

Looking at the Cost-of-Living Crisis: Working together to reduce poverty and hardship in Wandsworth.

2022 Conference



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Background

Citizens Advice Wandsworth (CAW) and Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network (WCEN) work in partnership to deliver the Hardship Crisis project. The project, which is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, aims to provide improved support to people in Wandsworth who face hardship and crisis.

As well as providing direct social welfare advice, the project also trains volunteers and staff from community and voluntary sector partners to provide 'Advice First Aid' (AFA) and connects people experiencing hardship with the support they need to improve their circumstances. AFA training supports people to identify advice issues, provide timely information and signposting, and accurate referrals for additional advice and casework support. This approach aims to prevent problems developing into issues of hardship and crisis.

Through our partnership we continue to build a network which includes a diverse range of community, faith and statutory groups and services. We bring together members of these networks at our regular events, and at our annual conference.

The annual conference is an important opportunity for organisations to reflect and network with community providers. It offers a safe space to talk about the issues affecting local people and to explore solutions to these problems. It also acts as an accountability forum, which enables us and our stakeholders, to measure achievements and to speak directly to policy makers and service providers.

Our 2022 Conference

Our 2022 conference focused on the current cost-of-living crisis and included looking ahead to face expectations about the situation worsening further in Autumn and Winter. The lifting of social distancing restrictions gave us the first opportunity in three years to come together in-person as a network to share knowledge, learning and develop ideas with a range of community organisations, local groups and agencies.

The event itself was attended by 80-90 people as outlined in Appendix A. All sectors were well represented with attendees from health settings, the Council and the voluntary, community and faith sectors

The aim of the conference was to increase the understanding of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on communities across Wandsworth, a crisis which has been layered on top of years of austerity and the impact of the pandemic. It also sought to answer how

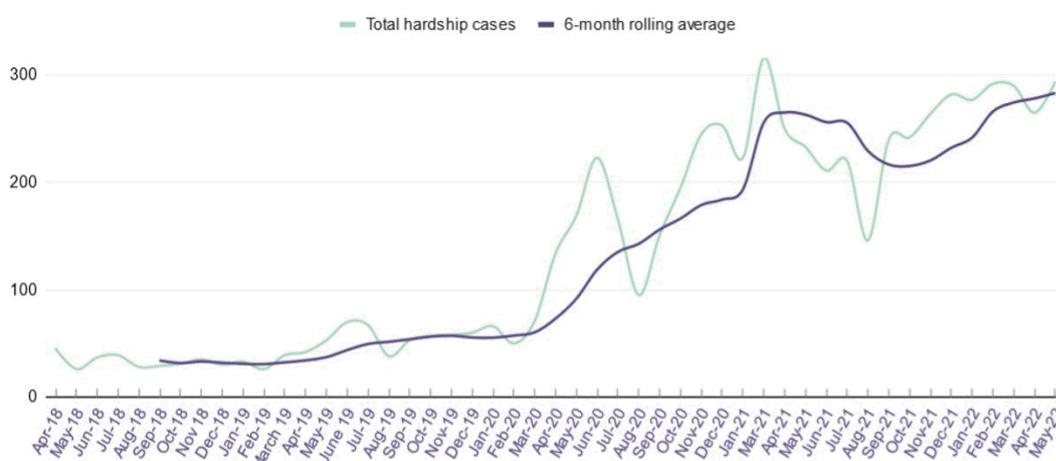
organisations can work differently, individually and as a network, to provide better support to residents across the borough experiencing hardship.

The issues were framed by presentations from Dame Clare Moriarty (Chief Executive, Citizens Advice) who gave an overview of the national picture. Mary-Ann Foxwell (Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Wandsworth) spoke about the hardship experienced by CAW's clients. Contributions also came from Giles Read, Director of [Thinking Works](#) (a not-for-profit organisation that delivers the Council's winter warmth provision) who talked about the extraordinary rise in demand for fuel vouchers even during the summer months, and Dan Frith [Wandsworth Foodbank](#) manager who talked about the experience of people who need to use local foodbanks.

