



**'The Cost of Living'**  
**Report of the Lewisham People's  
Parliament December 2022**

**This report is written in plain English**

## **The Lewisham People's Parliament**

The People's Parliament is here to represent the views of people with learning disabilities who live in Lewisham. It is a project run by Lewisham Speaking Up and it is currently funded by the Big Lottery Community Fund.

There are six Lewisham People's Parliament reps who are elected by other people with learning disabilities. They are paid the London Living Wage for their work with Lewisham Speaking Up.

### **Background to this report on the Cost of Living**

This Lewisham People's Parliament report is part of Lewisham Speaking Up's response to the cost of living crisis. We have held several events working together with our money management advocate to talk about the cost of living crisis.

Our advocacy service offers 121 support to people experiencing money difficulties. We have seen first-hand how the rising cost of living has affected people with learning disabilities.

The aim of this People's Parliament was to hear directly from people with learning disabilities. What do they think about the cost of living? How do they feel? What would they like to happen?



## The Parliament meeting



This was the first time we had been back to the Lewisham Council Chamber since 2019. Unfortunately, our meeting was at the same time as a train strike and lots of ice and cold weather.

We invited people to join us on December 15<sup>th</sup> and **36** people with learning disabilities came in person.

The meeting was chaired by People's Parliament rep Sam Attah.

### Sam ready to chair the meeting

Sam introduced the meeting and spoke about how there has been a lot in the news about the cost of living. He said we have all heard lots of stories in the news about:

- Energy bills
- Food prices going up
- People striking for higher wages

Sam said that lots of people are worried about not having enough money. They are worried about paying their bills. They are worried about having money to buy enough food.

Sam told everyone that we were going to do some workshops to ask people about the cost of living. Before that he said he wanted to introduce some guests to speak.

We had arranged for Vicky Foxcroft to open the People's Parliament. Vicky is the MP for Lewisham Deptford and also the Shadow Minister for Disabled People. Sadly, Vicky was unwell and couldn't make it to the People's Parliament.



**Sarah from Lewisham Foodbank**

We did have a great guest speaker called Sarah Vitty who manages Lewisham Foodbank. Sarah did a presentation about how the foodbank works.

She then answered lots of very good questions from the audience.

One person said that it 'this country should be ashamed that so many people need to use food banks'. This got a big round of applause from everyone.

We were hoping to hear from Councillor Paul Bell, but he was also unwell and could not make it.



**Councillor Jacq Paschoud speaks**

We did hear from Councillor Jacq Paschoud who told everyone about the Warm Welcomes scheme.

The Warm welcomes scheme means places that are open and free to go inside and get warm. Some places offer free hot drinks or even food. They are places like libraries, community centres and churches.

You can find a list of places offering Warm Welcomes on the Lewisham local website. Link below.

<https://www.lewishamlocal.com/lewisham-warm-spaces/>

After the guest speakers had finished, Sam asked everyone to join the Cost of living workshops.

### **The workshops**

There were 3 different workshops at the Parliament meeting.

They were:

- Why are prices going up so much?
- What can we do to save money and cut costs?
- What help is available with the cost of living?

At our People's Parliaments we try to find out what people think about a subject and what they would like to change about that subject.

This is what people with learning disabilities said at each of the 3 workshops.

### **Workshop 1: Why are prices going up so much?**

In this workshop people talked about the rising costs of things in their lives. The group discussed inflation and what it means. We asked people what they had noticed had gone up and they said:

- Food
- Energy
- Water
- Bills
- Phone bills
- Travel
- Taxis
- Clothes
- Oil
- Gym
- Christmas gifts
- Alcohol.

This is what people thought about why prices are going up so much:

- Inflation is going up and people are not getting a proper living wage
- Inflation is going up to 10%, it was usually 2%
- COVID has meant that people are not working
- The war in Ukraine is forcing food prices up. Oil prices are also going up
- Giant companies are exploiting the nation and it is not sustainable
- Prices are going up because of Brexit
- There is no increase in wages or benefits
- The Government is not putting so much in
- Prices are going up, but not wages
- People want fair pay – there are strikes but the Government is not paying more money
- Working people are using foodbanks because they can't afford the cost of living
- I need to be really careful about what I buy and compare prices
- I can only buy things once a month rather than weekly

This is what people with learning disabilities said they wanted to change about prices going up:

- We want a proper living wage that matches inflation
- We need help and more money
- We want our carers to be paid more
- We are concerned that people are going to turn to crime to survive because of desperation
- We need the Government to give us more money
- We want the Government to look at where they are spending their money

## **Workshop 2: What can we do to save money and cut costs?**

In this workshop, people talked about what they could do to save money. We asked if people were already doing things to cut down on spending. The group talked about whether it is harder for disabled people to cut their costs.

