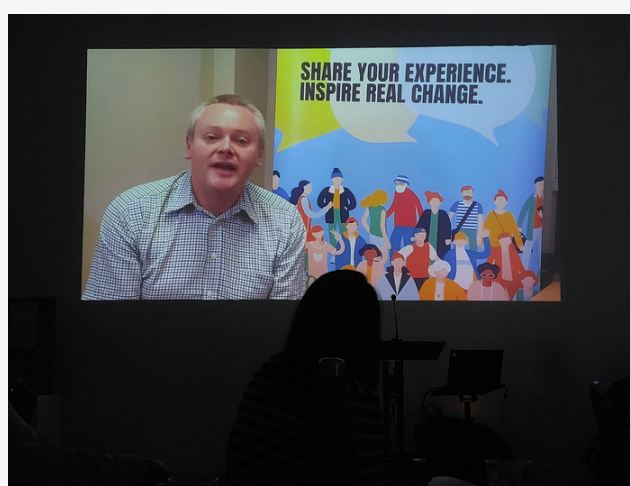
## Embed

This involves impact from the commission and disseminating a change in mindset. Engaging policy makers and changing ways of working for example the production of the. Good work Pledge.

The Call to Action Event was held on 24th January 2024 and attended by 60 leaders.

The event was a culmination of the Poverty Truth Commission and featured presentations of key learning and messages from both Community Commissioners and Civic and Business Commissioners.

Attendees heard first hand experiences and pledged their support for change. It was a successful event and a chance to celebrate all of the work and achievements of the Commission. Feedback from event centred around how powerful the messages were and the importance of valuing lived experience. The stories shared were a powerful reminder of the urgent need to take steps to address the issue of poverty.



# BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

The process of preparing for the Launch event involved exploring how to express their individual stories and experiences in a powerful and emotive way. This involved facilitators supporting community commissioners with a creative writing session which gave them the opportunity to explore different mediums.

## Stories of Commission

Experiences of Community Commissioners informed the commission and helped to form the themes of the working groups. More information on Commissioner stories can be found in the appendices.

**“All facilitators wanted the participants to be heard”**

**“We had access to all the support needed”**

**“Lots of encouragement”**

**Community Commissioners**

# CHALLENGES/BARRIERS

## Geographical Area

This PTC was unique, in that it was the first one to cover three local authority areas. This posed three main challenges

- The size of the area is vast, Northumberland alone is over 5,000 square kilometres and this impacted the involvement of both Community and Business/Civic Commissioners in terms of their time and access to working group meetings
- Each local authority has their own, different processes for policy making and senior leaders in place
- Each Local Authority area has different needs in terms of how poverty is experienced. For example, transport is a big issue for Northumberland, Newcastle reflects a broad range of diverse ethnic groups and has high levels of inner-city poverty and North Tyneside has pockets of poverty dispersed throughout more wealthy tourist areas.

## Commitment/Retention

We have found that it has been difficult to retain commissioners both community commissioners and Business and civic commissioners for different reasons.

Retention or commitment of Business and Civic commissioners has been tested as they have many demands on their time, and this was a lengthy commitment in terms of time with the project which was extended to 14 months (lasting 8 months initially). Many more commissioners agreed to take part at the outset and found they were unable to commit to regular meetings and therefore we experienced some drop out.

In terms of the community commissioners, we did experience retention issues and this was due to other demands in their lives such as starting college, managing parenthood and running their own business. Some community commissioners experienced very challenging personal circumstances which made it impossible for them to continue in



## Delivery

The delivery of the NOTPTC has been continuously challenged over the engagement period. As the sole delivery partner Children North East has experienced

- Significant changes of staff due to organisational change and staff turnover there were eight staff involved in total, where it would have been more appropriate to have two or three consistent staff to support commissioners. In addition, there were three changes in management throughout the PTC process. However, the final two facilitators in place from May 2022 and January 2023 have worked hard to build strong, supportive relationships with ALL commissioners which has resulted in a positive delivery outcome.

- Due to the geographical reach of the project, travel was a challenge, including implicated costs. To counter this, options were provided, including hybrid with the option to join online. Additionally, having regular meeting times, and building links with Children North East's Cafe Hope and a consistent safe space for those involved.

- Challenges involving the rollercoaster of emotions linked to living with inequalities, has led to the need for additional wellbeing and safeguarding support for Commissioners, from signposting to extra one to one support and liaising with other professionals.

## Extension

Further funding was secured to extend the Commission, a condition of which was that Commissioners were consulted in advance. There were concerns that some Commissioners would be reluctant to commit, however, due to relationships and commitment, all Commissioners engaged until the close of the project.

## Personal Challenges

Throughout the duration of the PTC both Business and Civic Commissioners and Community Commissioners alike have experienced their own personal challenges such as separation, money struggles, demands in terms of parental responsibility or responsibility of elderly parents this has tested commissioners commitment understandably but instead of withdrawing themselves

from the process they have gained emotional support with fellow commissioners which has driven them to remain involved.

**“Towards the end of this project I did become a little disillusioned and felt all the work we were doing and effort we had put in was futile.... I was close to leaving at one point.”**

## Community Commissioner

# KEY MESSAGES

Throughout the PTC journey there were many discussions and conversations about individual experiences and as solid relationships were established and the work progressed, it became apparent that these experiences held underlying key messages across working groups.

Commissioners valued the input of those with lived experience and The Poverty Truth Network question was repeatedly referred to.

***“What if people who struggled against poverty were included in making decisions about tackling poverty?”***

The key messages highlighted through this Poverty Truth Commission do not provide answers, but pose questions for strategic policy and decision makers to take into consideration.

- The attitudes of service providers to people in poverty seeking help, act as a barrier to accessing services.
- How do we all ensure that every vulnerable family receives the right support at the right time, from services that understand all their needs?

- How do we control our individual mind-set, values and beliefs for greater joint success and impact?

Commissioners emphasised that:

***“by valuing the intellectual capital and experience of people living with poverty, we can identify commonalities and work together to help each other and influence policy decisions. Through their engagement we want to inspire new thinking and build knowledge and connections to empower people”.***

**How services are delivered and structured, equality and diversity, and the development of policies can all impact negatively on those in poverty.**

- How do we raise awareness, adapt our approaches, tackle stigma and consider poverty as a protected characteristic in policy decisions, and the structure, development and delivery of joined up services for all?



Commissioners determined that:

**“The delivery of services requires consideration relating to those people in poverty. Services should be joined up, not only across housing, health, transport and care. It should include ALL services...poverty should be included and considered as a protected characteristic”.**

- Poverty is complex, it can happen to anybody, and people with different needs will experience poverty in different ways. Poverty does not mean being worth less than anyone else. Being poor is not a crime.
- How do we make poverty everybody’s business?
- How can we work together to challenge this approach?
- Is trauma Informed training for the staff the answer?

Commissioners agreed that poverty is a trauma, they explain that:

**“Trauma also forces people into poverty. The trauma of poverty refers to the negative effects of living in chronic, complex, and stressful conditions that can impact one's mental and physical health, behaviour, and**

**development. Poverty can increase the risk of experiencing traumatic events such as abuse, neglect, violence or hunger. Poverty can also trigger or worsen mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, or posttraumatic stress, which can interfere with one's functioning, performance or relationships.”**

**Social inclusion must be seen as an equal partner to Economic growth.** If economic growth is placed before social inclusion this will result in the needs of global business being met before the needs of the community. A global culture is a culture of Capital not Communities.

Commissioners agree that the key messages are powerful and emotive. Business and civic commissioners identified much work that is happening already but one Business Commissioner makes the point that must be considered by all policy and decision makers.

**“From the Community Commissioners perspectives, there’s a very strong view that we aren’t involving them enough, even if we think we are...ultimately the view we discussed a lot in the room was ‘nothing about us, without us, is for us’ so involve us”**

# RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships form an integral part of a PTC as all Commissioners are invited to share experiences and find commonalities to ensure trust is built up over time. To enable this to happen effectively, facilitators provided continuity in safe, welcoming spaces by

- explaining the deep listening theory U at the early stages of the working groups to ensure everyone was on board with the process
- asking Business and Civic Commissioners to leave badges and lanyards at the door
- supporting Community Commissioners in group sessions and on a one to one basis
- always using a check in and check out system at groups to ensure everyone was aware of what individuals were going through at any point
- role modelling how to behave in groups by responding sensitively to issues as they arose
- scheduling working groups over lunch time and providing food to ensure a relaxed atmosphere
- using the same venue and room where possible for all meetings



This meant ALL Commissioners felt they were in a safe place to share their personal stories, experiences and to be their authentic self.

**“I truly valued the relationship building, the time spent working through the issues and it will be hard to walk away from the group at the end of all of this.”**

**“...If we take time to make a human connection in our day to day services, we can quickly see that we have a lot in common.”**

**“I decided my best bet was to just be me, be honest and open about my personal experiences and I was blown away by the response I got. There’s been so much support and friendship, tears and frustration and I can honestly say I never expected to gain so much from the experience.”**

**Business  
Commissioners**

While relationship building was initially facilitated by Children North East Staff, Commissioners were soon developing their own relationships and, offering support to each other.

One Community Commissioner felt that **“Collaborating and building relationships with commissioners”** worked well throughout the poverty truth journey and that it **“was good that we had the opportunity to meet with each other outside of the confines of the PTC meetings”**.

Other Community Commissioners commented that Business/Civic Commissioners were **“very supportive”** and **“helped build confidence”**. They felt that “making connections and friendships” were something that had worked well throughout the commission. This Emotional support was particularly evident in working groups, knowing each other and bonding through shared experience made for some truly powerful messages being shared.



The Health Inequalities working group was described by one Community Commissioner as

**“... a very powerful and emotive session, lots of relationships built with commissioners, the topics which were brought up were extremely important things to address”**

The importance of the relationships of Commissioner with facilitators should also be acknowledged,

**“It started off slowly, but soon built up with the help of the Facilitators” Community Commissioner**  
**Facilitators provided both emotional, wellbeing and practical support to Community Commissioners during meetings and in working groups as well as outside of these times.**

**“Nothing was a bother, well listened to and supported”**  
 Community Commissioner

**“The facilitators were excellent throughout, a few changes in staff but that’s unavoidable and we quickly gelled with new facilitators”**

Community Commissioner

Facilitators worked hard to ensure they were not influencing discussions, but focusing the energy and passion of the Commissioners to ensure there was an outcome they were all happy with.

**“(The Facilitators) worked really hard to help us turn all our passion, energy and enthusiasm into things which we hope will start to make a real difference”**  
 Business Commissioner

Facilitator relationships were key in supporting Commissioners outside of the commission, providing references as they applied for and successfully secured jobs, other work and funding to develop further work tackling poverty.

Another example of the positive relationships built up among all commissioners and facilitators was during a picnic arranged over the summer at Ridley Park in Blyth, Northumberland. Commissioners brought along their children and joined in with games, including boules, cricket, basketball and hoopla as well as exploring the park together.

# WORKING GROUPS

Facilitators met with potential Business and Civic Commissioners before the launch event to find out more and learn about the PTC process. Working groups were established following the launch event, with Business and Civic Commissioners signing up to or being assigned to particular groups.

Community Commissioners decided which working groups they wanted to attend, some chose to attend all three, while others opted for the one which was their main interest.

The working groups were facilitated to develop group agreements which helped to create a safe environment and build realistic expectations to work within.

Community Commissioners met with Business and Civic Commissioners regularly and built a strong bond as they identified and developed human to human connections. Facilitators designed activities that encouraged commissioners to find commonalities and identify mutual experiences which enhanced the relationships and supported them to work together effectively.

## Caring Responsibilities

The working group agreed that people with caring responsibilities are frequently undervalued and not recognised in society.

It is often impossible to care and work well as people who care often have lower incomes, are less likely to work or more likely to be underemployed, have fewer opportunities and more likely to live in poverty – as well as facing stress and poor health themselves.

Key Themes included:

- Opportunities and access to support services for carers
- Barriers to people with caring responsibilities to employment
- Difficult to navigate systems
- It was recognised that these are all challenges to all people in the North East, but are exacerbated when you are living in poverty.

**Outcome:** A Call to Action letter to highlight the work and make recommendations was composed by the group and sent to local decision and policy makers, including MP's, CEO's and Chief Executives of the three local authorities as well as those senior leaders of NOTCA.

The letter invited responses to support the work before the Call to Action event and two out of 30 recipients responded, recognising the work of the commission.

### Food and Fuel

The working group discussed different models and concepts which already exist to support food poverty and identified that there should be more dignity around accessing affordable food options.

The food ladder (Dr Megan Blake, Sheffield University) approach was used as a basis for developing ideas. The group wanted to highlight to people in the community that there were more food options than just buying your groceries from supermarkets (with prices rising) or using a Foodbank.

They identified that people were becoming more reliant on Foodbanks and not using them as they were originally intended, as a crisis measure.

Key Themes included:

- Pride and dignity around accessing food
- Raise awareness of different options for affordable food
- Reducing stigma or barriers to accessing affordable food
- Demonstrate ways to cook food sourced from these food outlets due to lack of variety/choice
- Highlight the varying nutritional value of the foods obtained from different outlets.

**Outcome:** The working group have produced a video which enabled them to convey all of the above key messages. The group wanted this to be available to as many people in the North of Tyne communities to alleviate any barriers that they may face in terms of affordability, stigma, not knowing how to cook on a budget or not knowing what Food outlets or apps are available to access.

This video can also be used by organisations that want to show people in the community how they can access food outlets with messages coming from people who have experienced similar issues in accessing affordable options.



*Watch the Food and Fuel group video 'Pride and Dignity in Food Shopping' by scanning the QR.*

## Health Inequalities

The working group proved difficult to get off the ground with Civic and Business Commissioners finding it a challenge to commit their time to the groups. The first working group did not meet until 3 months after the launch event and it was particularly apparent that there were no representatives from the NHS or any Direct Health related services in the working group. This working group ran 2 months behind the other groups and while high quality and positive relationships were established quickly, the time for working on experimenting with ideas and thoughts was limited.

The working group had a wealth of experiences and commonalities to explore and agreed that this was a vast and complex part of poverty which underpinned all other areas.

