Approaches to Reducing Poverty and Inequality in the UK:

A Study of Civil Society Initiatives and Fairness Commissions

A Report commissioned by
the Webb Memorial Trust
for the All Party Parliamentary Group
on Poverty

by Paul Bunyan and John Diamond
Edge Hill University
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Webb Memorial Trust

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Foreword by Kate Green MP, Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty and Trustee, Webb Memorial Trust

I am delighted to introduce this report, commissioned by the Webb Memorial Trust for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty, into the role of civil society in addressing poverty and inequality in the UK. I want to thank the researchers, Paul Bunyan and Professor John Diamond of Edge Hill University, for a meticulous and fascinating piece of work.

Six years after the greatest financial crash most of us have ever known, the poorest families in our country, many of them working, remain under tremendous pressure. Yet there's widespread agreement that the state alone cannot address the challenge of poverty that we face. Wider society – business, voluntary, faith and community groups, trade unions, individuals, and government - all have a part to play. This report focuses on the way in which at local level these actors can work together, the strengths and deficiencies of such an approach, and what more could be done to engage our whole society in taking the action to address poverty that we need.

The report examines a number of civil society approaches to addressing poverty. In particular, it considers the rise of fairness commissions across the country, and captures the different ways of working which characterise the local dimension to the fairness commission approach. Last November, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty heard from 14 commissions and around 40 individuals involved in them, as we sought to understand better their approach, and the successes as well as the barriers to their work. This report draws on those discussions to highlight rich and different examples of how commissions have been established, who has been involved and participated in their work, and what they have achieved.

The report also reflects on the complexity and tensions that arise from relying solely on local interventions and action. Of course we need to ensure that initiatives are responsive to local needs and differences – the work of the commissions illustrates very powerfully how that can happen – but we also need ways of co-ordinating and enabling the diverse range of actors, from central government to local and public agencies to faith and voluntary sector organisations, to work co-operatively. This is not always straightforward, especially in the absence of clear lines of responsibility or accountability. The report illustrates both what is possible at a local level but also what local approaches alone cannot achieve.

From this analysis, the report looks ahead, pointing the way forward to how we can build on local, civil society approaches that have worked. I welcome it as the next step in the discussion which the Webb Memorial Trust and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty aim to stimulate about poverty in our country, and what more we need to do to create the "good society". We very much hope the report will encourage colleagues in parliament, in local communities, and campaigners and activists across the country to join us in taking that discussion forward, and turning it into practical action. By working together, we can both build stronger civil society relationships, and bring about the reduction in poverty and inequality that is our goal.

1. Introduction

1.1 Poverty and Inequality in the UK

Poverty remains an endemic feature of life in the UK, the growth of food banks and pay day loan companies coming to symbolise the hardship experienced by increasing numbers of people across the country in recent years. Inequality - the gap between the incomes of the rich and poor - has also grown significantly over recent decades. According to Professors Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, in their book 'The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone' the UK now ranks as one of the most unequal countries in the world alongside Singapore, the USA and Portugal.

This report examines approaches and initiatives to reducing poverty and inequality in the UK. Two areas of activity provide the focus for the study - firstly civil society-led initiatives and secondly, Fairness Commissions, a relatively recent development initiated by a number of local authorities since 2010 onwards. The initiatives and approaches of civil society organisations highlighted in section two and the work of Fairness Commissions examined in section three show that people individually and collectively in their localities and institutions are working in proactive and innovative ways to alleviate and reduce poverty. However, there was a strong sense from many of the people who participated in the study that a lot more could be done. To this end the analysis in section four highlights the need for ways to be found to co-ordinate and scale efforts beyond a local level and to augment consensus-based with more adversarial-based approaches to social and political change. The recommendations in section five reflect this agenda and identify some potential areas that could be developed to ensure that poverty and inequality remains at the forefront of political and public life in the UK.

1.2 Research Approach and Methodology

A more detailed summary of the approach and methodology of the research team is included as Appendix 1 at the end of the report. The study comprised a number of discrete phases of data collection and analysis which included the following:

- Desk research and review of relevant literature by the research team;
- Analysis of on-line survey (see Appendix 2) completed by 25 Civil Society organisations;
- Analysis of on-line survey (see Appendix 3) completed by 33 Fairness Commissioners;
- Analysis of nine Fairness Commission reports;
- Semi structured face to face interviews with 5 Fairness Commission Chairpersons;
- Facilitation of meeting held at the House of Commons in November 2013 with over 40 participants and representatives from 14 Fairness Commissions present (see Appendices 4 & 5 for list of participants and key discussion points).