People from a wide range of voluntary and faith groups described the needs of their communities. Table discussions were led by facilitators who ensured that contributions of all participants were noted, these are included in this report verbatim.

Setting the Scene

Cases of hardship – as seen at Citizens Advice Wandsworth



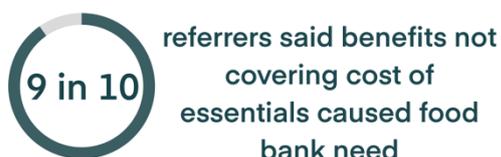
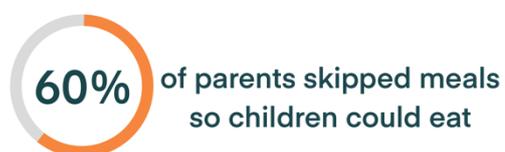
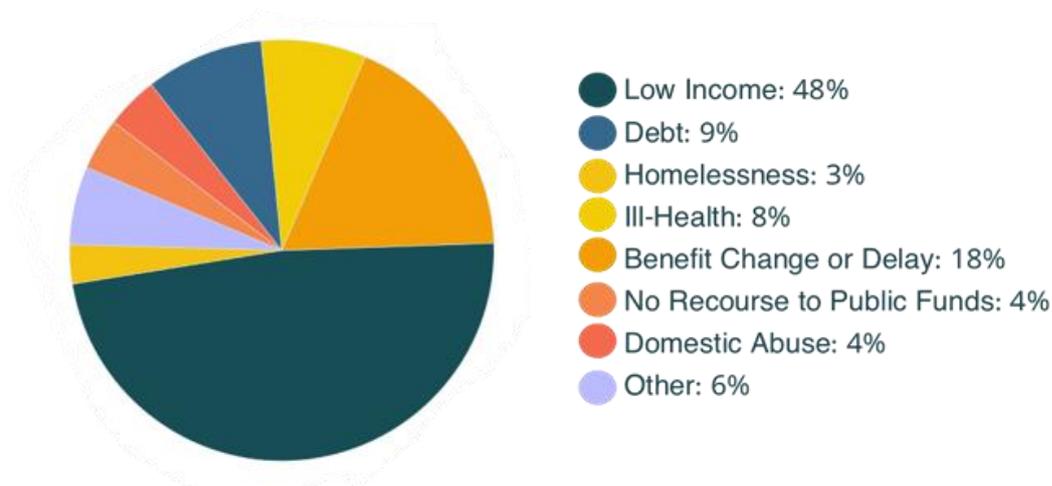
We anticipated the numbers of people coming to us in need of emergency help to diminish as the economic impact of the pandemic receded, instead they have continued to rise with increases in energy costs hitting households already impacted by years of austerity and in the impact of the pandemic.

Residents needing help with energy – Thinking Works

- Since April 2022 - 317 households unable to afford their fuel have been supported
- In 2019 – 15 households requested help during the same period

Residents needing food – as seen at Wandsworth Foodbank

April 2021- March 2022: Reasons for foodbank referrals



“ *Everything's just too expensive now. I make a coffee and try to keep myself busy so I don't think about being hungry. Or I sit under the covers, leaving the heating off and stay in one room. I've switched everything off apart from the fridge. I'm always crying.* ”

What is the impact of this poverty? What are you seeing in your services and communities?

Through facilitating an open and honest discussion, we learnt that the impact of the cost-of-living crisis is immediate and far reaching. Individuals in the community are routinely forced to choose between basic needs, including food provisions, household bills and medical costs.

“ *I am in rent arrears, have credit card debts, I am unable to work due to health reasons and my living conditions are extremely poor. I need some help and advice to help get out of this situation. I never have enough money to cover basic costs like food and clothing.* ”

Participants described the increase in the number and variety of mental health issues they were seeing in the borough.

We've themed the responses given by participants:

Economic impact

- Choices being made: food, bills, basic needs, medicine costs - there is an immediate need
- The welfare system can provide more funds than working but the benefit cap results in limited income.
- There are more barriers to financial support, including a lack of funds within community organisations
- Fraudulent transactions affecting older persons
- Seeing an increase in the need to work which results in the individual not being able to support family members in need of care.

