

Authorship and dissemination

This slide deck is an outline of the learning from Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission. It is one of three inter-related slide decks:

- Learning from Ilfracombe PTC 2024-2025
- Ilfracombe PTC Products and Impact 2024-2025
- Ilfracombe PTC Developing a Theory of Change 2024-2025

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We'd be interested in hearing any context of how they are being used or any feedback. Do contact us if you'd like to let us know, or would like to discuss the learning.

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How have we seen change happen during the Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission?

Developing a 'theory of change'

Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission 2024-25

poverty truth Ilfracombe



Overview

A **theory of change** is a way to describe how we think change happens. If we understand how change happens, we can use this learning when setting up or running Poverty Truth Commissions (PTC), or other initiatives or interventions that aim to mitigate the impact of poverty. We can also **hold on to these central ideas** when we are planning follow-on work from the PTC.

It also means we can **test the claims** made in a theory of change whenever a new PTC happens. In this way we make the theory more informed and refined, and help build our knowledge about **what works and when; and when, or why, it might not.**



Developing a theory of change

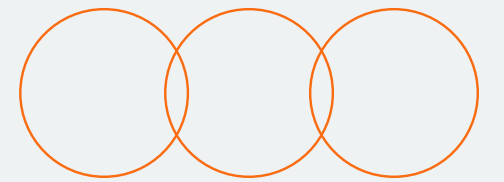
Our theory of change has been developed from the start of the Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission, starting with some ideas and hunches based on the learning from other Poverty Truth Commissions, from other groups and organisations, and from early observations of Commission sessions.

Regular reflection sessions with Commissioners and Facilitators during the PTC, one-to-one interviews and observation have informed and refined the theory of change. We've also discussed the ideas with other researchers, with partners and agencies working in this field, and with the Poverty Truth Network.

The theory of change starts with the **approach**, and **inputs and activities**, includes **mechanisms** of change (the key things that make change happen); **outcomes** (a set of **conditions for change** which need to be in place by the end of the PTC to enable future change); **enablers** that can help change happen, and **challenges** that can inhibit change.



PTC Approach



'Nothing about us, without us, is for us,'

Begins with lived experience

Centring the lived experience of people with experience of poverty in our work shapes the agenda.

Builds relationships

Developing relationships between people with lived experience and decision makers helps to create a new kind of understanding. Trust is built through deep listening.

Humanises people and systems

Meeting each other as humans helps to build trust and understand the challenges in creating lasting change.

Poverty Truth Network

<https://povertytruthnetwork.org/the-network/the-distinctives-of-our-work/>



Inputs (what resources did we need?)

People

- People with lived experience of poverty (Community Commissioners)
- Civic leaders who can make an impact (Civic Commissioners)
- Commission 'guests' who have specialist experience or responsibilities
- Facilitation team with a range of project management, planning, communication, creative, facilitation, support and group work skills
- Steering group to guide the early process
- Mentors, a counsellor and creative thinkers who support the process behind the scenes



Inputs (what resources did we need?)

Resources

- A comfortable venue to meet in
- Hot and cold drinks and shared lunch for everyone
- Budget for essential resources (printing, pens, badges, paper etc)
- Budget for facilitation, room hire and training
- Budget for reflection and evaluation
- Disposable cameras and print costs for Photovoice project
- Resources and materials for artworks



Inputs (what resources did we need?)

Time...

was needed to attend and take part regularly in gatherings. Both **formal time** (working together in a structured way) and **informal time** (breaks, chatting, sharing food) is important. Informal conversations 'on the periphery' were ways that people could share something of themselves more privately, building relationships and developing insight.

As well as attending gatherings, **facilitators** needed time:

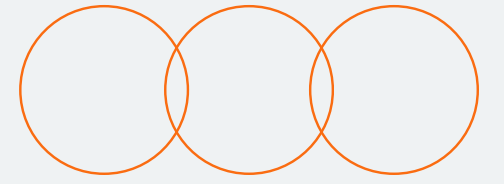
- To plan gatherings, including preparing materials
- To support Commissioners between gatherings (plan and send agendas, support action from the Commission, pastoral and safeguarding support)
- To find, meet and brief Commission guests

Facilitators and Commissioners needed time to:

- Action the work of the Commission outside of gatherings



Activities



Preparatory Phase and Launch

14 gatherings over five months (April - Sept 2024)

Thirteen people with lived experience ('Community Commissioners') were recruited and came together to tell their stories and build relationships. This part of the Commission helped to develop an expanded view of poverty, built confidence and collective voice. Community Commissioners worked with facilitators to plan the Launch event and with the researcher to plan evaluation methods.