Key Themes included:

- The North East was unique in its health inequalities and the diverse nature of the area
- There was not a level playing field in terms of funding allocations forging bigger gaps and barriers to health services than in other parts of the UK

- Health inequalities for women was significantly higher
- Trauma forces people into poverty and can keep them there

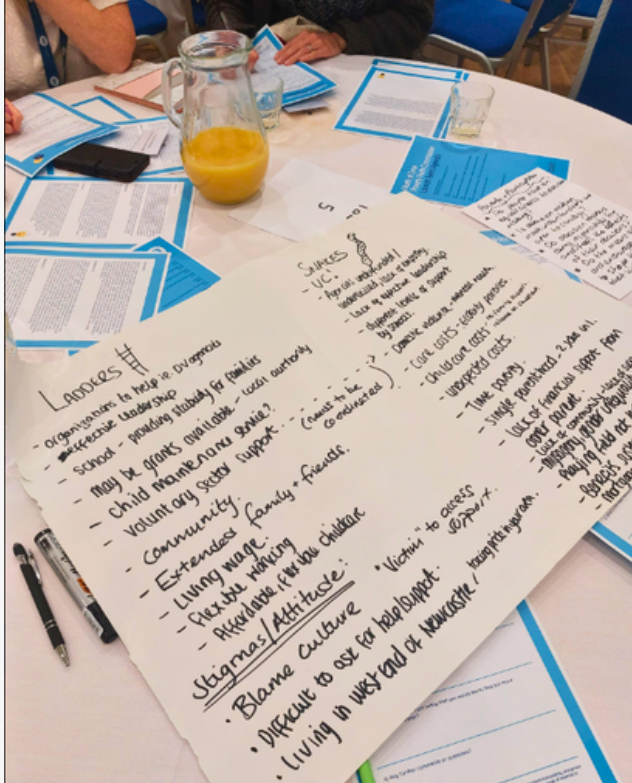
**Outcome:** A Call to Action and invitation to sign up to our pledge through a letter to local decision and policy makers including MP's, CEO's and Directors of relevant Health organisations and Chief Executives of the three local authorities as well as those senior leaders of NOTCA.

The letter invited recipients to sign up to a pledge before 19th January 2024, to make changes to the way they work to tackle health inequalities in the North East in the following areas:

- Addressing the misogyny in Health Services
- Addressing illness through wellness – a more positive approach
- Working together with people who have lived experience

A total of 5 out of 28 recipients responded positively to the letter, agreeing to the pledge.

# LEARNING



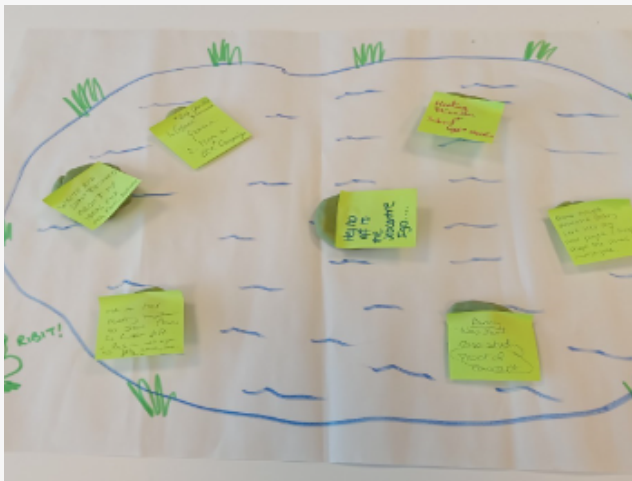
This was the first Poverty Truth commission to incorporate three Local Authority areas as well as the first commission in the North of Tyne region and the journey has been one of learning, reflection and discovery.

The Learning can be prioritised under the following headings:

## Commission

It had been acknowledged at the start of the process that recruitment and representing the voice of commissioners across the three Local Authority areas would be difficult, however, this proved to be significantly harder than first realised because the demographics of the three areas are totally different.

The significant amount of time invested in the Community Commissioners, building their confidence in sharing their stories ready for the launch event and building the initial relationships and bonds together, was the reason why working groups were able to function effectively.





The ability to converse and work together with Business and Civic Commissioners, ensured that the working groups ran efficiently and the commission was productive.

Despite the low numbers of Commissioners involved, there have been significant steps to address some of the identified areas of poverty affecting those involved. The outcomes achieved with the commissioners and resources available have been a success. The whole commission should be congratulated for their hard work and achievements.

The Poverty Truth Commission has highlighted that the process of deep listening, taking the time to build relationships, share experiences and fully participate in the process of working together to engender change, works and the time that we have taken has been worthwhile.

The Commission recognise that there is still work to be done, the Call to action event is not the end it is just the beginning, a springboard for further developments. The event is calling for local decision and policy makers to agree to make vital changes in the way they work, specifically, incorporating lived experience in designing services and policy.

## Commissioners

Commissioners fed back their thoughts on the learning of the Commission and have been instrumental in leading how the work has developed.

Commissioners generally felt that the way the commission had been put together was successful but there were some negative comments about accessibility and location of venues and how this affected the recruitment process and representation of the North of Tyne area. While it can be acknowledged that this was an issue and did affect recruitment and the number of commissioners involved, the outcomes of the working groups demonstrate that there was good progress and significant work completed.

Commissioners were consulted about locations for working groups and meetings and much consideration was given to this in order to meet the complex geographical area, disability access and availability of parking. While there were some initial concerns in terms of having one venue, this provided consistency, familiarity and a safe space with sound support for commissioners and facilitators in order to operate efficiently and effectively.

Many of the Community Commissioners, were involved in more than one working group and this impacted significantly on their

time and commitment to the commission. However, they mostly found this to be beneficial as working groups were scheduled around the same week each month and gave them the opportunity to focus for a few days each month on the work of the commission and freed up their time for other commitments.

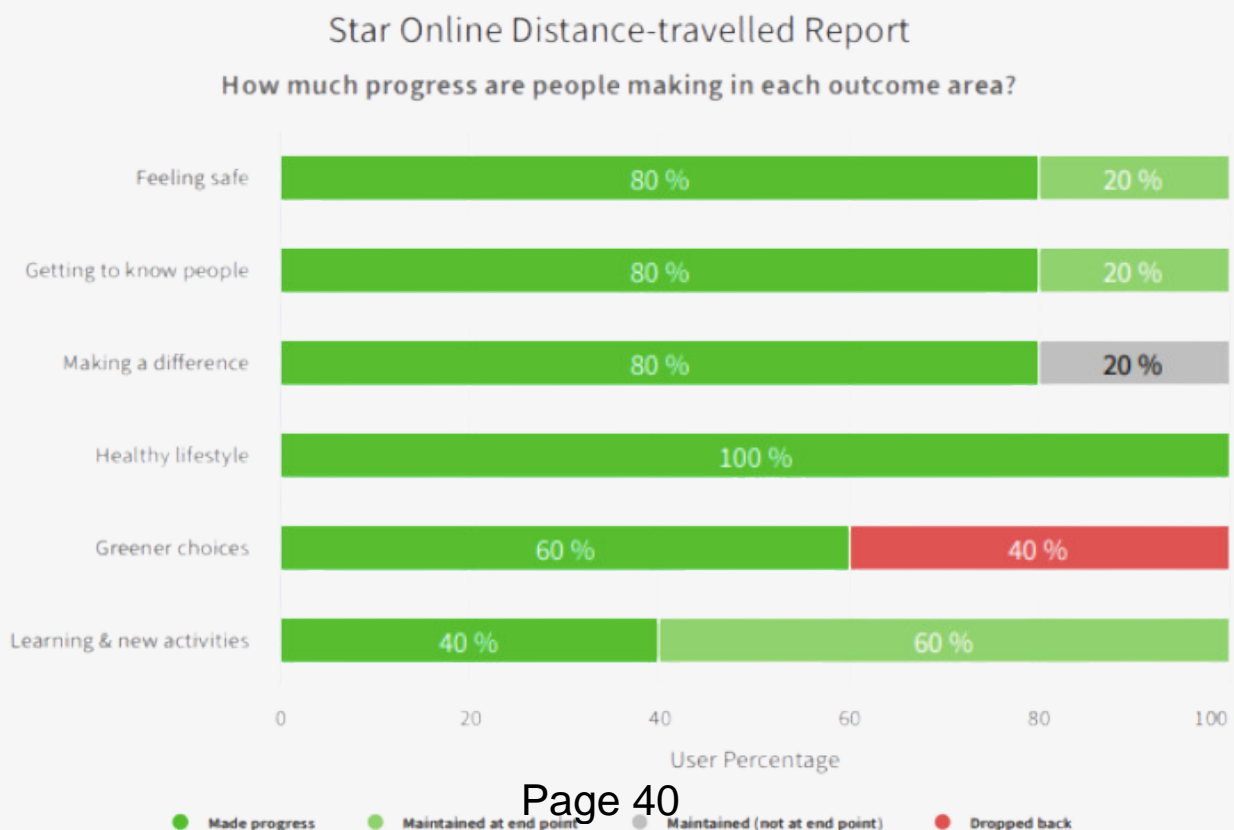
The Commissioners have been able to reflect on their individual journeys throughout the process and progression is particularly evident with Community Commissioners from their starting points.

**“I feel empowered. It’s been good to create networks with influential people. I don’t really know about the future, but the skills I have got from doing this will definitely help with whatever I do”**

**“I avoid employment [due to personal circumstances], but have scope to do much more... [to engage as an active and vocal member of society]”**

**“I feel very privileged to have been part of this project”**

Community Commissioners completed Community Outcome Stars at three points during the process, which demonstrated their growth in confidence, skills and breadth of experience. See Community Outcome star report below.



Community Commissioners have used their growth to be able to be involved in various other projects and work, which reflects their individual interests.

**“Continue working with the West End Community Council and join Penny on the Food Foundation”**

**...the things I would like to change require the involvement of many other groups and organisations. Making change happen is the next step”**

Business and civic commissioners have also valued the learning they will take away from being part of the commission.

**“...being in a room with people with significant caring commitments highlighted a really important point for us all... people who care for children or adults instead of working provide a critical role in our society and economy – without them there would be further increased demands on health and social care services and associated costs. Child development and well-being would also be impacted – I think it’s important to recognise and value that – and the fact that sometimes it’s just not the right time for people to find employment... who cares for the carer?”**

**“...my belief that one size doesn’t fit all in employment was reinforced... We need to find ways to flex the programme and be flexible employers.”**

**“It’s important to remember that the person on the end of the line, both ways, might be facing challenges you can really relate to – but just faces them harder than you at the moment – we are in the same storm, just different boats”**

Business Commissioner

**“I’ve been able to use my own experiences to help progress our work but also to empower myself to navigate through an often messy system and advocate for myself and others to access the support they need.”**

All Commissioners have pledged to continue to communicate about what poverty is and are committed to working together to find solutions. Community Commissioners are connected with organisations across the 3 LA's (Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland) and those connections will continue as work progresses after the end of the commission. Most of the Community Commissioners will also continue their involvement though the amplify work with the Poverty Truth Network.

The PTN slogan, “Nothing about us, without us, is for us” has been instrumental in discussions throughout the NTCA PTC. It has helped us to focus and has been fundamental to the work the commission has done. A significant part of the learning of the PTC is about raising awareness and improving life for people in poverty.

There is still some way to go in removing blame and dispelling the myth that people are in poverty due to what they have done. They do not want to be in poverty, and they do not want to be seen as less of a person because of the circumstances they might find themselves in.

More awareness is needed to ensure justice is achieved and this involves:

- Increased accessibility
- Understanding of individual situations
- Not putting people into ‘boxes’ – not everything is black and white

This will be achieved by listening and working together with individuals with lived experience and their communities with support from community led projects in community buildings which are trusted, safe places.

**“Poverty is not a stand-alone issue”**

Business Commissioner

### Organisations and Systems

There was a focus on improving and making changes. There is much learning the PTC has identified that Business and Civic Commissioners have taken back to their organisations and that other organisations can take on board about poverty being a priority and how the insight from listening to people who are in poverty can enable this to happen

**“We hope the insight we have gained will help organisations see that the way forward needs to be done differently, what we are doing now it is not working, we need to listen more to the people who experience poverty to learn and act”**

**“Society seems to think if you don't go out and earn/work and get a salary paid into your account every month, you don't work/not as worthy. People work hard all of the time - it depends on how society/structures values you. I'm worth more than petrol money.”**

**Community  
Commissioners**

“How we work with people experiencing poverty as colleagues in a shared challenge, without othering, and ensuring appropriate remuneration or acknowledgement” Commissioners felt strongly that this work should not be tokenistic,

**“Inclusivity as an action, not just a strap line”**

Commissioners went further and noted that this work needs to be done in the community where people in poverty are living.

**“To engage with the disengaged you have to ‘meet them where they are”**

Taking the focus to the heart of the communities to ensure people in poverty are able to access services easily.

**“focussing on our harder to reach communities, have we got access to services right in these areas?”**

The NTCA model of providing Citizen’s Advice services in schools was identified as an excellent example of this and more is needed.

**“Building the voice of lived experience through NTCA programmes and activities - especially as devolution expands in scope”**

There has been some disappointment that more Business and Civic Commissioners did not get on board, particularly from the health sector and that this emphasises that for them poverty is not a priority.

**“I feel the...lack of engagement from several civic commissioners has sadly borne this out”**

**“If you are in a position of power or authority and you say you are going to do something, then you should do it! Don't agree to get involved in things and then just not turn up! People who repeatedly do this are ALWAYS FOUND OUT EVENTUALLY”**

An underpinning part of the learning for organisations and systems is about understanding and tackling stigma. Identifying appropriate training and the language that is used. One recommendation was to use the ‘Trauma Informed’ approach used by Support and Grow North East. Pledges/Promises

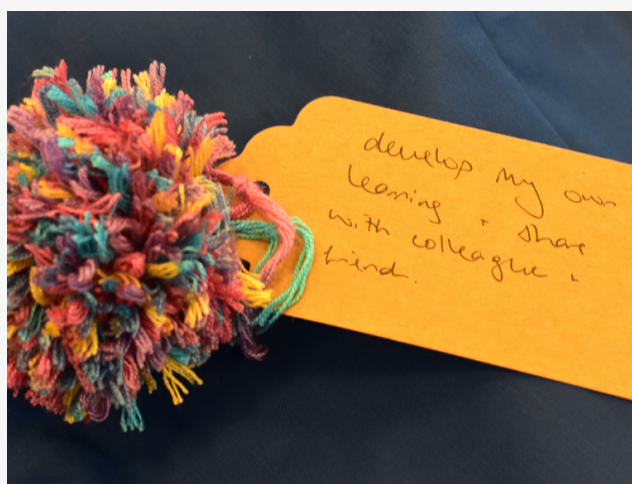
As the Commission was coming to an end, the Commissioners made some pledges and promises to the ongoing change that the commission had spurred. One Business Commissioner summed up the process

**“we’ve always known that we can’t change everything overnight with the poverty truth commission, but we do know we can make these (small) changes and that's what really matters.”**

The Pledges and promises covered three main areas:

### Individual

- Continue to speak out about the issues with poverty and do what I can.
- Start a blog - 'Life at the coal face' to discuss topics in my own lives experience, that of our clients and my learning from the poverty truth commission
- Continue and seek employment in this field if I am able as I am passionate about creating effective change
- Kick more butts
- Continue to campaign on this issue, using the PTC outputs to strengthen this advocacy/influencing work
- Explore other opportunities beyond what I thought were possible prior to my involvement in the PTC
- Continue to share what I have learnt using the platform I have
- Continue to share the stories
- Continue and develop on my understanding of poverty and its impact and explore this further through the network I facilitate on Child Poverty. Will continue to promote the great work of the Commission



### Organisations

- Make sure other people in my organisation (and outside it) understand the impacts of poverty and the work of the commission
- Actively support the recommendations and findings of the work amongst the business community and our members in the North East
- Continue campaigning against injustice. Continue to highlight that it's not a crime to be poor. Campaign for people in small business that have no back up (no holiday pay, no-one to rely on - no security network)
- Implement learning into our current client growth model.
- Really focus on introducing trauma informed working in my team

## Systems

- I am also going to continue to push other organisations in the region to ensure people with 'lived experience' of poverty are meaningfully included in policy/decision making
- Continue to fight for more trauma informed treatment and strategy planning from decision makers and facilitators
- Continue to campaign at boardroom level so projects are meaningful and not just a tick box exercise
- Communities must be involved in the discussion BEFORE strategic planning takes place
- Consider the learning to how we mobilise individual expertise in a way that is respectful and equitable.