2. Civil Society Initiatives

According to Michael Edwards, a leading writer and authority on the subject, civil society is best understood as encompassing three interrelated dimensions or perspectives - first, civil society as the world of associational life; second, civil society as the good society and third civil society as the public sphere. In examining civil society approaches to reducing poverty in the UK, we have drawn upon Edwards' three-fold model of civil society to help frame our study and analysis. Using case studies as examples of ways in which civil society works to alleviate poverty, we conclude that the capacity for civil society to effectively reduce poverty in the UK depends upon the extent to which initiatives and strategies are employed which encompass each of the dimensions identified by Edwards.

2.1 Civil Society as Associational Life

Civil society understood as associational life is the orthodox and most common view of civil society. Here civil society is understood as the myriad of groups and institutions within society, which are distinct from the state and market and founded on the basis of voluntary association. They include faith groups, community organisations, sports clubs, NGOs, charities and unions.

In addressing poverty, civil society as associational life encompasses the countless ways in which individuals, groups and local institutions respond directly to need. Among other things they include:-

- Individual acts of kindness, generosity and charitable giving;
- The work of volunteers in charities up and down the country, for example the numerous foodbanks set up by local groups in recent years as a response to austerity and food poverty;
- The work of third sector organisations who provide advice on welfare, benefits and debt to people in poverty;
- The work of faith groups such as the Salvation Army, the Catholic Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) and Muslim Aid who provide assistance to the poor and disadvantage.

Whilst many of these works and acts of charity might represent short term alleviations rather than longer term solutions to reducing poverty, they nevertheless represent an important part of the picture of how people individually and collectively in their localities and institutions respond directly to poverty and seek to make a difference to the world around them.

Foodbanks: The Trussell Trust

The growth in the number of foodbanks across the country has become symbolic of a growing sense that poverty has increased significantly in the UK in recent years. The Trussell Trust has been at the forefront of developing foodbanks, working with churches and communities to open up new foodbank projects – there are now almost four hundred across the country. The Trust cites a 76 percent increase in the number of foodbanks launched since April 2012 and a 170 percent increase in numbers of people given emergency food.

Whilst foodbanks provide support at a basic level within localities, the direct contact with people in poverty can lead to other forms of intervention beyond the local. For example, the recent criticism of government welfare reforms by church leaders, including the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, was in part attributable to the fact that the Bishops could draw upon the testimonies of people in their churches who run foodbanks and who listen to the stories of people in poverty who look to them for support. Such stories and testimonies provide an important counterbalance both to statistics quoted by government about the benefits of current welfare reforms and to media portrayal of poverty which is often couched in terms of so called 'scroungers' living off the state or of narratives which blame the poor themselves for their predicament.

2.2 Civil Society as the Good Society

Civil society understood as the good society encompasses the realm of ideas and competing narratives about the nature of a good society and how it might be achieved. Issues of poverty and inequality lie at the heart of debate about what a good society might look like and civil society organisations contribute to and inform such debate in a number of ways. For example, Charitable Trusts and Foundations provide an important source of ideas and analysis aimed at establishing a fairer and more just society; faith groups too, provide strong countercultural narratives which challenge stereotypes of people in poverty and promote social justice. Examples include:-

- The Webb Memorial Trust which following on from last year's New Statesman supplement entitled 'Busting the Poverty Myths' has commissioned this study looking at civil society initiatives to reduce poverty and inequality in the UK;
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation which has investigated causes of and solutions to poverty for over a century and is currently undertaking a major research programme aimed at understanding the impact of current welfare reforms on people and places in poverty across the UK;
- The Equality Trust, set up in 2009 to raise awareness of and develop the potential for a campaign based on the analysis of Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett in their book 'The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone';
- Church Action on Poverty, for example the report entitled 'The Blame Game Must Stop', published in 2013 which challenged the stigmatisation of people living in poverty.

Such organisations play an important role in addressing poverty and inequality in two main ways. Firstly, they raise awareness of and generate narratives about the causes of poverty and ideas about potential solutions. Secondly, they provide an important source of funding and resources to grass-root civil society organisations which enable them to work independently from government or corporate influence and funding.