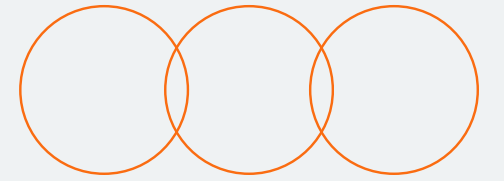
Launch (Sept 2024)

The Launch event told the community about the PTC, shared the learning so far, supported Community Commissioners to share their experiences and recruited civic leaders to the Commission ('Civic Commissioners').



One of a series of six paintings showing the precarity of stable housing. **Painting by Tom Osborne**

Activities



The Commission

21 gatherings over 11 months (November 24 - October 25)

Phase 1: discover and define

Community Commissioners came together with decision makers ('Civic Commissioners') and Facilitators to build relationships, promote deep listening, create a shared understanding of poverty and the services people use, and identify what issues they would like to address (5 months)

Phase 2: develop and deliver

Commissioners, with the support of Facilitators, created task groups and worked on ideas and action in their themed areas. Work was done on embedding the learning into organisations and institutions (7 months)



Activities

Closing event and embedding

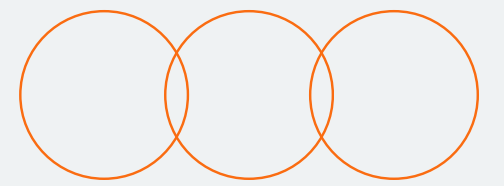
December 2025 onwards

In the Closing event '[Together for Change: Our Next Steps](#)', the Commission shared the learning, described the outcomes and sought to find ways to continue to embed the work in the community. Embedding included deciding what Poverty Truth could continue to look like in the area and support for Commissioners as they move on.

With further support from One Ilfracombe, Devon Mental Health Alliance and RDUHT, time has been allocated in 2026 to continue the embedding process, work on continuing tasks and outcomes and develop sustainable networks for change.



How does change happen?



Everyone is heard

by **hearing** our
Community
Commissioners, we
understand better how
poverty affects every
aspect of someone's
life; and learn about
the social barriers to
getting out of poverty



We create a collective
understanding

by **sharing** our
experiences of services
and of poverty, we
create a new kind of
knowledge not possible
otherwise

Everyone is heard

by **hearing** our Community Commissioners, we understand better how poverty affects every aspect of someone's life; and learn about the social barriers to getting out of poverty

During the Commission, **everyone is heard**, and time is taken to **build relationships and trust**. Experiences are shared and **confidence in working together** develops.

Over the course of the commission, both Community and Civic Commissioners **changed their views on poverty** and of each other. The PTC learned that, while everyone's experiences are different, there are ways in which services can better support people when they need help. The PTC acknowledged that **services not designed with and around people in poverty can result in harm**.

This challenged the idea of blaming people in poverty for their situation; and everyone saw poverty in a different light, **without shame or individual blame**.

The continued commitment to these relationships supported people's **hope and belief that change can happen**.

Everyone is heard

'It is the closest thing I've seen to actually changing people's perceptions of poverty and attitudes to it'.

PTC Guest

'I'm heard and I'm seen and I don't get that very often. Thank you'.

Community Commissioner

'I can speak up as I won't be belittled or ignored'.

Community Commissioner

Creating a collective understanding

by **sharing our experiences** of services and of poverty, we create a **new kind of knowledge** not possible otherwise

As the commission develops, there is a growing **collective understanding and awareness** which generates new knowledge and **a new way of thinking together**, raises awareness and connects people across the Commission.

Together the PTC created a new **shared understanding** of poverty, of services and of what engagement can mean.

This new understanding helped Civic Commissioners to **'embolden' the 'moral purpose'** behind the work people are doing; and helped Community Commissioners to understand some of the pressures of the system and the **barriers to change**.

This created a **shift from individual to collective accountability** brought about by being together and creating new relations: moving from seeing **'self in isolation' to 'self in relation'**. People worked with a different **mindset** or 'lens' on the world.