Community

- Providing online access only means that some individuals are unable to navigate the support available – need better signposting
- Police relationship with the community needs to improve
- There can be a lack of accountability from Council and long delays to accessing support. This often results in an increase in demand
- Unpaid carers can access hardship/lifelines, but this support is becoming more limited.

Housing

- High rental prices so more individuals in the community are in rent arrears
- Poor standard of accommodation resulting in health issues (e.g., lack of insulation/heating for older people)
- Increase in the use of temporary accommodation
- Voluntary organisations are also suffering from the rise in gas prices
- There is an increase in the number of private landlords contributing to higher eviction rates
- Individuals becoming homeless, but there is not an adequate response in the borough.

Mental Health

- Money worries and the possibility of not paying bills resulting in an increase in feelings of anxiety, depression. More complex and more people affected
- Boredom resulting in an increase in drug abuse

- Mental health support requires a diagnosis but there are long waiting lists. Some individuals do not meet the threshold, so no support offered
- Isolation and loneliness affecting both the old and young
- Institutional racism
- Family: more reports of domestic violence, an increase in a reliance on parents, children experiencing developmental delays, parental anxiety for children

How can we help?

“*I need your help. I’m a single mum to a 6-year-old. After paying my rent and other bills, I never have enough left over. I then have to use my credit card (which charges interest) for food shopping, which is putting me in further debt.*”

Following the annual conference, we have pulled together various ways in which we can all provide additional support to our clients in the borough. These ideas have come from you and reflect the collaborative approach we must continue to adopt if we are to make a positive contribution to individuals affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

Communication

- Elderly or vulnerable members of the community may be at risk of digital exclusion, and steps should be taken to ensure they have access to information, such as by distributing newsletters.
- Better sharing of resources and signposting between organisations makes it easier for people to find the information they need.
- By having better access to information, communities can be empowered and less reliant on aid.
- Public awareness of the crisis can be increased through advertisements such as on billboards and buses.
- Effort should be made to encourage people to come forward and ask for help, not just to provide help when it is asked for.
- Contact with the council should be streamlined through escalation routes.

Collaboration

- Greater collaboration and partnership is necessary to provide a more holistic approach to aid.
- Many of the issues facing the community are intertwined, such as the mental health issues faced by those dealing with other issues. A more comprehensive view takes into account the many symptoms and causes of an issue.

- Community hubs would make it easier for people to access all the services they need in one place and provide a focal point for the many organisations working towards the same goals.
- They would also supply a more human-centred and less digitally alienating approach to help.

Housing

- Elderly or vulnerable members of the community may be at risk of digital exclusion, and steps should be taken to ensure they have access to information, such as by distributing newsletters.
- Better sharing of resources and signposting between organisations makes it easier for people to find the information they need.
- By having better access to information, communities can be empowered and less reliant on aid.
- Public awareness of the crisis can be increased through advertisements such as on billboards and buses.
- Effort should be made to encourage people to come forward and ask for help, not just to provide help when it is asked for.
- Through events and education, more awareness should be raised about the help that is available.
- Contact with the council should be streamlined through escalation routes.
- There should be greater accountability from landlords to combat the bad living conditions that arise from Mould, delayed repairs and bad quality housing.
- There should also be greater accountability from landlords that exploit their tenants through high rent.
- More social and affordable housing should be available, especially to reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation.

Conclusion

“ *The current crisis is really just starting. Winter is potentially going to far worsen what we are currently experiencing. We need to work together ... to do the very best we can for Wandsworth residents.* ”

The conference highlighted the rising cost-of-living and the impossible situations that many community members find themselves in as a result.

Collaboration is key to moving forward. The many issues affecting the community feed into and from each other, and this connectivity must be reflected among organizations tackling them.