The Spirit Level and the Equality Trust

The Spirit Level was first published in 2009 and has since become an international bestseller. The book has generated a great deal of debate about the nature of societal divide, positing that societies with a bigger gap between rich and poor are bad for everyone in them, including the well off. The Equality Trust was set up to campaign and raise awareness around issues of inequality raised in the book. Stated simply, the vision of the good society promoted by Wilkinson & Pickett and the Equality Trust is that societies do better when they are more equal and worse when they are more unequal. Among western European countries, Britain is identified as one of the most unequal countries and this accounts for the UK having some of the highest rates in Europe for things such as child obesity, mental illness, drug abuse, teenage birth rates and imprisonment. The great challenge to be undertaken in realising the good society, according to the Trust, lies in closing the gap in incomes between the richest and poorest in society.

The Spirit Level inspired the creation of the first Fairness Commission in Islington in 2010, which was co-chaired by Professor Wilkinson. Over the past three years other Fairness Commissions, supported by the Equality Trust have been set up in a number of cities and areas across the UK (see below).

2.3 Civil Society as the Public Sphere

Civil society understood as the public sphere takes us into the political realm, raising important questions about the nature of social and political change and ways in which civil society organisations develop the power and legitimacy to engage in the public sphere. In recent decades, shaped by neo-liberal ideology, social and political change has tended to be understood as being largely consensus-based, framed in terms of increased co-operation and collaboration between the state, market and civil society. For example, 'partnership' under New Labour and the 'Big Society' under the Conservative-led coalition both envisaged an ever greater role for civil society and implied a shift in power away from the market and state towards civil society. In reality the opposite has largely been the case as neo-liberal hegemony, actively promulgated through what one author has referred to as the state-market nexus, has remained firmly entrenched.

Through the employment of 'managerial technologies and private sector practices, such as contracting and commissioning, the practices of civil society and third sector organisations have been significantly impacted upon, involving, among other things a shift towards service delivery at the expense of other forms of engagement such as advocacy and campaigning.

Examples of civil society organisations which adopt an overtly political approach in contesting the effects of neo-liberalism within the context of the public sphere include the following:-

- Citizens UK, which uses community organising to harness the power of local associational and institutional life in order to engage politically in the public sphere;
- Unions, including Unison, Unite and the GMB, who reduce poverty and inequality by, among other things, challenging and negotiating with employers for better pay and conditions for low paid workers;
- Organisations, such as the National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA) and the web-based National Community Activist Network (NATCAN) which represent civil society initiatives which actively dissent from the neoliberal orthodoxy which has prevailed in recent times.

National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA)

The National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA) brings together individuals and organisations to promote independent voluntary and community action in order to engage in and contest the public sphere. The impact of neo-liberalism upon the practices of voluntary and community organisations, for example the effects of privatisation, cuts, 'big society' and localism, have been a particular focus and concern for the organisation.

In 2012 NCIA carried out an inquiry into local activism across the UK, culminating in a report published in March 2013 entitled 'Here We Stand: Inquiry into Local Activism and Dissent'. The notion of dissent is central to the philosophy of NCIA and in contradistinction to consensus-based notions of social change, is seen as being vital to a vibrant and healthy democracy - this is illustrated in the following quote from the report:

'Activism without the capacity for dissent will not have sufficient force. Without this capacity, the democratic role of voluntary action (or civil society) is fundamentally undermined. This is already the case for many voluntary and community services co-opted by funding regimes and marketisation. The role of the dissenting activist, of whatever form or style, has now become critical for our collective health and wellbeing'.

2.4 Reducing Poverty and Inequality: Key issues and Challenges for Civil Society in the UK

So how are we to assess the effectiveness of civil society in addressing poverty and inequality in the UK? As we have seen civil society works in many different ways to alleviate poverty. But on the basis of the conceptual framework established weaknesses in current approaches and ways in which civil society organisations might more effectively tackle poverty and inequality in the future can be identified.

Firstly, the capacity for civil society to effectively address poverty is weakened to the extent that the dimensions of civil society are seen in isolation from each other. For example a strategy which focuses solely on individual agency and charitable giving, but pays little attention to the structural nature of poverty and the need for engagement in the political and public sphere is less likely to lead to sustainable and long term solutions. Similarly, a coherent and rational argument about how best to tackle poverty, or a vision of the good society divorced from a political strategy or local institutional support, will lack roots and legitimacy and likely fail to materialise. Put in more positive terms, poverty is most effectively addressed when strategies are employed which encompass, more than one, and ideally all of the dimensions of civil society highlighted. The case of food banks quoted earlier and the public debate generated by the criticism of government policy by church leaders provides an example of how local initiatives can inform wider public debate. However, the challenge for civil society is to ensure that such debate is not fleeting but sustained over time through, for example, providing a means for people in their localities, most importantly poor people themselves, to play a more active role collectively and politically in addressing their circumstances.