This is what people with learning disabilities thought about saving money and cutting costs:

- Turn lights off if you are not using them
- Buy less food
- Don't buy things you don't need
- Save money for a rainy day
- Purchase food at Aldi and Lidl to save money
- Save water by having a shower instead of a bath
- Have shorter showers
- Do bulk shopping (for supported living houses)
- Make sure taps are turned off
- Plan meals so you don't waste food
- Keep boilers working on a timer or get an engineer to turn your boiler down
- Get home insulation to keep your home warmer. In the roof, walls and use door draught excluder
- Keep your windows closed and close your curtains
- It is more difficult to pay your bills if you have a disability

This is what people with learning disabilities said they would like to change about saving money:

- We want more easy read information on how to save money. Use pictures and symbols
- We want housing associations to provide help and advice
- We want lower prices for gas and electricity
- We want to see money distributed more equally
- We want to pay less for energy bills if you have a disability
- We want easy read bills from the energy companies
- We want easy read information about Winter Fuel Payments
- We want better information on how to claim help for energy bills and Council tax

- We want more opportunities for people with learning disabilities to get employment

### **Workshop 3: What help is available with the cost of living?**

In this workshop people talked about what help is out there to support with the cost of living. People talked about the extra costs that some disabled people have to pay. They spoke about what extra help they would like to get with the cost of living.

This is what people with learning disabilities thought about the help that is available:

- There was a £150 Council Tax refund for everyone
- You can get vouchers if you pay your electric on a pre-pay meter
- You cannot top up over £180 on a pre-pay meter
- There are extra costs for some disabled people like if you need to have a hoist or you need a bath instead of a shower
- Some disabled people have to pay for their support worker on top of gas, rent and other costs. It's too much!
- If you have a severe disability and use an electric wheelchair you need more electricity
- If you need 24/7 care there are extra costs
- In supported living each person puts some money into the pot
- Some people have to pay for their care with their own money

This is what people with learning disabilities said they would like to change about the help that is available with the cost of living:

- We want Universal Credit to go up because costs and prices are going up
- The Government should fund some of the special extra supplies that disabled people need for their health (like continence pads for example)
- Supported living costs should be the Government's responsibility



- The Government need to provide more money to the NHS and social care, so people on benefits don't need to pay out of their own pockets
- There need to be more employment opportunities for disabled people. We have less money than people who are not disabled.

## **Summary**

People with learning disabilities had lost to say about the cost of living. Some of the main themes of the discussions in the workshops were:





- Disabled people are at a disadvantage due to low employment opportunities and the extra costs that some face, including many paying towards the care and support they receive
- The Government need to do more, both the make sure that benefits rise in line with costs and to properly fund health and social care services
- There is a concern that a rise in crime due to the cost of living crisis will mean that people with learning disabilities are more often targeted and will be more isolated as a result of this fear
- People with learning disabilities find it hard to understand a lot of the information around the cost of living. More Easy Read information helps, but people also need support to understand and act on information, even if it is in an Easy Read format

## **What did people say about the Parliament?**

To evaluate the success of the People's Parliament on the cost of living we use an accessible method with facial expression stickers.

We asked people with learning disabilities to rate the Parliament by choosing a face sticker. 36 out of 36 people (100%) put up a sticker.

This is what they thought about the Parliament meeting:

Stickers		Number of stickers
Yellow smiley face (good)	 =	36
Red sad face (bad)	 =	0
Total of all stickers	 +  =	36

### What Next?

These are the things that the People's Parliament will do next:

- Send this report to Local Members of Parliament, Lewisham Council, service providers in Lewisham and other people who may be interested
- We will continue to hold events where we talk about the cost of living crisis and how this is affecting people with learning disabilities. We will support people to understand what is going on
- We will campaign for changes to the benefit and health and social care system

For more information or to discuss anything to do with this report contact Lewisham Speaking Up.

[info@lsup.org.uk](mailto:info@lsup.org.uk)

[lsup.org.uk](http://lsup.org.uk)

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