Creating a collective understanding

*'I've got a new lens to see through and I'm grateful',
Civic Commissioner*

*'I see (poverty) more in the attitudes that were behind it... I started seeing that as true poverty'.
Community Commissioner*

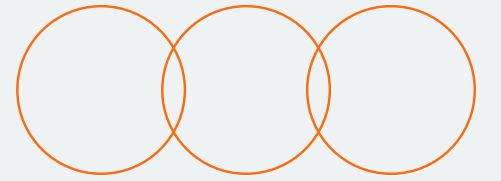
What happens when everyone is heard, and there is a new collective understanding?

Participants in the PTC told us they:

- saw things differently because of what they'd learned
- could be more open and honest about their experiences and challenges
- were more confident to speak up
- felt connected, appreciated and better understood
- could accept services may not be providing in the way they intended
- were hopeful that change could happen



this led to...



A transformative space...

People's **deep engagement** created a space where people could **think, act and behave differently**. The space created together is radical and transformative



by **respecting** everyone as equal, we create a space where human relationships deepen and we feel an **increased responsibility** to make change happen

Creating a transformative space

by **respecting** everyone as equal, we create a space where human relationships deepen and we feel an **increased responsibility** to make change happen

Community commissioners welcomed civic leaders into their space. This set the tone: from here on, **relationships, conversations and behaviours were allowed to be different.**

Nobody's voice was more important than any others. People **strove for equality.** The working boundaries were unlike others in day to day life, either for Community Commissioners in services they access, or for Civic Commissioners in their jobs.

People were **brave and humble** as they deepened their engagement. People aimed to be human with each other, challenging any preconceptions of the 'other' and making a **personal commitment** to do their bit towards change. Everyone sat with uncertainty, to see what would happen. The **courage** of Community Commissioners inspired Civic Commissioners to be vulnerable and **honest about system limitations.**

This process **disrupts habitual thinking**, lets new ideas flourish and helps to create the conditions for transformation ('**makes the ground ready for change**').

Creating a transformative space

'I feel like I'm being productive rather than shouting into the void'
Community Commissioner

*'Things change when you feel that accountability'.
Civic Commissioner*

*'Along the way we're making personal commitments to each other... this process is different... I wonder if Civic Commissioners will feel greater pressure to make good the work as a result of that'.
Civic Commissioner*

Outcomes: a set of conditions for change

When everyone is heard and there is a new collective understanding, and a transformative space is created...

... this can result in the creation of a set of 'conditions for change' (things that enable future change):

- A different set of relationships
- A change in the conversation
- A shared set of values and principles

'making the ground ready for change'

...and these, in turn, help to create 'tangible' outcomes



A set of conditions for change

A different set of relationships

- **breaking down barriers** between decision makers and those they serve
- an opportunity for **community and civic commissioners to work together** in the future
- **motivated and proactive cross-sector partnerships** willing to continue working together

A change in the conversation

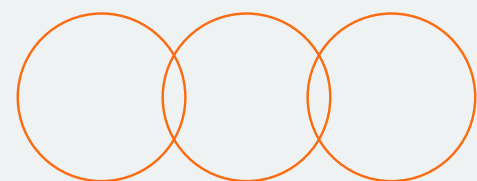
- an **increased willingness** to talk about poverty in different places
- removing **blame and shame** when we discuss poverty
- Civic Commissioners have **increased confidence and motivation** to create a case for change
- Civic Commissioners feel greater **personal responsibility** to make change happen
- Civic Commissioners find ways to **keep poverty on the agenda** and work to make change happen

A shared set of values and principles

- a shared and expanded **understanding of poverty**
- a new approach which is **collaborative and informed** (a different way of being and acting)
- the potential for the **'relational fabric'** in the area to be different
- a way of working based on mutual respect that could lead to longer term **culture shift**

A different set of relationships

by **listening deeply** to the voices of people with lived experience of poverty, we **put those narratives at the centre** of reimagining what services might look like



By putting the experiences of people who have struggled with poverty at the centre of the process; and asking civic leaders to leave their lanyards at the door, people engaged with each other as **human beings** rather than people in work or life roles.

Everyone developed **trust** together (although it can be fragile) and understood better the challenges and barriers to change.

This helped to **break down the barriers** between decision makers and those they serve. **New alliances across sectors** were created based on Commission values.