Appendix 1: Attendee list [list of people who registered to attend]

| First Name | Surname | Job Title | Company |
|------------|-----------|---|---------------------------------|
| Pat | Gabriel | Administrator | Wandsworth Foodbank |
| James | Sandbach | Development Manager | London Citizens Advice |
| Elizabeth | Oddono | Director | Oddono's |
| Kirt | Hunte | Clinical Service Lead | SWLSTG |
| Carmel | Gallagher | Tenancy Sustainment Support Officer | Wandsworth Council |
| Diane | Kleut | Rough Sleeper Tenancy Sustainment Support Officer | Richmond and Wandsworth Council |
| Debbie | Eldridge | Senior Family Support Worker | WellCare |
| Adam | Smith | Tenancy Sustainment Support Officer | Richmond and Wandsworth Council |
| Sophia | Moreau | Head of Advocacy and Communications | Little Village |
| Lynn | Hemming | Tenancy Sustainment Support Worker | Wandsworth Borough Council |
| Natalie | de Silva | CEO | Age UK Wandsworth |
| Michael | Nayagam | TB Case Worker | St George's Hospital |
| Tony | Tuck | Chair | Wandsworth Older People's Forum |
| Su | Elliott | Administrator | Wandsworth Older People's Forum |
| Aaron | Barbour | CEO | Katherine Low Settlement |
| Lea | Siba | Senior Commissioning Manager | Wandsworth Council |

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|------------|----------|--|----------------------------------|
| Sarah | Young | Specialist Health Visitor for Homeless families | CLCHT (NHS) |
| Sol | Amel | Manager | GTA |
| Jenny | Reid | Service Manager | Wandsworth Mediation Service |
| Peter | Forde | Technical Support Manager | Richmond & Wandsworth SSA |
| Carneb | Cameron | Secretary/Assistant Treasurer | New Testament Church of God |
| Sahar | Beg | Director | MindworksUK |
| Mark | Creelman | Locality Executive Director, Merton & Wandsworth | NHS SWL CCG |
| Dan | Frith | Foodbank Manager | Wandsworth Foodbank |
| Glenroy | Browne | President Lay Council London AME Zion Church | AME Zion Church Battersea |
| Sarah | Chapman | Advocacy and Communications Manager | Wandsworth Foodbank |
| Clapperton | Carol | Head of Community and Partnerships | Wandsworth Council |
| Jacob | Adams | Programmes Manager | WCEN |
| Aaron | Barbour | CEO | Katherine Low Settlement |
| Becca | Walker | Snr Commissioning Manager | Richmond and Wandsworth DASS |
| Diane | Sechi | lawyer | South West London Law Centre |
| Dustine | Davis | IAG Advisor | Wandsworth Lifelong Learning |
| Dominique | Clem | Veterans & Mental Health Support Worker | CDARS |
| Graeme | Markwell | Senior Public Health Lead | Richmond and Wandsworth Councils |
| Sue | McKinney | Ruth's mum | Wandsworth |

| | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Juliana | Annan | Councillor | Battersea Park Ward |
| Maria | Charles | Family Support | WCEN |
| P | Harris | Chaplain | Volunteer |
| Antonia | Buamah | Community Mental Health Worker | Ethnicity and Mental Health Improvement Project |
| Savitrie | Baichoo | Coordinator / Health Advisor | PHP Network |
| Jonathan | Mogford | Vice Chair | Wandsworth Citizens Advice |
| Ranti | Lawumi | psychologist | NHS |
| Venessa | Bobb | founder | a2ndvoice |
| Venessa | Bobb | founder | a2ndvoice |
| Abdirahman | Xirsi | Director | Elays Network |
| Kenya Sue | Smart | New members contact | Ileto Caribbean People's Network (iletoCPN) |
| Yasmin | Ali | Community support | Muzammil Masjid |
| Jennifer | Stapleton | Early help Manager | WBC |
| Melissa | Watson | Voluntary Sector Partnership Manager | LBRUT |
| Gena | Grant | Health Coach | Ransom AME Zion Church |
| Alpa | Thakore | DDSL ELSA LM | Swaffield Primary School |
| Kirt | Hunte | Clinical Service Lead | SWLSTG |
| June | Pilgrim-Ndure | Project Manager | Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network |
| Shelley | Esposito | Volunteer, Signposting & Guidance | Little Village |
| Nick | Atkins | Head of Health and Wellbeing | Enable |
| NASEEM | ABOOBAKER | PROJECT DIRECTOR | MUSHKIL AASAAN CHARITY |
| Pamela | Carnegie | Co-ordinator / project developer | YCF community church |