# IMPACT

The PTC has been extremely impactful in a number of ways and can be grouped under the following headings.

## Personal

All commissioners have identified personal growth as part of the impact of the PTC. For Community Commissioners there has been a huge increase in confidence while for Business and Civic Commissioners there has been an impact on both their personal and working lives.

Community Commissioners have learned valuable insights by being involved in the commission.

**“That no one person has the answers”**

**“How deep poverty is and how varied the different aspects are”**

**“the more voices you have the louder you are”**

**“Improved my self-esteem and confidence and established a sense of connection with all commissioners, learned that there are ways out even though they are complex”**

One commissioner made an analogy about the process of change they had experienced.

**“You can't build a house with one brick - each time you add a brick, you are building a strong foundation for changes.”**

Business/Civic Commissioners have also felt the impact on both their personal and professional lives and summed up their experiences,

**“... I've learnt so much professionally from being part of this group but personally I've gained so much more. Every single one of the sessions has been a lesson... It's changed the way I approach work issues. I thought I was already pretty inclusive, but I now have the community commissioners' voices at the back of my mind and try to take it that step further. I've met so many wonderful people and feel very honoured to be a part of it all”.**

**“... I found the whole experience incredibly valuable. It was personally challenging in many ways, I was moved on many occasions by the stories and emotions shared in our sessions by everyone involved.”**

**“The care and understanding throughout has been very much appreciated and helped me to process all of this.”**



## Community Commissioners described the Poverty Truth Journey as...

**"TRANSFORMATIVE"**

**"POSITIVE"** **"RELENTLESS"**

**"COMMUNICATION"**

**"EXHILARATING"**

Community Commissioners have gone on to be involved in the following roles and work:

- Trustee for a local Charity in North Tyneside (Support and Grow North East)
- Chair of board for Health/NHS
- Speaking at the NTCA Child Poverty Prevention Programme, Schools Event
- Food Action at a Government level
- Involved in Community work in the West End of Newcastle
- A fundraising role at a Newcastle school
- Full Time employment in the prison service
- Involvement in the PTN Amplify work for improving access

One Commissioner has been awarded an MBE for their services to a Newcastle Community throughout Covid-19 in the food poverty sector.

## Organisational

The Organisations who had representatives as Business/Civic Commissioners have all reported that being involved in the PTC has been impactful. The key messages that have been highlighted will be used to make changes within organisations to the way they work with people with lived experience. These organisations want others to learn from their involvement, making the necessary 'tweaks' and changes.

**"...I would like to ensure other public services or businesses consider how we truly involve people who need our help...I know it can be difficult to involve service users because of issues such as time constraints or fears around whether we can really meet their expectations... all I would say is keep doing it, do more of it and think about new ways of getting people involved all of the time, it's powerful when you do."**

Business/Civic Commissioner  
The Good Work Pledge was an example of when something positive can be built upon to involve those with lived experience to further enhance services and ensure all staff needs are considered. Commissioners acknowledge that by continuing to strive to involve people with lived experience and working together, valuable improvements to services can be made.

**"...once you build that bond you will find that it's really hard to give up on the people you are trying to help...this process pushed that message hard with me."**

Business Commissioner

## Regional

The Call to Action event has inspired many organisations in the North of Tyne region to continue the work of the commission. Individuals who attended the Call to Action event were asked to make a pledge to continue the work that was started by the NTCA PTC. These pledges included;

- To include payment (as well as expenses) for volunteers on advisory group as part of funding applications.
- To ensure services we commissioned are trauma informed and we listen to lived experience.
- I pledge to use the insights learnt today in my own work to address fuel poverty and in the development of our work on including lived experience and marginalised communities.
- I pledge to bring my Teams support and signposting experience out to the community hubs and work with those in health poverty in particular (DWP, Disability employment advisor Lead, Northumberland).

- I pledge to listen and become a force.... a positive disruptor.
- The ICB commits to tackling poverty and its effects on access to healthcare- with your help and advice!
- I will make sure that our equality impact assessment process includes poverty and inequalities.
- Continue the 'ripple effect' by encouraging people to take action e.g. signing up to guarantee our Essential Campaign. (T.T)
- To use the increasing power of the Good Work Pledge to make a difference to working people.
- As a lead of an organisation, review our Volunteers. Look into SEND Services to support children whilst parents are at work.
- Our pledge is to lift the burden of debt by helping not hurting those in poverty (Christians Against Poverty).
- I want to engage with the Call to Action letter around Caring Responsibilities. Commitment to build relationships with service users, building on the PTC model. Sign up to Good Work Pledge. Work to support unpaid carers into work.
- Press to involve voices earlier to help better steer the direction.
- I pledge to drive up 'employment standards' through the real living wage action team in Newcastle. I pledge to push our equity, diversity and inclusion training and ensure that poverty is included in this and support my volunteers. Thank you.
- To recognise that citizens and communities have agency and insight and should be involved in.

The publicity shared after the Call to Action Event, invited comments from regional leaders attending the event and the commissioners themselves.

**"An amazing event celebrating the journey, you can see the change already in the individuals and the group let's hope it will bring about more systemic change!"**

**"So proud to have been part of this and immensely proud of the amazing civic commissioners who shared their intimate, traumatic and very raw lived experiences. So many examples of social injustice, it was also really brave of the business commissioners who often had to acknowledge limitations in their own understanding and be open to learning. Well done Children North East and of the North of Tyne combined Authority for doing something different and looking for innovative solutions to address suffering in our region."**

**“Last week was the end of a very powerful experience. I was lucky enough to take part in the North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission. A chance to challenge conventional ways of thinking about how we listen and act. As someone who has always worked in a social justice and aspirations environment, I have always understood the power of working with the individuals you are developing services for, but this experience took it to another level. If you take the time to build relationships and common ground, you will build trust and unlock so much potential.”**

## Commissioner

### National

Community Commissioners have been involved in the national Poverty Truth Network throughout their poverty Truth Journey, from attending conferences to being part of the ‘Amplify’ work and attending online meetings. Two of the Community Commissioners will continue to be involved in the amplify work of the PTN, working specifically on access.

Community Commissioners were consulted by the local representative of the Centre for Social Justice which has concluded in the production of “Two Nations, The State of Poverty in the U.K, an Interim Report” and this will feed into the wider report at the culmination of their work.



# CHALLENGE

**The NTCA PTC has made numerous findings, with key messages and Learning evidenced throughout this report. The final 'ask' of the Commission and our 'Call to Action' is for EVERYONE to think about what changes they will make, big or small to contribute to the ripple effect?**

# THANKS

## We would like to thank

### 1

The Community Commissioners for their honesty, hard work and devotion to the Commission throughout the two years they have been involved. It has been somewhat of a rollercoaster experience and their passion, drive and humour have been instrumental in ensuring the process came to a positive end – or as they would say a ‘springboard’ onto the next stage.

### 2

The Business and Civic Commissioners for really listening and sharing their authentic selves throughout the process as well as offering support and encouragement. Without your hard work, commitment and dedication to the cause, the Commission would not have been the success that it was.

### 3

NTCA, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Community Foundation for funding this innovative commission across three Local Authority areas and providing an opportunity to expand the Poverty Truth model, working alongside people with lived experience of poverty.

### 4

The Poverty Truth Network for all their support, advice and guidance throughout the journey.

# COMMUNITY COMMISSIONER PENNY'S STORY



“There are so many people living in food poverty in our communities, it’s like a third-world country. We simply shouldn’t have them. It’s undignified to live in poverty; to say ‘I’ve got no food’ and have to ask for help. That takes a hell of a lot to do that.”

Penny Walters is one of the Community Commissions on the North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission. She was awarded a British Empire Medal in the latest New Year’s Honours list for her tireless activism on behalf of local communities, in particular in relation to food poverty. She lives in Byker, with her adult child, whom she has been a full-time carer for.

Penny advocates for a ‘cash first’ approach to help families who hit crisis point. A ‘cash first’ approach means giving families facing food insecurity a small payment, trusting them to resolve their short-term challenges rather than encouraging reliance on foodbanks.

“Part of the challenge is the stigma, the idea someone accessing any kind of benefits are playing the system or going to make bad decisions. In reality, it’s such a small percentage who abuse the system.”

“It also isn’t always straight forward accessing food banks. You need to travel to them, which might require paying for a bus. You have to go at a certain time of day, often during the day – which can be hard for carers or those in work [according to the Trussell Trust, 1 in 7 foodbanks users are in employment].”

Penny also believes a Universal Basic Income would help lift many people out of poverty.

“The benefits aren’t adequate enough. It’s a contradiction that the National Living Wage is backed as what’s needed to have a quality of life, but benefits are so much lower. It’s a contradiction that the National Living Wage is backed as what’s needed to have a quality of life, but benefits are so much lower.”

“I have a friend with three children with additional needs. For her to work, she will need to pay £2,000 in childcare costs. How many jobs cover that? She has no choice but to live in poverty.”

# COMMUNITY COMMISSIONER

## GEMMA'S STORY



Can you imagine being a parent of a child with SEND and not being able to pay for everything they need for their care?"

Gemma Johnson is a proud mum and carer to her 8-year old son, who has additional needs. She is one of Community Commissions who volunteered with the North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission, sharing her experience of navigating life "trapped in the system".

"If you don't have family to support you, that means you're a carer 24/7. You rely on health and social services to decide what help you can access, and housing services choose where you live. It can be hard to get up to date information about what benefits and support you can apply for. I've found out more through Facebook groups about what is out there than professionals."

There is a lack of opportunities locally for SEND group sessions, similar to what the Tim Lamb Centre and the Alan Shearer Centre do. These are often not accessible and come at a cost, more expensive than people like myself, who don't have much of after the essentials are paid for, can afford

"Gemma sees an important step in tackling poverty for many families, especially those who have limited options for work due to caring responsibilities, as adjusting the way benefits are calculated and paid.

"There needs to be a middle ground, either a reduction in the cost of food, fuel and other essentials, or an increase in benefits. Ideally, that would be finding systems that keep costs down so the government are not just handing over money for it to be passed straight to energy companies and supermarkets profits.

"We need to look at the bigger picture. For example, we're told by the Government that Minimum Wage is set to reflect the least you can be expected to live off, but benefits are much lower – so when you can't work you are pushed further and further into poverty."

Taking part in the Commission has encouraged Gemma to reframe her experiences and grown her confidence in her voice.

"Constantly explaining to people your situation, like healthcare workers or to access benefits, it leaves you feeling like a broken record. This commission has made me recognise my strength and that my experiences do matter. You can feel very lost and lonely when things are difficult, but this Commission has reminded me you can make a difference not matter what your background."



# BUSINESS COMMISSIONER CLIVE'S STORY



“Clive Davies is Local Partnership Manager for the Department for Work and Pensions. He took part in the Commission as a local decision-maker and, as a proud parent and carer, found parallels and differences between his and Gemma’s experiences.

“As a parent/carer of a child with SEND myself I can understand a lot of Gemma’s frustrations about the effect caring responsibilities can have on people’s circumstances. You have to fight for your child’s needs to be met but also face a battle to get support for yourself.

I’m able to work and am fortunate to have an employer with well-developed policies to support staff who are carers, but many parent/carers, especially single parents, find it very hard to combine working with their responsibilities at home and are often on low incomes.

While the benefits system provides some help in the shape of carers benefits and disability benefits for children, these don’t replace income from earnings so families with SEND children often find themselves worse off.

# COMMUNITY COMMISSIONER DAVID'S STORY



“It keeps you awake at night, thinking about the future. It had never happened to me, to us, before. You’re told if you work hard, save hard and try not to be a burden you’ll be looked after. I felt lied to.”

David Black is one of the Community Commissioners taking part in the North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission. When his mum’s health began to deteriorate a few years ago after an operation, his family was thrown into a very different financial situation than they were used to. Delays in NHS processes meant care home fees were fast depleting the family resources and putting their home at risk.

“I’m not sure people would think of me as being in poverty. But my experience was that very suddenly we had to spend all our family savings on mum’s care, whilst we were waiting for NHS decisions. Suddenly I was concerned with very basic needs: food, travel, bills.

“From when you wake up to when you go to bed, it’s about surviving. I’ve worked and paid in during my life and now care for my mum. If you have a shorter-term problem, kids, time-off work or family, the system doesn’t take account of that.”

“They [the government] say that the route out of poverty is work. But if you have dementia, or care for someone with dementia, that’s no help. I’ve had to rely on bits and bobs of work since this started. I can’t access any help until that lifetime of savings are completely gone. I had to push and push for letters from three different people confirming we wouldn’t lose the house.”

After paperwork delays by the NHS, the decision was made that David’s mum would qualify for funded care. Whilst it was good news, it came several months later than the originally planned two-week timeline, during which time the family had been depleting their savings and were deeply worried about their financial future.