A different set of relationships

*'We've come to appreciate and understand each other better'.
Community Commissioner*

*'I think the Civic Commissioners are listening a lot more. They are listening. And I understand it's very frustrating for them with their jobs...and I think the big bosses are listening, in a way, as things slowly will be getting done, hopefully. So, that's a good thing for everybody. And I'm really happy about that'.
Community Commissioner*

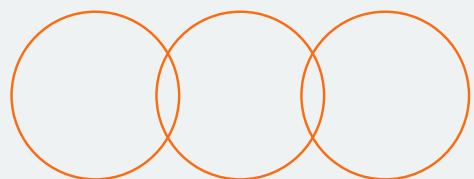
*'it has the potential to be much more vibrant, much more rewarding, much more uncomfortable... than sticking to perhaps more remote professional settings, behind performance monitoring reports and some of the white collar management world that we all live in as well'.
Civic Commissioner*

A change in the conversation

by **working together**, we feel empowered to speak up, because more people are talking about poverty

The relationships and the learning stayed with everyone when they went back to their daily lives. Through a **more precise understanding of poverty**, Civic Commissioners felt able to work in a more targeted way towards making change happen.

People found that **poverty is on the agenda**, and were able to contribute to that discussion and create a case for change with **renewed confidence**. People's experience in the Commission gave them courage to speak up for Ilfracombe, and for those who are most marginalised.



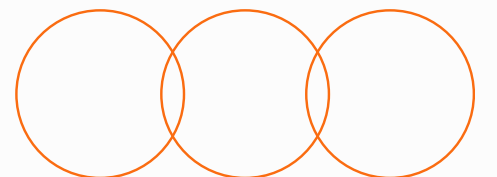
'I do feel like we've broken an eggshell, broken the egg...I think it's a lot more open now, the conversation (about poverty). It's quite normal now to have conversations... it's become accepted for people to talk to us about being broke outside of the Commission, as well as in it. It's become normalised a lot more'.

Community Commissioner

A change in the conversation

'I try to embed learning from the Commission in everything I do'.

Civic Commissioner



A shared set of values and principles

by **putting aside our preconceptions of each other** we grow a new shared set of values and principles (ways of working together) based on the relationships we form

Working together, Commissioners were able to **create a shared set of relationship-based values** that informed the ideas and developments being planned.

With ongoing will and determination, this collective way of working together, shared with other organisations and residents in Ilfracombe, can help to create a shared **mandate for change**.

Over time, these working values could lead to a **Culture Shift**, where, together, we think, act and respond to poverty differently.

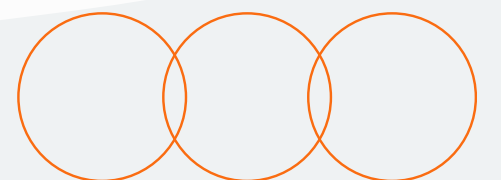
A shared set of values and principles

'I feel like its not two different kinds of Commissioners – it's a group of people working towards an end goal. Its 'us' rather than 'them and us'.

Community Commissioner

*It's values-based, isn't it? You've got a CC pulling up a senior leader on the way they're addressing (the issue). That to me is magic. This would never happen on the street. We'd never have the opportunity to even be in the same room together... And that is different to a lot of things, which is you just do the work, you're rarely addressing **how** you work together.*

Facilitator



How does change happen?

raising awareness

a mandate for change

a new way of thinking

remotivated

from individual to collective thinking

new knowledge

The PTC Approach

1 Begins with lived experience

Centring the lived experience of people with experience of poverty in our work shapes the agenda.

Builds relationships

Developing relationships between people with lived experience and decision makers helps to create a new kind of understanding. Trust is built through deep listening.

Humanises people and systems

Meeting each other as humans helps to build trust and understand the challenges in creating lasting change.