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|------------|-----------|---|---|
| Nelly | Misenga | Development Officer | Together Southwark/Dioce se of Southwark |
| Sara | Linton | Councillor | Wandsworth Council |
| Cllr | Kemi | Councillor | Wandsworth |
| Sarah | Davies | Councillor | Wandsworth Town |
| Elizabeth | Guyatt | Senior Wellbeing Coordinator | Family Action |
| Paul | Boddy | Disability Benefits Adviser | Citizens Advice Wandsworth |
| Sam | Paterson | Student | University of London |
| Olga | Carnegie | | Balham & Tooting Community & Sports Club |
| Carmen | Cameron | Church Secretary/Assistant Treasurer | NTCG TOOTING |
| Sarah | Rackham | Community worker | Battersea Befriending Network |
| Lystra | Charles | Operations Director | The HOPE Atrium |
| Allerdiena | Hubbeling | WHTT | SWLSTG/SGUL |
| Marie | Edwards | Community Mental health Worker | EMHIP |
| Sahar | Beg | Director / CEO | MindworksUK |
| Anissa | Daud | Programme Coordinator | WCEN |
| colin | king | Lived Experienced | WCEN |
| Jacob | Adams | Programmes Manager | WCEN |
| Michelle | Rose | Service Manager | Citizens Advice Wandsworth |
| Habib | Mansour | Retired | Retired |
| Iman | Roble | Health Coordinator | WCEN |
| Helen | Redd | Communications and Community Engagement Officer | Southwest London and St. George's Mental Health NHS Trust |

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|-----------|-------------|---|---|
| Charlotte | White | Manager - Earlsfield Foodbank | Earlsfield Foodbank |
| Michael | Areola | FM | Charity |
| Charity | Bawuah | Debt Caseworker | Springfield Advice and Law Centre |
| M | Husbands | NTA | NTA |
| Jacqueie | Reid-Rodney | Homeless CNN | Central London Community Healthcare |
| Millie | Reid | Independent | Independent |
| Amanda | Lewis | CAB Client | CAB Wandsworth |
| Julie | Bristow | VSCS manager | WCA |
| Lucia | Palma | Service manager | Citizens Advice Wandsworth |
| Kemi | Adebiyi | Advocate/Panel Member | WCEN |
| Giles | Read | Director | Thinking Works |
| Polly | Rawlings | Healthy Communities / Engagement Project Officer | Wandsworth Care Alliance |
| Tina | Molyneux | Grants Project Support Officer | Council |
| Aydin | Dikerdem | Cllr | Wandsworth Council |
| Anabel | Claro | community involvement | Soundminds, NHS, Samaritans Brunel University |
| Stephanie | Ferguson | Visitor | Balham SDA Church |
| Esther | Persuade | | |
| Claire | Moriarty | | Citizens Advice |
| Robert | Bertram | | Wandsworth HTT |
| Norma | Gayle | | |
| Abu | Sankoh | | EMHIP/ E Wandsworth CMHT |
| Hanan | El-Mahdi | | Elays Network |
| Lilias | Gillies | | Wandsworth Older people's forum |
| Nicola | Anciano | | Wandsworth HTT |
| Agatha | Anyiwo | | WOPF |
| Amal | Ali | | Community |
| Abdi | Ali | | Community |

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|----------|----------|--|----------------|
| Robert | Bryce | | CAW |
| Jamal | Naser | | Muskil Aasaan |
| Javed | Iqbal | | Muskil Aasaan |
| Mary-Ann | Foxwell | | CAW |
| Malik | Gul | | WCEN |
| Sheree | Pinheiro | | WCEN |
| Ruth | McKinney | | WCEN |
| Dave | Worth | | WBC |
| Nikki | Rossner | | Racquets Cubed |