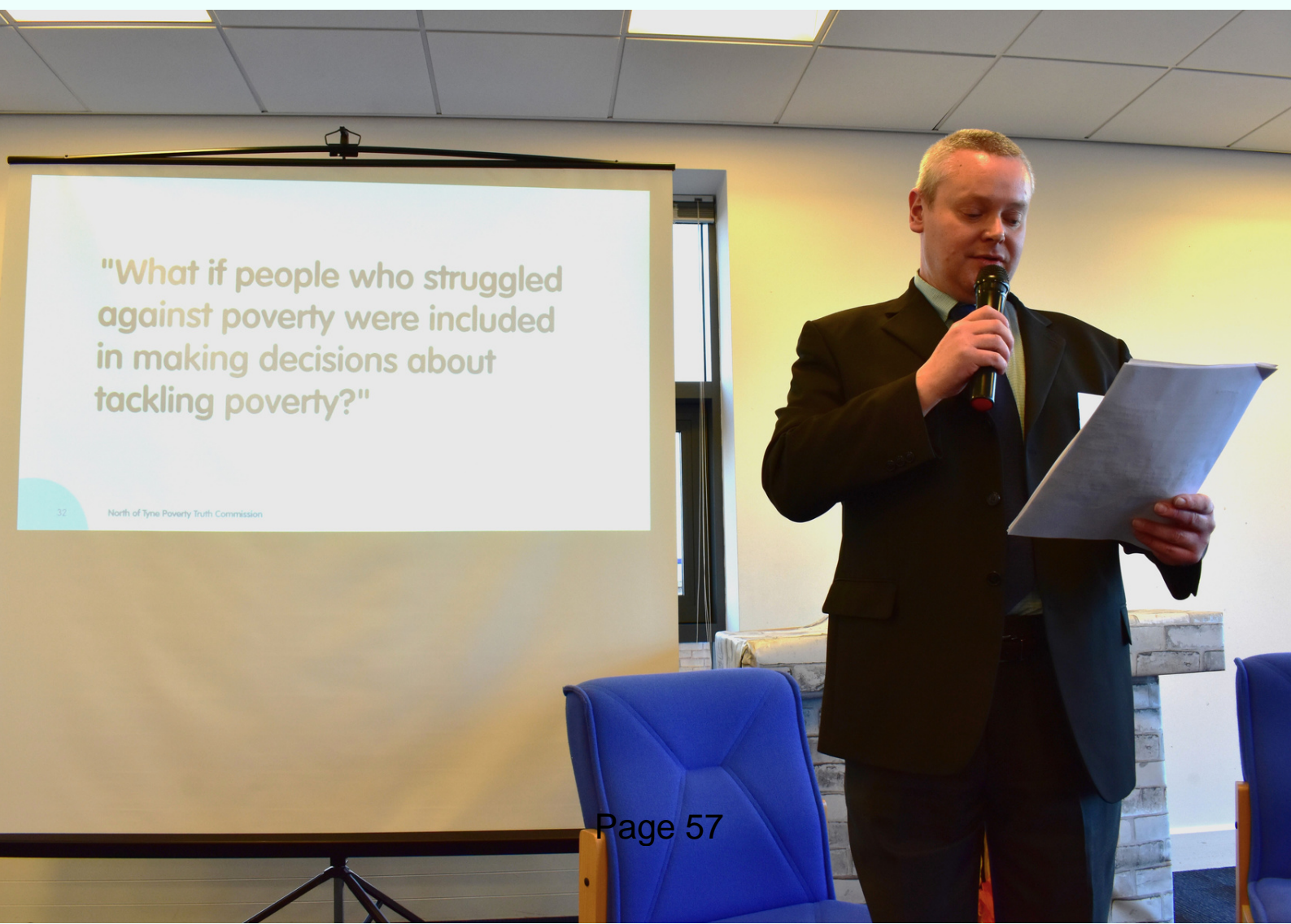
David joined the Commission to give a voice to his experiences, wanting to raise awareness about the real impact of the way later life care is processed and funded.

Like others in the group, he felt that stigma plays a significant role in making the experience of poverty both hard to live with and misunderstood by those who had never lived it.

““You don’t feel confident. You feel like you’re to blame for not being able to manage. At the Job Centre in the 80’s, there was no blame. Now, you feel like a criminal. It comes down to a lack of empathy from the system itself – you’re always having to battle for your rights rather than someone helping you navigate the help which is available.

“I wanted to get my voice heard about the all the problems I’d encountered with the Social Care system. The groups informing decisions, like the hospital board I am part of, were mostly well to do, retired, professional. I had different experiences to them.

“Taking part in the Commission has transformed my attitude. There have been a lot of opportunities that wouldn’t have been possible without it. I’m pursuing my new role as a ‘positive disruptor’ on issues to do with health inequalities, such as taking on a Trustee role with Support and Grow North East. I want to help as many people as possible. This Commission is a starting point and in many ways the impact the people who took part are having using their voice is the real legacy of the project.”



# HEALTHCARE INEQUALITIES CALL TO ACTION LETTER



# North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission Call to Action

North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission  
C/O Children North East  
89 Denhill Park,  
Newcastle upon Tyne,  
NE15 6QE

[participation.team@children-ne.org.uk](mailto:participation.team@children-ne.org.uk)

Dear [NAME],

The North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission have spent the last two years researching the issue of health inequalities.

This letter is a Call to Action, from the people in the communities you serve in your professional role or realms of influence.

The North East has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the UK, as well as the highest mortality rate for persons of all ages in England. It also has the highest rate of male suicide and as a female, you are 1.7 times more likely to die from a poverty related issue.

People living in the North East die on average 3 years earlier than people living in the South East of England. They also have spent more years in poor health, 29.1% of people age 50-64 in the North East compared to 20.3% in the South East. (The Centre for Aging Better).

Even within our regions, health is a postcode lottery where life expectancy can be mapped along the metro line. Two stations, 9 minutes apart and life expectancy drops by 8.5 years!

Planning and delivering our services needs an understanding of the unique geographical, cultural and diverse communities. Former industrial, fishing and farming communities all being very different in their health care needs. The overwhelming learning has been the disconnect between the services planned and what is needed or delivered.

Throughout our journey, we have recognised the good work that is being done, however it is evident that there was an assumption that there was a level playing field at the beginning of previous funding allocations and this means that we have repeatedly come up against barriers and gaps in Health services:

- Services aren't there WHEN they're needed or are hard to access (Geography, cost)
- The complexities in navigating the system and learning how the system works alongside the HUGE barriers created by stigma
- Assumption that everyone has
  - a certain level of knowledge/ability to access a service
  - the resources to access services, including utilities, transport and the internet
  - access to information and skills to use technology – digital by default is NOT the answer – it excludes people who are: Blind, Illiterate, Elderly, Neuro Divergent and people with ESOL, Disabilities
- Disjointed services and lack of communication within the NHS including the capacity of staff to deliver services alongside a lack of integrated services when someone is in crisis
- Lack of empowerment for individuals and value placed on engagement and involvement of users on service design and delivery
- Lack of understanding that Health is impacted throughout an individual's life by lived experiences and when living in Poverty, a person is already disadvantaged by these experiences.
- Unconscious and conscious bias
- Imminent implementation of cashless systems for car parks, the adverse links of this to stress and poor mental health

In addition, Health Inequalities for women are well documented and highlighted in numerous reports. Health services are designed by men for men. Including, decisions about funding research, what and how they are delivered.

- disparities in funding for research and product development for erectile dysfunction versus female conditions, such as the menopause.
- ADHD medication, where research into the hormonal effects of the normal menstrual cycle or menopause were not included in research.
- Women are under diagnosed with neurodiversities, and still often find they are not taken as seriously as their male counterparts

Health Inequalities matters because we matter. The North Matters.

We are inviting you to sign our pledge below to make the following changes to the way you work to tackle health inequalities in our region.

#### 1. Addressing the misogyny in Health Services:

- Create an environment that supports women already in senior positions to be empowered to challenge decisions so that women's healthcare needs are given equal consideration at every stage of research, development, funding and service delivery. If you are women in a position of influence, please use your voice loudly.

## **2. Addressing illness through wellness – a more positive approach**

- Make access to non-medical services easier and cheaper by 'meeting people where they are'. Remove barriers of location and cost. Trusted community settings could be greater utilised, and could include more use of 'pop up' checks and mobile dentists etc
- Focus on prevention and early detection of illness and injury through education, support and delivery of services
- Provide support to people who need it the most, particularly those affected by wider determinants of health in a holistic way

## **3. Working Together with people who have lived experience**

- Work alongside people with lived experience, accepting that 'Experts by Experience' are EQUALLY important as professionals and academics and act on their advice
- Demonstrate you value their time and knowledge e.g. reward
- Don't jump into our communities to try to save us, Empower us!!
- Encourage diversity by reflecting the communities you serve in all decision making, from funding and research to service delivery.

Please respond via our email address, by 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024, to let us know you agree to sign the pledge.

Yours,

**Health Inequalities Working Group, North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission:**

Amy Rose, Community Commissioner

David Black, Community Commissioner

Ellie Grice, Jobcentre Customer Service Manager at Work and Health Services Directorate

Gemma Johnson, Community Commissioner

Louise Jones, Chief Executive & Founder at Support and Grow North East

Nicola Morrison, Community Commissioner

## Recipients:

- Richard Barker, NHS England - Regional Director for the North East and Yorkshire and North West Regions
- Sir James Mackey, Chief Executive - Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- North of Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll
- NOTCA Deputy Mayor Dame Norma Redfearn DBE, Mayor of North Tyneside Council
- North of Tyne Councillor Nicholas Kemp, Leader of Newcastle City Council
- NOTCA Councillor Karen Kilgour, Deputy Leader of Newcastle City Council
- NOTCA Councillor Carl Johnson, Deputy Mayor of North Tyneside Council
- NOTCA Councillor Glen Sanderson, Lead of Northumberland county Council
- NOTCA Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader Northumberland County Council
- Lucy Winskell OBE, Chair of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership Board
- Lisa Goodwin, Mayoral Ambassador for the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector
- Caroline from North of Tyne Combined Authority – leads Good Work Pledge work stream
- Phil Capewell – Society Matters
- Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP
- Guy Opperman MP
- Ian Levy MP
- Ian Lavery MP
- Rt Hon Sir Alan Campbell MP
- Mary Glendon MP
- Rt Hon Nick Brown MP
- Chi Onwurah MP
- Catherine McKinnell MP
- Sam Allen, Chief Executive of The North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
- Dan Jackson, Director of Policy, Involvement and Sustainable Affairs at NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
- Professor Peter Kelly CBE, OHID Regional Director and NHS Director of Public Health North East and Yorkshire
- Professor Sir Liam Donaldson, Chair of NHS North East and North Cumbria Care Board
- Lisa Taylor, Health and Wellbeing Programme Director for VONNE
- David Thompson, Chair of Health Watch Northumberland and North East and North Cumbria Healthwatch Network



**CARING RESPONSIBILITIES  
CALL TO ACTION LETTER**



## North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission Call to Action

C/O Children North East  
North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission  
89 Denhill Park,  
Newcastle upon Tyne,  
NE15 6QE

[Participation.team@children-ne.org.uk](mailto:Participation.team@children-ne.org.uk)

Dear [NAME],

We are members of the North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission's Caring Responsibilities Working Group. We are a group of people from across communities, businesses and public organisations in Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland who have come together to tackle poverty head on. With more than one in four people across the North East living below the poverty line, we know that this is one of the biggest challenges impacting our region right now. We also know, from our work together, that there are some actions we can take collaboratively that would help in the North of Tyne. We are writing this letter to share these views and ask for your support.

We have looked at care and caring responsibilities as part of our Poverty Truth Commission. This includes people looking after children, supporting children and adults with disabilities or special educational needs, and caring for other relatives because of ill-health or age-related conditions. Unpaid care has a significant economic value recently estimated at £445 million a day – or £162 billion a year – across England and Wales. We know that when the work of care is properly valued and supported it makes children, adults, families and communities healthier, happier and more productive.

The work of care has power and value. But our work found that it is often impossible to care and work well. This means that people who care often have lower incomes, are less likely to work or more likely to be underemployed, have fewer opportunities and more likely to live in poverty – as well as facing stress and poor health themselves.

We want to shine a spotlight on the poverty trap that caring responsibilities can create. The work of our Commission has identified three things that can change this:

- 1. Bringing support services to carers to increase opportunity and access.** We have looked at what works across the North of Tyne and have identified the Child Poverty Prevention Programme as good practice. The 'welfare

support through the school gate' pillar of this pilot project has so far provided welfare rights advice and support to parents, carers and staff in 33 school settings across Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside. Some commissioners had experience of using this service directly. The benefits of having advisers in easy, accessible and safe spaces meant people felt more comfortable getting advice quickly and easily. People who used the services also felt there was less stigma talking to advisers in the trusted setting of their school. The North of Tyne Combined Authority has recently committed additional funding to expand this model, to include more schools and families. We welcome this move and would also like the Combined Authority, with partners, to explore how this could be expanded to other places carers attend regularly e.g. hospitals, other NHS services, community centres and Family Hubs.

**“When you try and ring Citizens Advice, you can’t get through and it becomes a big effort. It’s easier to access when you know they’re going to be there at the school you’re going to anyway. It takes the stress away.” Community Commissioner**

2. **Improve career opportunities for people with caring responsibilities.** We have identified two practical ways in which this action could be addressed:
  - a. By expanding the North of Tyne Good Work Pledge so that employers are encouraged to recognise, accommodate and support people with caring responsibilities – both in their current workforce and when they are recruiting.
  - b. By the Combined Authority working with the Department for Work & Pensions and Jobcentre Plus to undertake a pilot exploring ways in which a more flexible, personalised service for people with caring responsibilities can be delivered to people in our area.

**“When I go into Jobcentre Plus – because I don’t fit into one of their boxes – they can’t help me. Despite my challenges and caring responsibilities, I have a lot to offer. I want to thrive, to make a success of my life and support my family but the current system won’t let me.” Community Commissioner**

3. **Long-term and ongoing support from systems.** Support systems are complex and can be hard to access and navigate: this is well known and well-rehearsed. However, time and time again, in the evidence we considered, people explained that being treated 'like a human' or with 'respect and

sensitivity' could make the difference between feeling like the system was working for them or against them. We identified training tools like trauma-informed practice, and values and behaviours like patience and empathy as being central to good experiences with the benefits system and other mainstream services. We would like to see staff in services who demonstrate these values commended and relevant training considered and applied at a local level.

**"I understand that people's hands are tied by working within systems, but there should be more compassion and understanding for individual circumstances and experiences. Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what their situation is."**

**Community Commissioner**

These recommendations are evidence-based, practical and focused. We understand that there are some parts of the systems which support carers which are outside regional control and the scope of this work. However, as a North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission we have asked ourselves *who cares for our carers?* We have worked together to come up with some answers.

We would like to invite you to join us in this work and at the Call to Action event on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and look forward to hearing how you may be able to support us.

An initial response before the event would be appreciated.