Everyone is heard

'MECHANISM OF CHANGE'

2 VOICES OF
COMMUNITY
COMMISSIONERS
AT THE CENTRE

A collective understanding

'MECHANISM OF CHANGE'

4 LEADS TO... A TRANSFORMATIVE SPACE
WHERE THERE IS THE
POSSIBILITY OF...

5

A SET OF 'CONDITIONS
FOR CHANGE'

- A DIFFERENT SET OF RELATIONSHIPS
- A CHANGE IN THE CONVERSATION
- A SHARED SET OF VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

- 3 Commissioners are:
- more open and honest about their experiences and challenges
 - more confident to speak up
 - connected, appreciated and better understood
 - accepting services may not be providing in the way they intended
 - hopeful that change could happen

6 THESE BECOME THE
MECHANISMS FOR FUTURE
CHANGE AND EMBEDDING...

equal voices

challenge perceptions

building trust

relationships deepen

being human

deep engagement

'INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES'

Outcomes

By the end of the Commission, participants:

- Had developed **relationships** and **a set of values and principles** that can help change the way in which people work together in the future
- Were actively working on number of **ongoing projects and initiatives** that can contribute to addressing some of the challenges identified by Community Commissioners
- Were **demonstrating their commitment** to continuing to work towards change by pledging support to continue to develop and embed the work
- Had developed a **model for a new way of working** that can inform policy decisions both within Ilfracombe and across the County

Intended Impact

By building on these conditions for change over the longer term it is intended that the Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission will:

- Have created a **person-centred way of partnership working** that joins up services in Ilfracombe to provide compassionate, flexible support rooted in dignity and understanding
- Contribute to **improving housing, education and health provision** for people with lived experience of poverty in Ilfracombe
- Improve access to **clear and accessible information** so that people can access effective and timely support when they need it
- And ultimately, **increase health and wellbeing** for people who are most underserved or marginalised in Ilfracombe

BUT... there are challenges

- Embedding system change is slow, but the Commission is short. The system can feel rigid and intractable and, when change is slow or intangible, this can impact on trust that change can happen
- It is a challenge to ensure that work is followed through, embedded and resourced, after the Commission ends
- Finding ways to connect with and expand the work to other residents and those working 'on the ground' in the town can be a challenge (there are a relatively small number of people in the room)

'There are only a set number of people in that room for that period of time, and so while we might change our personal, professional experiences... we've got to take that out into something that's more sustainable than just our unique experiences of over that year'.

Civic Commissioner

BUT... there are challenges

- A shifting policy context (e.g. Local Government Reorganisation; Integrated Care Board cuts) and lack of resources or new funding impacts on the possibilities for change
- There is a tension between working to address specific local issues, and the Devon wide/regional remit many Civic Commissioners have. Civic Commissioners have competing priorities and it can be challenging to create a case for change back in their organisations, particularly at times of organisational change or funding cuts or if they are responsible for a wide geography
- Some Civic Commissioners felt restricted by national policy or found it challenging to influence colleagues back at work, meaning that tangible change in Ilfracombe was hard to implement

'It feels to me that my professional world has never been tougher and I see no let up on the pace at which further challenges will come through. We are challenged and expected to do more with less on an ongoing basis and I wrestle a lot with how we might be able to provide broader and different services at a time when the core offer is so challenging'.

Civic Commissioner

AND... there are things that helped (enablers)

- Timeliness - just as it is a challenge, policy and strategy changes towards neighbourhood health (the Integrated Care Board), the shift from 'hospital to community' (Ten year health plan): a focus on health inequalities (Devon Partnership Trust); young people, employment and skills (Devon County Council) provide future opportunities.
- The most likely (and possibly most long-lasting) change happened when Civic Commissioners were able to look critically at their service, without being defensive, in response to Community Commissioners experiences.
- When Civic Commissioners recognised where the work of the Commissions supported and was in harmony with their own work objectives, and their own values, then embedding the work of the Commission was more likely because Civic Commissioners can create a case for sharing and working with the learning from the commission. They can also better justify time spent on the Commission.
- Knowing what is going on outside the Commission helped to connect ideas to similar projects and people. If an idea 'chimed' with other plans, it helped to 'turbocharge' PTC ideas.
- After deciding areas of working, bringing in specialist 'guests' brought in fresh ideas, new expertise and connections to help make things happen.

Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank all the Community Commissioners, Civic Commissioners, Guests, Facilitators and local people who contributed to the learning of the Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission. Everyone was very generous with their time, and willing to readily engage with the learning process.

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To learn more about the Ilfracombe Poverty Truth Commission and to view films about the work see <https://onenortherndevon.co.uk/our-work/reducing-health-inequalities/health-inequalities/work-in-northern-devon/poverty-truth-commission/>



poverty truth Ilfracombe