Secondly, civil society needs to remain at arms length from electoral party politics and be wary of government narratives, such as 'partnership' and the 'Big Society', which prescribe the role of civil society vis a vis the state and market. Politics involves more than electoral politics and whilst electoral democracy represents an important prerequisite for a more civil and just society, it is no guarantee of it. The challenge for civil society, therefore, is continually to push the boundaries of civility, by developing the power and political capacity of grassroots civil society organisations to more effectively engage with and contest state and market practices which diminish human dignity. Charitable Trusts and Foundations, in particular, have a vitally important role to play in building this political capacity and therefore it is important that they too remain at arms length from party politics and focus their energies and resources on helping to build new forms of civil society led politics.

Thirdly, and following on from the previous points, civil society needs to become more radical in the approaches and strategies it adopts in tackling poverty and inequality in the UK - particularly so, in light of the austerity measures and the impact this has had on the most vulnerable in society. To this end the impact of neo-liberalism and the shift more towards service delivery by many third sector and civil society organisations needs to be augmented by a greater emphasis upon political engagement and campaigning. The Living Wage campaign represents one of the most successful civil society-led initiatives to reduce poverty in the UK in recent years and provides an excellent example of a strategy which has managed to encompass Edwards' three dimensions of civil society.

Citizens UK and the Living Wage Campaign

The Living Wage campaign was started in 2001 by Citizens UK and its main affiliate London Citizens. In terms of Edward's three dimensions of civil society, a number of factors can be identified which have contributed to the effectiveness and success of the Living Wage campaign and the community organising approach employed by the organisation.

Firstly, in terms of civil society as associational life, London Citizens comprises an alliance of civil society organisations and institutions, now numbering over two hundred, which includes faith groups, schools, universities, charities, unions and housing associations. As members of London Citizens, these institutions have driven the Living Wage campaign, connecting to the low paid within their own organisations and localities and providing the support, people and leadership that has sustained the campaign over many years.

Secondly, the vision of the good society promoted by London Citizens and its approach to community organising is of people in their localities and institutions coming together to act for change and the common good. This idea of relational power and the importance of building power in order to enact values of social justice is central to the community organising approach employed by the organisation and its vision of the good society.

Thirdly, Citizens UK and London Citizens exists essentially to build the power and capacity of civil society organisations to engage in the public sphere. In terms of the Living Wage campaign this has involved member organisations contesting the practices of large public sector bodies and private sector corporations, through among other things, turning out large numbers of people for street actions or large public assemblies holding politicians and other decision makers to account.

3. Fairness Commissions

Over the past three years Fairness Commissions have been set up in a number of cities and areas across the UK. To date such commissions have been initiated in Islington, Liverpool, York, Newcastle, Sheffield, Blackpool, Tower Hamlets, Newport, Plymouth, Bristol, Oldham and Southampton. Similar initiatives have also taken place in Camden (Camden Equality Taskforce), Manchester (Greater Manchester Poverty Commission) and Birmingham (Giving Hope, Changing Lives).

3.1 The Fairness Commission Model and Process

Fairness Commissions are, for the most part, Local Authority-led initiatives. A number of have been instigated by the leader or a lead member of the elected ruling group of the Council. This has been the case in Islington, Newcastle, Sheffield, Newport and Liverpool. There have been variations to this – for example in the case of the Manchester Poverty Commission which covered a number of local councils, it was the local MPs who took the initiative. Whilst many of the commissions have been initiated by members of the council, different approaches have been taken in relation to the direct involvement of councillors on the commissions themselves. Some commissions have had a number of councillors directly involved as commissioners, for example Islington and Camden, others have chosen not to involve elected members directly, i.e. Newcastle, Tower Hamlets, York and Plymouth.

Most of the commissions have followed a parliamentary select committee model, enquiry-based, taking evidence and producing a final report. Evidence and information has been gathered in a number of ways including, among other things, public meetings, listening exercises, themed 'select committee' style meetings, walkabouts, street surveys, web-based surveys and expert presentations.

The commissions are at various stages of development – a number have published reports and implemented recommendations, i.e. Islington and the Living Wage, others have recently launched reports, i.e. Tower Hamlets, others still are at a relatively early stage of the process, i.e. Bristol, Oldham and Southampton.