Yours,

**Caring Responsibilities Working Group, North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission:**

Amanda Bailey, Director at North East Child Poverty Commission

Amy Rose, Community Commissioner

Christine Paxton, Assistant Director Business Development, Communications and Change at Karbon Homes

David Black, Community Commissioner

Gemma Johnson, Community Commissioner

Nicola Morrison, Community Commissioner

Rhiannon Beame, Executive Director (Policy and Representation) at North East Chamber of Commerce

This letter is being sent to:

- Abi Conway, CEO at Northumberland Citizens Advice
- Tracy Armstrong, Chief Officer at Newcastle Citizens Advice
- Mark Almond, Chief Executive at North Tyneside Citizens Advice
- North of Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll
- NOTCA Deputy Mayor Dame Norma Redfearn DBE, Mayor of North Tyneside Council
- North of Tyne Councillor Nicholas Kemp, Leader of Newcastle City Council
- NOTCA Councillor Karen Kilgour, Deputy Leader of Newcastle City Council
- NOTCA Councillor Carl Johnson, Deputy Mayor of North Tyneside Council
- NOTCA Councillor Glen Sanderson, Lead of Northumberland county Council
- NOTCA Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader Northumberland County Council
- Lucy Winskill OBE, Chair of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership Board
- Lisa Goodwin, Mayoral Ambassador for the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector
- Caroline Preston, North of Tyne Combined Authority – Good Work Pledge
- Phil Capewell – Society Matters
- Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP
- Guy Opperman MP
- Ian Levy MP
- Ian Lavery MP
- Rt Hon Sir Alan Campbell MP
- Mary Glendon MP
- Rt Hon Nick Brown MP
- Chi Onwurah MP
- Catherine McKinnell MP
- Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner – Kim McGuinness
- DWP – Strategic Partnership Manager for the North East, Sharon Thorpe
- Joanne Jobling– Job Centre Plus
- Pam Smith, Chief Executive, Newcastle City Council,
- Paul Hanson - Chief Executive, North Tyneside Council
- Dr Helen Paterson - Chief Executive Northumberland Council
- Pauline Steele, CEO Carers Trust Tyne and Wear
- Nic Palmarini, Director of the National Innovation Centre for Ageing

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# NORTH OF TYNE

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# COMBINED AUTHORITY

## Poverty Truth Commission: Learning journey

*'Nothing about us without us is for us'*

February 2024



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## Abbreviations

CC – community commissioner

CNE – Children Northeast

DWP – Department of Work and Pensions

JRF – Joseph Rowntree Foundation

NHS – National Healthcare System

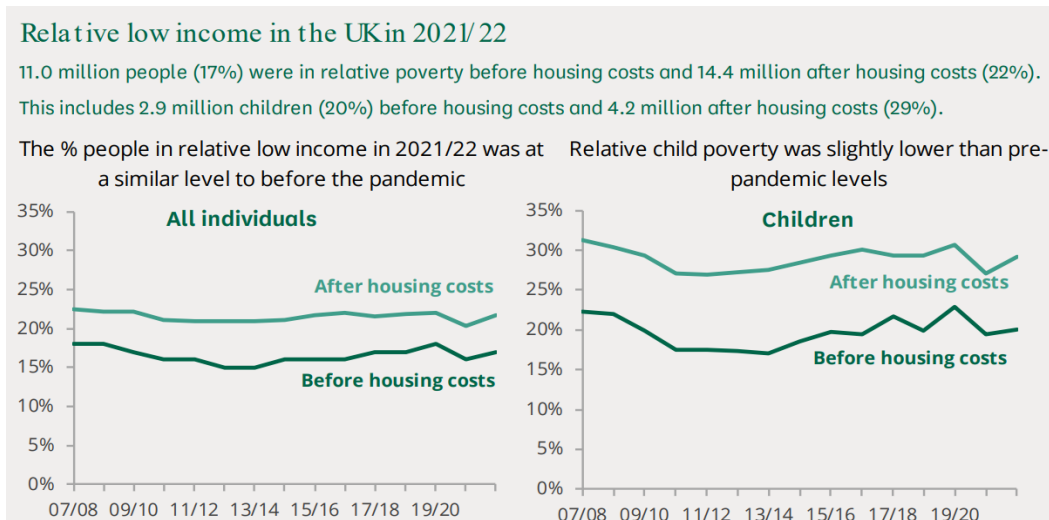
PTC – Poverty Truth Commission

WG – working group

## Poverty in the UK

Poverty remains a serious problem in the UK being exaggerated after the Covid-19 pandemic followed by the cost-of-living crisis. Poverty is not only about money, ‘poverty is a lack of social democracy and lack of social equity’. It means that those in poverty without the resources or voice to change their situations are affected disproportionately.

According to the [Poverty in the UK: Statistics report](#), ‘around one in six people in the UK were in relative low income (relative poverty) before housing costs in 2021/22. This rises to just over one in five people once housing costs are accounted for’.



Source: DWP, Households Below Average Income, 2021/22

The report also confirms that although the share of people living in absolute poverty has decreased, around 13% of people were in absolute low income before housing costs in 2021/22, and 17% were in absolute low income (absolute poverty) after housing costs, it remains high.



Source: DWP, Households Below Average Income, 2021/22

Unfortunately, the Northeast stays on top of the rating showing the percentage of people in relative low income, which is the main reason the NTCA has looked for innovative ways to tackle the issue.



Source: DWP, Households Below Average Income, 2021/22, Table 3.17ts

The Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) is one of such solutions NTCA implemented in 2021-2023.

### Poverty Truth Commissions model

Poverty Truth Commissions are models of direct engagement where civic and business representatives are brought together with people with lived experience of poverty (community commissioners). Commissions work to understand the specific features of poverty in their areas and work collaboratively to come up with practical solutions. PTCs aim to help facilitate a wider range of voices to join decision-making, intending to produce better informed decisions as a result. Central to the PTC model are the principles of fairness and equity.

PTCs are usually supported by local authorities but not led by them. They are usually hosted independently to ensure their work is genuinely equitable and collaborative. PTCs aim to help to facilitate a wider range of voices to join decision-making, intending to make better decisions as a result. Poverty Truth Commissions tend to:

- Run on average for two years, including a 'start-up' phase of around 6 months.
- Recruit from a wide range of communities of place and interest, prioritising the voices of groups which are rarely heard in traditional methods of engagement.
- Be built collaboratively on a mix of commissioners from the public sector (Councillors and officers), business and civil society and people with lived experience of poverty.
- Secure funding from a mix of public, civic and/or business sources to support collaboration.

The Commission is usually led by an independent Chair who can challenge traditional narratives and discuss underlying assumptions in a neutral way.

Poverty Truth Commissions can make a significant difference in terms of:

- Seeking to address short-term issues that also respond to long-term needs by identifying and supporting changes to systems and processes.
- Considering the solutions to issues in collaboration, integrating meeting the needs of those experiencing poverty with the objectives of multiple organisations.
- Directly involving people with lived experience of poverty to share their experiences and working with organisations to identify solutions.
- Including wide representation from civic bodies, front line services and members of the public. They work collaboratively to identify priorities and take actions to solve problems.
- Through the development of priorities and actions, aiming to prevent issues from getting worse and preventing issues from occurring in the first place.

On average PTCs run for 18 months and all end with a final report and supporting digital content (web resources, videos etc.), promotional activities and event(s) to share the learning and achievements. 'Nothing about us, without us, is for us' is a slogan the Poverty Truth Network<sup>1</sup> uses to express the nature of PTC.

### Relevance of the PTC concept to the NTCA approach in addressing poverty in the area

NTCA is committed to delivering an inclusive economy for the benefit of all its residents. The COVID crisis has radically altered the landscape in which the organisation was working, putting poverty, inequality and the importance of economic and social cohesion at the forefront of people's minds. With advice from the Inclusive Economy Board, NTCA has been considering ways in which residents' experiences can feed directly into area's recovery response, and NTCA's ongoing engagement and co-design work. Poverty Truth Commission was considered the relevant model to do so, enabling the voices of groups traditionally marginalised in decision-making to have a more direct impact on the NTCA's work.

The NTCA vision is of a dynamic and more inclusive economy, one that brings together people and opportunities to create vibrant communities and a high quality of life, narrowing inequalities and ensuring that all residents have a stake in our region's future.

It acknowledges that there are huge economic disparities between the region and the most affluent parts of the country, and inequalities within the area which need to be addressed. 'For those who are struggling to get by a picture of positive growth is not easy to embrace', the PTC business case states.

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<sup>1</sup> The Poverty Truth Network supports Poverty Truth Commissions and encourages them to work together <https://povertytruthnetwork.org/the-network/who-we-are/>

A PTC for the North of Tyne was meant to be a clear, credible statement of NTCA's and its Employability and Inclusion Portfolio's intent – putting poverty and inequality at the heart of the understanding of inclusive economic growth, developing activities and interventions which achieve local economic resilience via strengthened communities, and more good jobs. NTCA's Vision is of a 'dynamic and more inclusive economy...[which narrows] inequalities' (Home of Ambition, NTCA Vision, p3). NTCA's Inclusive Economy Policy Statement reinforces this by committing NTCA to taking a people-focused approach to support every individual to succeed (NTCA Inclusive Economy Policy Statement, p4).

The NTCA vision includes six key pillars representing the most important groups, issues and goals that the organisation needs to invest in and nurture, in order to achieve a more prosperous and inclusive future. A PTC for the North of Tyne was intended to deliver against three pillars, as follows:

1. *Hotbed of talent - Giving everyone the opportunity to thrive.* Coming up with practical solutions to help people furthest from opportunity to attain a fair wage, and access good jobs with continued training and skills development available once in work.
2. *Spark of innovation - Supporting research.* Leading the way with the UK's first post-COVID, Combined Authority PTC.
3. *Pride of place - Communities that inspire and places where people want to live.* Demonstrating that the North of Tyne is a place with opportunity for everyone, where serious, sustained effort is taken to address the inequalities and disparities which undermine our productivity.

The PTC was designed to have an impact on NTCA's intention to work with business and civil society to change working practices. It was also aimed to empower those involved with the skills and resources they need to take ownership of their futures and support them and their communities to thrive.

Central to the PTC model is a recognition that it is a learning experience whereby outcomes and outputs are not pre-determined before the Commission completes its work. However, PTCs already delivered have a track record of benefits at four levels:

- Individual impact
- Organisational impact
- Policy level, and
- Impact on wider society

*Individual Benefits include:*

- Community commissioners (people with lived experience of poverty) have spoken of how they have grown in confidence, and how the strength of relationships and sense of purpose of the group has kept them going through hard times.
- Community Commissioners have spoken of improvements in their mental and physical health and well-being.
- Commissioners in other areas have been able to find work or to establish their own businesses, gain qualifications and go on to higher education e.g. Skills Training in

West Cheshire PTC increased opportunities and helped community commissioners to continue their community work in a voluntary or paid capacity.

*Examples of organisational Impacts:*

- A mentoring programme for Civil Servants through which those who have direct experience of poverty coach senior policy leaders (Scotland).
- Changes in wording in Housing Benefits letters to make them more understandable and customer friendly for clients (West Cheshire).
- Stop using enforcement agents when recovering debts from the most vulnerable residents, and also to waive charges for copies of birth certificates for homeless people, enabling them to more easily obtain the official Identification they need to access benefits (Salford PTC).
- Business Leaders building relationships with Community Commissioners, encouraged their skills and sought to develop new opportunities within their business to make a difference in the city (Leeds).
- Through listening to the Community Inspirers, many voiced negative customer service experiences when accessing benefit systems and support services. The lack of empathy and respect for people accessing these services had a negative impact on people's mental health and wellbeing. The PTC worked collaboratively to address this issue, creating the PTC Pledge which promotes honest and respectful treatment of all people, encouraging the development of positive relationships rather than transactional processes (West Cheshire PTC Pledge).
- A Manifesto that focusses on the de-humanising effects of poverty and asks public, private and voluntary sector organisations to commit to include people with lived experience of poverty in all their antipoverty work (Leeds PTC Humanifesto).

*Examples of Policy Level Outcomes:*

- Co-authorship of the official report, 'Poverty in Scotland' with the Scottish Government.
- Deep involvement in the Community Empowerment Bill (2014) in Scotland.
- The NHS and DWP are building stronger relationships and aim to work together to support people back into employment (GP Engagement Strategy West Cheshire).
- The work of the Commission has led to changes in government policy, including securing a minimum level of £100 for School Clothing Grants in every local authority in Scotland.

*Impacts on Wider Society*

- Wide use of the Scottish films on social media and for training purposes - including schools, local authorities, GP training, ATD Fourth World and UNICEF.
- Leeds PTC working with Church Action on Poverty created videos for [www.realbenefits-street.com](http://www.realbenefits-street.com) as an alternative narrative to the TV series.

- Leeds PTC commissioners invited to advise scriptwriters on major national TV soap on storylines and portrayals of people living in poverty.

### Cross-Cutting Themes: Equalities

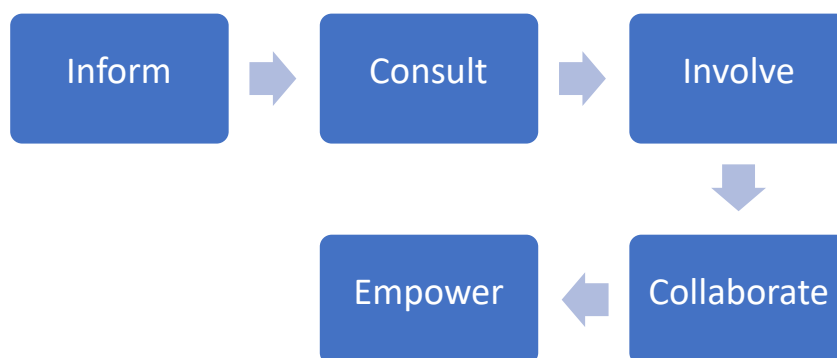
It was anticipated that NTCA’s PTC will have specific positive impacts for groups experiencing protected characteristics, under the terms of the Equality Act 2010. Residents with certain protected characteristics are more likely to experience the effects of socio-disadvantage which result in poverty. By creating a mechanism to directly improve the relevance, responsiveness and quality of interventions by the Combined Authority, NTCA’s constituent authorities and wider partners and stakeholders for people experiencing poverty a PTC are expected to specifically deliver the aims of the 2010 Equality Act: to advance equality of opportunity for all, especially for residents experiencing low pay/socio-economic disadvantage. This idea was checked during the evaluation learning exercise.

### A Poverty Truth Commission for the North of Tyne

Based on a nationally recognized model of a practice, a PTC for the North of Tyne is the first to run post-COVID and on a Combined Authority footprint. It was directly delivered against the inclusive economy ambitions of the Devolution Deal as well as NTCA’s co-design and co-production strategy. It was aimed to better understand the specific effects of the COVID pandemic for people living in Newcastle, North Tyneside, and Northumberland and come up with practical solutions for NTCA, local authorities and others to implement.

A PTC was designed to add considerable value to NTCA work already underway including Citizen’s Assembly on climate change, young people’s engagement strategy, Mayor’s Question Time model with specialist groups, and NTCA Ambassadors. In particular, it was designed to drive significant additional learning in relation to engagement strategy, taking organization into new forms of on-line engagement and reach, and demonstrating ‘what works’ in relation to Northeast residents, especially those at risk of significant additional socio-economic exclusion from the Covid crisis.

The International Association for Public Participation identifies the following levels of engagement during PTC implementation:



The NTCA PTC project was meant to provide the platform to empower all involved to build collaborative and productive relationships. Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland local authorities all have established programmes of work seeking to address the unique characteristics of poverty and exclusion in their areas.

*Newcastle:* The work of the City Council's Active Inclusive Partnership has been central to the city's approach to addressing poverty and exclusion since 2013. It provides a framework through which a wide range of partners work together to maximise the value of collective resources to help residents to maintain the foundations for a stable life. These are defined as: having somewhere to live, an income, being financially stable and accessing employment opportunities. Key outcomes have included supporting income maximisation by helping over 23,000 households gain nearly £29m in unclaimed benefits and providing the Money Matters consultancy advice line for professionals and volunteers to address benefits and income queries quickly and efficiently on behalf of residents.

*North Tyneside:* In September 2021 North Tyneside's Cabinet approved a flagship £1m Poverty Intervention Fund, seeking to build on established work in relation to poverty and inequality. It will target funding and support to address the financial, social and health impacts of poverty through focusing specially on three target groups: children, families and older people. The Fund is overseen by a Steering Group made up of elected members and relevant external organisations as well as the area's Young Mayor and youth Cabinet members to ensure young people voices and experiences are central to the impact of the Fund.

*Northumberland:* Northumberland County Council has made a strategic commitment to poverty reduction and prevention by appointing a senior manager responsible for the coordination and development of activities across all areas of the authority's work. This has resulted in innovative work such as the authority's Welfare Rights Team acting as a joint initiative with the local Foundation Trust, providing specific advice, training and support to frontline staff in health and social care services. This work has been identified as good practice in the recent follow-up report to the Marmot Review into health inequality. During the pandemic the authority has worked close with community leaders to build the capacity of community-led partnerships to provide hardship funding and address food insecurity, and financial wellbeing in the areas of greatest need.

The PTC had to specifically support the development of an inclusive economy in line with the following characteristics:

- ✓ *Participation* – Delivering a people-centred approach to local economic development by co-designing responses to COVID-19 which are based on the lived experience of our residents, especially those whose voices are least heard.
- ✓ *Equity* – Tackling inequality in the North of Tyne by creating a mechanism whereby the voices and view of residents experiencing poverty and socio-economic disadvantage are given parity with the experience of public sector and business and civil society commissioners.



- ✓ *Growth* – Informing the quality of NTCA policies, programmes and projects to target and effectively address poverty, directly targeting poorer communities, families and individuals.

The PTC was built on NTCA learning and expertise by providing additional capacity to understand better how the unique pressures of the COVID-19 crisis are affecting residents, especially those most vulnerable to the financial, social and health effects of the pandemic. As the first PTC to occur at a combined authority geography it was supposed to provide a further demonstration of NTCA commitment to local collaboration and understanding of the relationship between social and economic resilience for people and places. A North of Tyne PTC was meant to help to identify and share good practice across the area, highlighting any specific gaps for further work based on the rapidly changing effects of COVID-19. It was also supposed to bring wider stakeholders, such as business commissioners, into the discussion of the emerging issues and subsequent action.

Working in partnership with partner local authorities, local funder the Community Foundation for Tyne, Wear and Northumberland and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), NTCA commissioned local charity Children North East (CNE) to set up and run the North of Tyne Poverty Truth Commission for an initial two-year term starting from 2021.

Children North East is a regional children’s charity, aiming to ensure that North East children and young adults grow up healthy and happy. CNE’s aim is to serve babies, children, young people and their families, schools and communities to address their needs during critical periods. The organisation has a strong interest in understanding how poverty impacts on individuals and seeks to alleviate stigma and the structural causes of poverty through its work.



CNE engaged with local people with lived experience of poverty (community commissioners) to establish a start-up group. This group was responsible for the PTC launch and the recruitment of civic/business commissioners, representatives from civic and business communities). The established commission collaboratively identified the priorities for further investigation and action (in other areas these have included, addressing the sigma of poverty, exploring approaches to improving educational attainment and changes in debt and arrears policy and practice). The PTC was expected to enhance this work across the North of Tyne by providing an innovative, collective and strong voice for those with lived experience of poverty to influence how services are developed and delivered to meet their expressed needs.

Delegated Decision on the project start was made on 29/06/2021. Initially the project was planned until 25/07/2023 with an extension until 31/01/2024 (both practical and financial completion date).

The PTC communications plan was built around two strands:

1. Internally facing communications to recruit, support and maintain the membership of the Commission.
2. Externally facing communications to promote the activities of the PTC and support their identified areas of work.

#### Stakeholders

The PTC business case identifies the following key stakeholders engaged to the Commission:

- Salford Council's senior policy lead with experience of the area's successful PTC, and with council officers, development workers and commissioners with lived experience involved in Gateshead's new PTC.
- The independent Poverty Truth Commission Network and JRF as an experienced PTC partner and funder, to build on best practice.
- The three constituent local authorities have been actively involved throughout. NTCA officers have benefitted in particular from advice from Northumberland's senior manager with responsibility for poverty programmes, as she has previously worked on two PTCs nationally.

#### Planned results

The PTC business cases indicates the following service outputs for the project:

- *Participation*: 20 residents and wider stakeholders to engage in the Commission, considering evidence and collaborating on shared recommendations;
- *Equity*: 50 wider stakeholders and participants to engage in Commission activities and explore issues in relation to poverty, equality and the effects of COVID;
- *Growth*: a minimum of 2 NTCA policies, programmes or projects to demonstrate specific changes or revisions as a result of Commission evidence and advice;
- Deliver, with commissioners, a final report and learning event;
- Provide Quarterly Monitoring Reports to NTCA.

The project had only one official output tracked during the project delivery via NE OPS, project management system, namely 'Number of people attending an event'. However, the PTC project manager in the NTCA have tracked all above-mentioned outputs through monitoring meetings, reports etc. The target was set at the level of 70 people calculated on the basis of number of Commissioners in start-up phase (6-8), number of additional public sector, business etc. commissioners (10-12), number of people attending the launch/subsequent events (50).

## PTC Budget

The project budget according to the business case was £100,000 followed by 23.4% increase of NTCA's contribution:

|                                    | Initial budget | Final budget | Variance (£) | Variance (%) |
|------------------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Total Project Value</b>         | £100,000       | £118,748     | £18,748      | 18.75%       |
| <b>Total NTCA Funding</b>          | £80,000        | £98,748      | £18,748      | 23.44%       |
| <b>NTCA Intervention Rate</b>      | 80.00%         | 83.16%       | 3.16%        | 3.95%        |
| <b>Total Private Match Funding</b> | £20,000        | £20,000      | £0           | 0.00%        |
| <b>Total Revenue</b>               | £100,000       | £118,748     | £18,748      | 18.75%       |
| <b>NTCA Revenue</b>                | £80,000        | £98,748      | £18,748      | 23.44%       |

Source: project change request, PMO team

Due to co-financing and internal evaluation of the project, the additional Investment Fund contribution was not necessary, and the project had a final budget outturn of £97,798 – made up on £77,798 from NTCA Investment Fund.

## Co-financing

NTCA received £20,000 co-financing from Joseph Rowntree Foundation to deliver the PTC. An additional £20,000 from the community Foundation Tyne and Wear went directly to CNE. This support was intended to help NTCA to do three things:

1. *Voice, participation and influence:* NTCA is interested in establishing more regular mechanisms to engage with communities of interest, geography and identity. JRF support would enable the Inclusive Economy team and internal Equalities Champions to work with specialist bodies across the area to explore how NTCA could do this well and meaningfully. It foresees engagement with Great Manchester Combined Authority's equalities panels via talking to organisations like [Youth Focus North East](#), [Disability North](#) and [Difference](#), and the [Angelou Centre](#) to understand the approaches that would work most effectively in the given context. North of Tyne has diverse ethnic communities which are geographically concentrated e.g., south east Asian communities in the West End of Newcastle, geographically dispersed e.g. Syrian families resettled across the wider geographical area. Support would enable NTCA to work more directly with the network of Black and minority ethnic service delivery and representative organisations in culturally informed ways to explore mechanisms for regular, sustained engagement. This dialogue would underpin our practice and policy as follows.
2. *Practice:* Several of NTCA's funded programmes work with people facing additional barriers to good jobs and skills. Funding would enable NTCA's Inclusive Economy Team to maximise the learning from established activities like Return to Work Carers programme

and Adult Education Budget, as well as enabling better engagement in on-going delivery. It would enable genuine co-design and co-production to occur more specifically for projects in the pipeline e.g., proposed child poverty programme.

3. *Policy:* NTCA has a number of strategically significant programmes in development that stronger mechanisms for community engagement and influence could positively impact e.g. regional recovery plan, a wellbeing framework for the North of Tyne (in partnership with Carnegie UK), developing the organisation's overall evaluation framework. JRF's support would effectively enable us to co-produce our approach to co-production, ensuring residents voice and views are central to our long-term plans and ambitions.

#### Commissioners' recruitment

CNE Facilitators and Managers and NTCA colleagues have utilised existing connections with crucial organisations, such as Carbon Homes, DWP, Northumberland CC, North Tyneside Council, NE Chamber of Commerce, etc. +whilst forming new connections with organisations to engage with potential civic, business and faith commissioners as well as interested parties.

According to the CNE report, over 60 potential business, civic and faith commissioners were approached by CNE facilitators and 7 were recruited that is almost three times lower against a target of 20. CNE Facilitators have met and explained the role of a business, civic and faith commissioner to all parties and all business, civic and faith commissioners either attended the launch event in person or ensured a representative from their organisation was present.

A total of 76 community commissioners who reside in the North of Tyne (specifically Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland), have been identified according to the relative population of these three respective areas, while only 5 'graduated'. The population of each geographical area, relative population percentages, and the number and share of identified commissioners respective to each area are below:

| Geographical Area of North of Tyne      | Population Headcount (2019) | Relative Population (%) | Commissioners Headcount (of 76) | Commissioners Headcount (% of 76) | Final Community Commissioners Headcount | Contacted Civic/ Business Commissioners Headcount | Final Civic/ Business Commissioners Headcount | Full Commission Headcount |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Newcastle                               | 300,820                     | 36.7%                   | 36                              | 47.4%                             | 3                                       | 60<br>(no breakdown available)                    | 5                                             | 8                         |
| North Tyneside                          | 200,801                     | 24.7%                   | 19                              | 25.0%                             | 1                                       |                                                   | 1                                             | 2                         |
| Northumberland                          | 319,030                     | 38.9%                   | 21                              | 27.6%                             | 1                                       |                                                   | 1                                             | 2                         |
| North of Tyne (inc. Hexham and Prudhoe) | 820,651                     | 100%                    | 76                              | 100%                              | 5                                       |                                                   | 7                                             | 12                        |

Source: CNE project manager

\*Where Northumberland spans 5,103km<sup>2</sup> and 97% of this area is categorised as rural (Northumberland County Council, 2019), Northumberland is sparsely populated, with 63 people per km<sup>2</sup>. Across the three area committees of North Northumberland, South East Northumberland, and West Northumberland, percentage populations and the headcount of community commissioners are represented below.

| Geographical Area of<br>*Northumberland<br>Committee | Population<br>Headcount (of<br>approx.<br>319,030) | Relative Popu-<br>lation of North-<br>umberland (%) | Commission-<br>ers Headcount<br>(of 9) | Commission-<br>ers Headcount<br>(% of 24) | Final Commu-<br>nity Commis-<br>sioners Head-<br>count | Recruited<br>Civic/ Busi-<br>ness Commis-<br>sioners Head-<br>count | Final Civic/<br>Business<br>Commission-<br>ers Head-<br>count | Full Commis-<br>sion Head-<br>count |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| North Northumber-<br>land                            | 91,218                                             | 28.6%                                               | 5                                      | 23.8%                                     | 1                                                      | Data unavail-<br>able                                               | 0                                                             | 1                                   |
| South East Northum-<br>berland                       | 149,164                                            | 46.8%                                               | 9                                      | 42.9%                                     | 0                                                      |                                                                     | 1                                                             | 1                                   |
| West Northumber-<br>land                             | 75,646                                             | 23.7%                                               | 7                                      | 22.27                                     | 0                                                      |                                                                     | 0                                                             | 0                                   |

Source: CNE project manager

The rationale behind the identification of community commissioners being geographical in the first instance, is the stark differences in headcount population between areas of the North of Tyne, and within the larger area of Northumberland. Further recruitment considers demographics pertaining to protected characteristics and areas affected most by poverty.

Although the number of involved commissioners is not high, they represent the population structure properly.

## Commission themes

The community commissioners identified 3 key themes specific to the commission refining the focus on the previously flagged core areas of work. The key themes are:

- Food/fuel poverty;
- Caring responsibilities (elderly and children with additional needs);
- Health (physical health, mental health and disability);

This identification of key themes specific to the geographical area of the PTC informed the recruitment of civic and business commissioners who have been recruited into the process on the basis of their field being connected with a key theme, and that they operate a level of seniority with decision making capability in their working lives.

Three working groups have been created to represent each of the key themes. Civic and business commissioners were allocated to a working group on the basis of their professional remit. Community commissioners were allocated to a working group according to their preference and interest.

Following the civic and business commissioners and community commissioner meeting at the PTC launch event on 14th October, commissioners worked together to deepen understandings of poverty, reduce stigma and stereotypes of those experiencing poverty and work to effect positive change.

The working groups initially entered a relationship building phase to work together, listening to each other and creating a culture of empathic understanding. The working groups were meeting on a monthly basis to discuss the issues and structural barriers faced by those living in poverty with their allocated theme. It is an important pre-requisite that titles are left at the door and all members of the working group are equally valued. The working groups followed the typical PTC process of explore, experiment and embed.

## PTC delivery design

The PTC delivery Team includes:

- Participation workers (3) responsible for overseeing the day to day running of the project; managing relationships with community commissioners, business and civic commissioners and interested parties; organisation, chairing and facilitation of working groups. Their task was to ensure that Community Commissioners feel comfortable, supported and listened to during their interactions with Civic and Business Commissioners. The participation workers collated and stored information relating to the project to aid with the production of quarterly reports.
- Participation Team Manager responsible for providing oversight and overall support to Participation Workers.
- Head of Youth Service and Poverty proofing responsible for providing oversight and support to the Participation Team Manager.

The work had oversight from Luke Bramhall, Head of Youth Services and Poverty Proofing and Gwen Dalziel, Participation Team Manager. The delivery was directly managed by three Participation Workers.

## Learning journey

### Methodology

The NTCA always tries to understand the impact of project delivery using a variety of tools including process and impact evaluations. Given the complexity and social value of the PTC, the NTCA decided to have a light-touch evaluation, a so called 'learning journey' to understand the difference the PTC made, as well as to accumulate lessons learnt to fuel future decision-making and project design aimed at combating poverty at the Northeast.

Olha Krasovska, NTCA senior evaluation specialist undertook the learning journey with the kind support of Emma Paterson, NTCA Inclusive Economy Policy Development Officer, and Rachel Edwards, NTCA national management trainee, in October 2023 – January 2024.

The learning journey followed traditional evaluation methodology trying to answer as many evaluation questions as possible (please see the list of evaluation questions in the Annex A). It also included a desk review of the project documents, covering poverty-related research, the PTC business case and CNE reports.

The learning Team conducted 7 semi-structured interviews with the NTCA project manager, the CNE manager and facilitators, funding partners and a focus group with commissioners. In total 7 commissioners took part in the evaluation journey, 3 community commissioners and 4 civic/business commissioners. In total, the learning team talked to 14 stakeholders/beneficiaries, 9 female and 5 males.

The current report sums up the results of the learning journey to be discussed further with the NTCA management team and broader audience.

### Drivers to join the PTC

Different commissioners had different reasons for joining the PTC. For civic and business commissioners it was mainly driven by professional interests, as they dealt with different aspects of poverty while performing their working duties:

- 'We have a lot of community engagements, observe challenges in the system of supporting people in poverty, so we considered the PTC as a good opportunity to be engaged';
- 'I expect the PTC helps to overcome some misperceptions of professionals dealing with people with lived experience, community commissioners;
- 'As my job is closely related to different dimensions of poverty, I felt that the PTC could help to strengthen my role and to get a better understanding of those in poverty's needs;



- 'I grew up in extreme poverty experiencing sexual exploitation. I managed to get out of this by being successful in business and launching my own charity. I participated in many poverty-related projects with no results. When the CNE approached me, I saw this as a chance to get tangible results from the PTC'.

Community commissioners decided to join the PTC mainly 'to be heard', to share their living experience, to contribute to the combating of poverty stigma and to improve the policy making process around poverty. Commissioners stressed that the PTC launch event was very emotional and powerful which supported their decision to join the PTC.

One of the co-funding partners mentioned 'it was more than just adding money, we wanted to add value in the sphere our organisation's work'.

#### Achievement of the project results and making a difference

The project has one officially tracked output – number of people who attended events. Events conducted within the PTC include the launch event, final 'Call to Action' event and number of working groups meeting. The number was achieved (62 participants for the launch event and 60 participants for final event); however, this output does not really reflect the project essence as it produced valuable but hardly quantifiable results. The number of unique participants attended the events was slightly less than the target (only Launch event = 27, only call to action = 13)<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding other results envisaged in the project:

- *Participation*: the final number of commissioners worked in WGs was 12 that is less than the target (20 residents and wider stakeholders to engage in the Commission, considering evidence and collaborating on shared recommendations)
- *Equity*: 60 civic/business commissioners were contacted while only 7 participated in the PTC. The target was: 50 wider stakeholders and participants to engage in Commission activities and explore issues in relation to poverty, equality and the effects of COVID.
- *Growth*: the PTC achieved the target of a minimum of 2 NTCA policies, programmes or projects to demonstrate specific changes or revisions as a result of Commission evidence and advice (see: policy impact below).

The learning team identified several main results and impact from PTC activities at different levels.

#### *Individual impact:*

1. ***Personal changes community commissioners experienced.*** The PTC helped CCs who often felt marginalised to increase their self-confidence, self-esteem, wellbeing and their communication skills. CCs who initially were talking over each other competing for talking space, got clarity of thought and improved their ability for succinct articulation of problems and respect for each other. The PTC brought an opportunity for community commissioners to be heard, 'You need to listen to me now, I have a voice', one of the

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<sup>2</sup> Unique Participants means a single individual attending the event whether for a single day or multiple days (launch/final event)

commissioners said during the powerful launch event. Unfortunately, not all community commissioners felt the same way, some of them considered their ideas/suggestions to be neglected at times. However, the Learning team did not manage to find specific examples of such negative attitudes, and thus, triangulate this opinion.

2. **All of the community commissioners have embarked on wider work**, e.g., one was invited to speak at the Hunger conference in North Carolina, one started to work with child poverty groups, another CC was asked to join the board of trustees they were engaged during the PTC.
3. Collaborative working contributed to an **emergence of leaders** within the working groups. Friendly relationships established between community commissioners led to continuous support of each other within and beyond the PTC.
4. Creating ties and better relational understanding between the community and civic/business commissioners through their collaboration in working groups. Initially 'us and them' has been transformed into a partnering supportive relationship. The way commissioners were working together led to a **mutual change in thinking, understanding each other's points of view**. Clear evidence of the structural causes of poverty supplemented civic and business commissioners with a better understanding of how that feels when you are living in it. In their turn community commissioners got a better understanding of the civic/business commissioners' working context. Safe space, and effective, free, honest communication created within PTC contributed to this. The learning team evidenced **potential future cooperation between community and civic/business commissioners**, e.g., with Karbon Homes. Some civic/business commissioners continue to support CCs with signposting their inquiries. Future cooperation is supposed to be supported by personal commitments (pledges) made during the final 'Call to Action' event. However, some interviewees expressed concern that future cooperation can fail without proper facilitation.

#### *Organisational impact:*

1. **Civic and business commissioners brought a better understanding of poverty and learning from the PTC to their organisations** – 'Seeds of change into the wider organisations', 'Oil the wheels of change', 'Snowball effect that is difficult to stop', which contributed to the broader impact across different sectors.
2. Good relations among civic/business commissioners supporting **fulfilment of their daily duties**. E.g., one of the commissioners got access to the paid database from another commissioner to conduct research on the child poverty strategy of the Northeast.

#### *Impact on wider society*

1. **The PTC contributed to breaking down barriers and perception of poverty** for the broader audience as well as a recognition of shared experiences e.g., parenthood. 'We need to remember that we are human beings in the first place', one of the civic/business commissioners said. A lot of interviewees stated that the PTC had a Ripple effect for the wider society.

2. **The PTC contributed to mutual changes of perceptions** and led to recognition of community commissioners and business/civic leaders as equals. ‘You can grow together and produce more changes when you are authentic and equal’, one of the commissioners stressed during the final event.
3. **The PTC increased visibility of poverty** as one of the main challenging issues in the region (internally and externally) and helped people to think differently.

#### *Policy level*

1. The Poverty Truth Commission helped to finetune interventions and emerging priorities related to inclusion for Children and Young People in the NTCA, which was confirmed by responsible project manager.
2. CCs were consulted by the local representatives of the Centre for Social Justice which has concluded in the **production of ‘Two Nations, The State of Poverty in the U.K. an Interim Report’** and this will feed into the wider report at the culmination of their work.
3. The PTC serves as a persistent **reminder to politicians** that this is a fundamental issue for the region which needs investments.
4. The NTCA used PTC experience/elements while **designing interventions on child poverty** across the area. Some of the CCs were involved to the activities of the Poverty Truth Network.
5. Working groups developed the following outputs which could have policy impact:
  - Food/fuel WG: video ‘Pride and dignity in food’;
  - Caring responsibilities: Call to Action letter inviting to sign up for the PTC pledge;
  - Health: PTC Health Inequalities Call to Action letter;

Interviewees mentioned that the process of writing the PTC Health Inequalities letter was challenging because a) it was not clear who should lead the process and where civic/business commissioner should intervene; b) the letter was only a small piece of the bigger picture, and it was not clear how all pieces should come together; c) representatives of the job center were not engaged so it was difficult to ensure proper fact-checking of the letter. A total 5 out of 28 recipients responded positively to the letter, agreeing to the pledge.

The process of the video production was also challenging, so video was adjusted/improved based on the received feedback. The Call-to-Action letter developed by the Caring responsibilities group got only 2 out of 30 responses which raises the question of using the proper communication channels. Thus, the NTCA results are more modest in comparison with results the PTCs in other localities (see Poverty Truth Commissions model).

Thus, despite achieving a number of positive results on all levels, the PTC failed to answer the question all stakeholders/beneficiaries asked: ‘What is next? How can we preserve, and synergise the results achieved? It caused frustration and unrealised hopes ‘We don’t want to have this all only on paper, in the report, we need to have concrete actions’. The PTC raised high expectations with little evidence they would be met.

## Beneficiaries and their satisfaction

The PTC managed to reach its direct beneficiaries - people with lived experience, community commissioners; however, their number was not very high due to the challenges described below. In general, beneficiaries enjoyed their participation in the PTC; however, the absence of clarity about the next steps and ways to utilise achieved results caused a lot of frustration. Civic/business commissioners shared the same feeling.

Co-funding partners are happy with their engagement at the stage of the PTC designing; however, they were not fully satisfied with their engagement during the delivery 'we would like to be considered as partners not only as co-funders, we also don't feel we contributed as successfully as we might'. It looks like the change in attitude happened when the responsibility to engage with partners moved from funding (NTCA) to delivery organisation (CNE), so it should be taken consideration for the future interventions.

At the moment the Learning journey was undertaken, the Commission made a difference mainly for direct beneficiaries. In the case of successful communication of commissioners' stories outside the main circle, it could have a ripple effect, inspiring people to make changes in their lives.

## Factors contributing to achieving results/efficiency of PTC delivery:

The Learning team identified the following factors contributing to achieving results/efficiency of PTC delivery:

1. Effective co-production approach to the project design which allowed to identify relevant topics.
2. Powerful and moving launch event which 'sparked' all commissioners and legitimised the push of energy into poverty as an issue.
3. Efficient work of CNE's facilitators who managed to build strong relationships with CCs, their personal and professional skills: they were patiently listening to understand, fostering collaborative relationships, they recognised group dynamics, understood how different people react to different situations; and did not try to take control. 'The facilitators really stand for us', 'CNE facilitators were absolutely great, they manage to work in narrow lines of money and given design'. They also were very supportive of each other.
4. High commitments from all commissioners. Community commissioners dedicated their personal and family time to participate in the PTC. Business/civic leaders removed their lanyards and dressed in non-office wear to avoid visual perceived status differences, to show they were on the same page.
5. The Call-to-action final event became a celebration of moving forward with community and business/civic commissioners' relationships. Joint storytelling confirmed that these relationships won't end after the Poverty Truth Commission.

The high level of all commissioners' commitment is the main element that really worked well during the PTC. The PTC invested a lot of time and energy to relationships which contributed to the achieved results. By committing time into relationships there was then time to listen,

understand, and emphasise. The PTC brought a real recognition of community commissioners' lived experience.

Factors challenging achieving results/efficiency of PTC delivery:

The Learning team identified the following factors which made it difficult to achieve results:

*Project design/management*

1. Absence of clarity on expected results, and tasks of the delivery partner as well as a vague understanding of the next steps. 'The PTC raised high emotional costs if nothing happens, it will be very frustrating for people'. 'What are the roots to inform policy and decision making, or is PTC is just an opportunity to give a people a voice. If we want to keep these voices, we need to have a better understanding of how we ensure future delivery of messages. We need to think how to engage authorities and give voices to people in poverty'.
2. Limited understanding of the PTC concept within the NTCA when the project has been designed led to insufficient facilitation of the project from the very beginning causing frustration and lack of clarity.
3. The project design was data/evidence oriented with strict time boundaries, e.g. no. of community commissioners recruited and retained while the relational aspect of the PTC was not taken into consideration. Collection of evidence on the PTC impact was challenging. 'The PTC is built on lived experience – to achieve the value of lived experience time is required', 'The PTC is based around people, experience and relationships', 'If you consider us practitioners, we need to be trusted in what we are doing', interviewees said. Different understanding of the PTC's nature by practitioners and funding partners, 'data vs non-quantifiable support', created tension which was partly overcome by the end of the project. However, funding partners still want to be seen as partners rather than just co-financers.
4. Selection of the CNE as the delivery partner was not properly justified. The CNE is an established organisation; however, its strong record around child poverty was not fully suitable to run the PTC which addresses different angles of poverty.
5. Very large geographical area to cover within the combined authority. The target localities are very different with disparate issues people are facing. For example, food and fuel poverty look very different across the Northeast, in rural Northumberland if you aren't on the grid, you can buy oil for heating only in large quantities. There is no opportunity to use any other heating system which has a massive impact on individuals. If a person has spent cash on oil 'doesn't matter if you have a job interview next week – how are you going to get there if you have no money to travel?' Limited representation from Northumberland was mentioned as one of the negative factors.
6. Apart from the first event the interviewees were not sure about the exact role of the NTCA: is it limited to providing funding or the NTCA will have certain ownership, how information gained during the PTC will be used?

### *Recruitment of commissioners*

1. The process of recruitment and retention of the community commissioners itself had a 75% drop out rate. Many of the recruited community commissioners experienced so much difficulty that they didn't feel they could participate in the commission. 'There wasn't the net to catch people' which led to 'lost voices whose insights could be crucial'. Poverty Truth Network who supported the PTC reported that retention of community commissioners is a general issue; however, the dropout rate from this PTC stayed too high.
2. Relatively low number of involved civic/business commissioners due to the passive way to engage with them mainly via sending emails. It resulted in not equally sufficient involvement of the commissioners in different WGs. For example, NHS or any Direct Health related services did not send its representatives to the 'Health and equality' working group which caused frustration of commissioners and limited value added of the achieved results.
3. Limited time commissioners could dedicate to PTC because of the workload, personal/family constraints, in particular CCs found the PTC challenging and time-consuming. In addition, there were some technical difficulties affecting CC's participation, e.g., the majority of meetings were held in Newcastle which was challenging to reach by some commissioners even when the costs of public transport were reimbursed. Online engagement was not always possible even if the PTC would provide data and tablets – digital poverty and exclusion still caused concerns e.g., some difficulties with tech and not being able to engage due to sensory issues.
4. Some of the interviewees mentioned, that at the end the PTC managed to recruit enthusiastic and motivated CCs; however, some of them were involved in a lot of things, and it was not obvious that there were the right people, as we needed to hear from people who was never heard before.

### *Engagement with different groups:*

1. Inequal attitude at the very beginning as civic commissioners were too active proposing their own way, and tried to take too much control which frustrated community commissioners who did not feel power to oppose the experience and skills of civic commissioners. This factor was successfully eliminated after the PTC progressed further.
2. Interviewed commissioners have found the involvement of academics too challenging as 'they are too far from the real situation'. In particular, it was difficult to achieve the compromise during the development of the action letter ('Health and equality group').
3. Personal time of CCs and civil/business commissioners was treated differently: civil/business commissioners participated in the PTC during their working hours being paid their normal salary while CCs dedicated their personal/family time. Because the majority of CCs get Universal Credit, it was not possible to pay them cash. Other methods, e.g., supermarket, food or high-street vouchers were explored and considered on numerous occasions but was not considered to be true to the 'PTC' model according

to the PTN. Some of the CCS felt that they dedicated their time and did not get full satisfaction from the process, their high expectations were not met. The fact the PTC did not communicate expected results from the very beginning and did not explain limitations, caused a lot of frustration.

#### *PTC delivery*

1. Continuity of staff: many changes in staffing in CNE and to a lesser extent within NTCA, affected the process of commissioners' recruitment and the PTC delivery. The change of facilitators and necessity to rebuild relationships could be difficult for community commissioners especially given how fundamental this relationship is.
2. 'The health and equality' working group had too broad a focus which made finding specific solutions more challenging.
3. It was not easy to ensure additional emotional support and pastoral care for community commissioners. Facilitators were struggling to watch 'people's lives fall apart' which affected their moral conditions.
4. Lack of proper understanding of the distribution of responsibilities by CCs. A lot of questions raised during the PTC belong to national government's responsibility and could not be solved at the local level (e.g., universal credit). 'We do a lot of work around poverty at the local level; however, the main policy makers are at the national level'. This distribution of responsibilities should be better articulated in the future.

What could be done differently in the project?

#### *Project design/management*

1. Involvement of the NTCA staff with relevant experience in the process of project design.
2. Clearly defined results/expectations from the PTC at the initial stage.
3. Clear requirements for the delivery partner taking into consideration skills and experience needed for the successful delivery.
4. Focus on quality rather than on numbers and geographical ambitions.
5. Facilitators had other roles within the organisations. It was felt working solely on the poverty truth commissions would have been clearer for staff and more consistent for community commissioners. Valuable for facilitators to have experience in community work. PTC principles could include something about working relationally, taking the time needed and also reimbursing for time spent.

#### *Recruitment of commissioners*

1. More actively approach civic/business commissioners when sending invitations, especially to people who never came, as this was not enough. It would be good to have a clearer understanding of potential civic/business commissioners to be involved.
2. Could learn more from PTCs in other areas to understand their experience and avoid mistakes in recruiting.

### *Engagement with different groups:*

1. It would be good to ask community commissioners who they would like to have in the room to work together.
2. Introducing a deputization system for business commissioners which will offer business leaders flexibility when they can't attend a meeting. This should be introduced with caution to avoid disruption of the balance of the relational aspect of the working group. Flexibility could have been offered to community commissioners as well. Could the length of time for sign-up be amended e.g., any commissioner could sign up for 2 years or 6 months etc.
3. More actively engage with young people and other groups, as there was not much diversity at all within the community commissioners.
4. Broader engagement with different organisations like the NHS. The majority of involved civic commissioners were already dealing with poverty issues, it would be good to engage with organisations who did not deal with poverty on day-to-day issues (e.g., transport).

### *PTC delivery*

1. 'We need to change the attitude where we accept that academics, people in power = are experts. People with lived experience should be considered as equal experts' and therefore also paid.
2. Having better internet access and access to technologies (printers, laptops, multimedia etc.) in the meeting venues to facilitate/ease the discussion and presentations.

### *Sustainability and possible contribution to the design of next interventions*

Despite all the positive results and impact that the PTC made, its sustainability is not obvious. Some interviewees are concerned that the PTC won't go beyond the final event without future facilitation. On the other hand, some of the interviewees think that 'even if the PTC isn't be extended, already a proper base has been established to let it run independently'. Indeed, the learning team can evidence the establishment of some connections between community and civic/business commissioners which could be maintained after the official completion of the project:

- Civic/business commissioner L. plans to have regular 'coffee meet up' with community commissioners to understand how they can support them.
- Another civic/business commissioner C. mentioned they would integrate gained experience into the decision-making process within their organisation.

A family picnic organised outside the official part of PTC at Ridley Park in Blyth, Northumberland fuelled friendly relationships between commissioners who highly appreciated that.

Another way to ensure the sustainability of PTC results is a broad dissemination of commissioners' personal stories to inspire the broader audience.



Interviewed beneficiaries were also concerned about the possible low policy impact of the PTC as they were not aware about the project's follow-up steps to deliver messages and results to policymakers. PTN have been assisting NTCA with this and Comms at NTCA and CNE will continue work once the report is finalised, however there is no further capacity available for us (NTCA) to drive this.

The learning team confirms that the achieved results are a valuable source for the design of future interventions related to different poverty issues. The NTCA should carefully take into the consideration the PTC lessons learnt and 'what could be done differently' element when designing future interventions. The most important conclusion is that people with lived experience should be involved not only in the identification of the challenges and problems but also for the development of joint solutions with proper reflection in respected policy documents. Future interventions should ensure the delivery of messages to the relevant (local/national) level of decision-making. A learning event put on for all staff at NTCA, to inform policy development in different policy areas could positively contribute to the sustainability.

#### Value for money

The undertaken Learning journey did not aim to assess the PTC value for money as it requires more time and usage of advanced evaluation techniques. As it was already mentioned, the number of engaged people barely reflects the PTC nature and could deviate the results as this number is not high compared to the project budget. As described above, the majority of achieved results are non-qualifiable, NTCA currently uses Social Value Engine to assess this type of social project, however, it's appeared to be difficult to calculate a meaningful social value on PTC mostly due to the low number of participants (relative to the investment) and the lack of clear programme objectives.

#### Benefits experienced by those with protected characteristics

The learning team did not find enough evidence to demonstrate specific benefits by those with protected characteristics from the PTC. The interviewees confirmed that it was challenging to recruit CCs in a way to cover different types of families.

All three local authorities are quite different in terms of equality profile. The PTC managed to engage with women, people with disabilities and special educational needs. However, it failed to engage with people such as refugees and asylum seekers or young people/young parents (Mid 30's upwards age group), people of colour, LGBT+. According to the interviewee 'Refugees and asylum seekers felt themselves already 'labelled' and they didn't want to get 'poverty label' in addition'. The PTC did not reflect cultural diversity which is a nationwide issue.

One of the interviewees said that 'the way of understanding inclusivity needs improvement. The principle 'we invited everyone if they did not come that was their decision' could not be recognised as inclusivity, for example, Churches Together, who meant to assist with recruiting community commissioners, did not work hard to invite Muslim or other religious communities'.

The delivery partner carefully considered the place for conducting meetings/events, e.g., accessible buildings for participants/nearby parking, or flexibility in format for people who are neurodivergent. However, as the PTC covered a big geographical area it was difficult to pick up a place convenient to all participants, so there were places especially in Northumberland people sometimes did not even afford to come as they were too far away, CCs couldn't leave children in school or could not afford two buses while were rejected to be paid for taxi.

#### Promotion of equality of opportunity and fostering good relations

The PTC facilitators invested a lot of efforts to ensure all commissioners are treated equally. It was challenging because from the very beginning civic/business commissioners were considered more experts than CCs. The situation changed with the PTC evolving, staff put significant time and efforts into developing and fostering good relations, encouraged communication between commissioners (one to one drinks/meets with community commissioners as new facilitators enter the commission). Interviewees expressed the strong belief that some relationships would endure. They also believed that the poverty truth commission encouraged a changed mindset which would lead to increased collaborations.

#### Lessons, learning and/or reflection for the future

##### *Large scale is not always helpful*

Broad geographical coverage made the PTC difficult to manage. However, having a broader CCs group could have a bigger legacy.

##### *Next steps are important*

The absence of clarity on the next steps caused a lot of frustration. The Call-to-Action event reached its main purpose of sharing learning; however, it's not fully clear how obtained results/joint stories could be shared with the broader public. The most valuable result of the PTC would be 'if people making decisions 'really listen' to those who have lived experience and incorporate that knowledge into policy'. The PTC needs to retain links with commissioners to understand how to use gained experience in the future. The policy impact should be strengthened as at the moment the achieved results (Call to Action letters, video) does not look properly articulated as the feedback from policymakers looks underachieved.



##### *Don't forget to measure*

Measuring of social projects' impact is always challenging. Most likely you won't be able to calculate the value of mindset changes or changes in poverty perception easily. However, a properly selected evaluation method at the project design stage can make everyone's life easier.

Individual and especially joint case stories of community and business/civic commissioners could be a valuable way to demonstrate impact. 'Outcome stars' taken at the start and at the

end of the poverty truth commission process or ‘outcome harvesting’ could be the way to understand an individual's development as they see it.

#### *Balance between trust and scrutiny*

Delivery partners should have flexibility in the ways they implement the project; however, it is important to ensure they deliver what was agreed – see ‘Don’t forget to measure’.

#### *Inclusivity is important*

It’s important to engage with people representing different groups to promote equality. There was a feeling that young people’s voices are often omitted from poverty truth commissions as they are difficult to access in addition to issues of stigma and bias affecting how commissions may see young people in poverty. Additional work needs to be done to involve people of colour, LGBT+, young people, people of different beliefs, refugees and asylum seekers etc. ‘Inclusivity is more than having someone in the room, sending invitations is not always enough’. It could be done using a model of regional representation demonstrated above regarding recruiting CCS, for example, if there is a high number of disabled residents in the Northeast, an equal proportion of commissioners should probably have been people living with disabilities, in order to represent the local demographic. Such engagement requires flexibility of used models and specially trained staff.

#### *Don’t try to solve all problems at once*

The PTC brought a recognition that barriers and challenges can be similar across poverty truth commissions nationwide. The PTC has to have a clear understanding of how to deliver respective challenges at the national level.

### *Learning for the design of future policy and interventions*

1. **Better understanding:** Development of future interventions should be based on a deep context and comparative analysis of available models, and lessons learnt from this and similar interventions, in particular, the NTCA Child Poverty Prevention Programme.
2. **Flexibility:** Traditionally people participating in poverty truth commissions are retired/have flexible working patterns; however, we need a broader range of voices and flexibility in terms of degrees of engagement. Running a full-scale PTC requires more money and more staff as it is labour-intensive.
3. **Engagement:** Involve people with lived experience in the designing of the future interventions; however, we need to avoid ‘making engagement their job’ and ensure getting new faces on board.
4. **Don’t be too ambitious:** Working within three local authorities was too far challenging. Geography within Northumberland can vary dramatically as well as when compared to North Tyneside and Newcastle. Poverty is different in each of the areas. The PTC model works better at the local rather than combined authority level.

5. **Understand results before the start:** Traditional outputs like number of people attending events are not suitable for the projects like PTC, and additional ways to measure potential impact should be considered. Expected results should be clearly formulated and articulated from the very beginning. It's also important clearly articulate expectations from co-funders, in case of their involvement.
6. **Deliver messages:** the project has to have clear understanding of the communication channels to deliver messages from the project to the policymakers.
7. **Inclusivity be design:** Consider ways to engage with different groups of beneficiaries from the very beginning, e.g., focus Poverty Truth Commission on the voice of young people from 11 to 25 y.o., consider involvement of refugees/asylum seekers, LGBT+ community.
8. **Longer time frame:** Interventions resulting in changes in perceptions and attitudes usually require longer time scale.
9. **Better internal coordination:** NTCA implements a lot of inter-related interventions and internal coordination could be of mutual benefits. E.g. the PTC could benefit from closer cooperation with the Inclusive Economy Board, North Of Tyne Growth Fund Panel. The North of Tyne Committees and Cabinet members could have also played more of a role in supporting this work. Such synergies should be considered for the future interventions.

Considering these points will be important in ensuring the success of next PTC and similar initiatives.

## Annex A. Evaluation questions:

| Evaluation questions                                                                                                                                                                                  | Desk study | Commissioners | CNE <sup>3</sup> facilitators | CNE managers | NTCA project manager | Partners: Poverty Truth Network | Funding partners |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Did the Project achieve its objectives? What are the most valuable results of the Project?                                                                                                         | ✓          | ✓             | ✓                             | ✓            | ✓                    | ✓                               | ✓                |
| 2. What contributed to/hampered achieving those results (external/internal factors).                                                                                                                  |            | ✓             | ✓                             | ✓            | ✓                    | ✓                               | ✓                |
| 3. Who benefitted, in what ways and in what circumstances? Were the intended participants and beneficiaries reached?                                                                                  | ✓          | ✓             | ✓                             | ✓            | ✓                    | ✓                               |                  |
| 4. How satisfied were the beneficiaries with the Project?                                                                                                                                             | ✓          | ✓             | ✓                             | ✓            |                      | ✓                               |                  |
| 5. In what ways did the Commission contribute to improved wellbeing and quality of life of participants? Examples of any changes that happened in people's lives due to the Project.                  |            | ✓             | ✓                             |              |                      | ✓                               |                  |
| 6. To what extent did the Commission make a difference for the community outside the main circle (beneficiaries)?                                                                                     |            | ✓             | ✓                             |              |                      | ✓                               |                  |
| 7. Which elements of delivery worked well? What could be done differently in the project (management, engagement, delivery of activities)?                                                            |            | ✓             | ✓                             | ✓            | ✓                    | ✓                               | ✓                |
| 8. How long will any effects last after the Project has ended?                                                                                                                                        |            | ✓             | ✓                             | ✓            | ✓                    | ✓                               | ✓                |
| 9. To what extent this Commission has, and will in the future, helped to design services and responses based on the lived experience of our residents, especially those whose voices are least heard. |            | ✓             | ✓                             | ✓            | ✓                    | ✓                               | ✓                |
| 10. Has the intervention provided good value for money (e.g., compared to alternatives)?                                                                                                              |            |               |                               |              | ✓                    |                                 | ✓                |
| 11. What lessons, learning and/or reflection can be learnt for the future?                                                                                                                            | ✓          | ✓             | ✓                             | ✓            | ✓                    | ✓                               | ✓                |

<sup>3</sup> CNE - Children North East

|                                                                                                                                           |  |   |   |   |   |   |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 12.What benefits were experienced by those with protected characteristics?                                                                |  | V | V | V | V | V |  |
| 13.To what extent has the Commission promoted equality of opportunity and fostered good relations?                                        |  | V | V | V | V | V |  |
| 14.What learning can we take from this Commission to help effectively embed inclusion into the design of future policy and interventions? |  | V | V | V | V | V |  |