3.2 The Impact of Austerity

A climate of austerity provides the backdrop and the catalyst for many of these initiatives. Most of the commissions that have reported so far comment on the wider social, political and economic context and the challenges presented in addressing poverty and inequality at a time of severe and unprecedented public cuts. Stark inequalities between localities within cities and across areas are highlighted. For example, the Tower Hamlets Commission report 'Time to Act' states that 'there is arguably nowhere in the country where inequality is more pronounced' contrasting the shiny towers of Canary Wharf and the billions generated there, to the forty nine percent of children in the borough who live in poverty, the highest proportion in the country.

In the Newcastle report a 14-year gap in life expectancy between the most and the least prosperous wards of the city is cited. Similarly, in the Sheffield report health inequalities in terms of life expectancy was vividly expressed by reference to the 65 minute journey on the number 83 bus route where at its start at Millhouses in Ecclesall ward, female life expectancy is 86.3 years and 40 minutes into the journey in the Burngreave ward female life expectancy drops to 76.9 years.

3.3 Examples of Fairness Commission Recommendations

Fairness Commissions have addressed many different issues and areas of concern. Given the very nature of the process and the different approaches taken by different commissions it is difficult to provide a comprehensive picture and analysis of recommendations as a whole. What follows are some of the key themes and recommendations for tackling poverty and inequality from Fairness Commission reports published to date.

(i) The Living Wage: The Living Wage has figured prominently in many of the reports. For example Islington, where the first Fairness Commission took place, became the first Local Authority to become an accredited Living Wage employer. One of the headline recommendations in the York report advocated to 'Make York a Living Wage City and inspire Yorkshire to become a Living Wage Region'. Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, who was patron of the York Fairness Commission has since launched the Living Wage Commission, a national independent inquiry into the future of the Living Wage. The Tower Hamlets report 'Time to Act' recommended that all employers in Tower Hamlets become accredited London Living Wage employers.

(ii) Pay differentials: Many of the Fairness Commission reports highlight wide disparities in income between the wealthiest and poorest households across their cities and areas. Whilst the Living Wage focuses on the lowest paid, attention has also been directed towards the highest paid and the need to bring down the pay ratios between the two. Islington cut the pay of its Chief Executive by £50,000 and in conjunction with implementing the Living Wage brought the pay differential ratio between the highest and lowest paid employees to 1:10. Some may still regard this as being too high for a public body. As yet it would appear that none of the other authorities in which Fairness Commissions have been initiated have made significant progress in reducing pay ratios.

(iii) Debt and credit: Increasing levels of personal debt and the need for alternative forms of lower cost credit was identified as key issues in many of the Fairness Commissions. In the Tower Hamlets report there was a recommendation for the government and the financial services sector to support the development of the credit union sector to provide an alternative to payday loans and competitive banking services for people on low incomes. The York and Islington Commissions recommended the introduction of a by-law restricting the activity of payday loan companies.

(iv) Increasing job opportunities for local people: In Liverpool, in order to reduce the city's dependency on public sector employment, it was recommended that the City set measurable targets for the creation of new local business and social enterprises with a clear strategy and action plan to monitor and publish year on year performance against these targets. In Islington it was recommended that employers (by means of legitimate positive action) should increase the proportion of local people they employ – a target of increasing the proportion of Islington residents in the Councils workforce from 23 per cent to 30 per cent by 2014 was set.

(v) Tackling youth unemployment: In Tower Hamlets there was a recommendation for local business, especially the large businesses based in Canary Wharf to effect a step change in their engagement with local people, guaranteeing to provide 25% of work experience placements every year and committing to increasing apprenticeship and other local employment opportunities. In Sheffield a city-wide programme of work trials, placements and apprenticeships for young people was proposed.

(vi) Targeted support for mothers: In Camden there was a proposal for the Council to work with all employers to develop a targeted package of employment support to mothers, especially for those groups such as Bangladeshi and Somali women with particularly low rates of employment, combining advice on childcare, training, volunteering, and employment options.

(vii) Health: Whilst health was identified as a key issue and area of concern in many fairness commission reports, recommendations tended to be quite general. In York one of the headline recommendations called for greater and more integrated provision of preventative and community based health and social care services, particularly in addressing services for the elderly and the large gap in life expectancy – nearly 10 years for men and 7.6 years for women – between the least and most deprived areas across the city. In the Sheffield report mental health was highlighted as a key issue - it was stated that people with mental health problems are more likely to be in problematic debt. The commission recommended for increased attention to be given to mental health and wellbeing in commission plans and for the commissioning of services for the physical health care of people with mental health problems to be radically rethought.

(viii) Housing: Housing was identified as a key issue in all the reports, particularly in London. In the Camden Equality Taskforce report a number of recommendations focused on what Government should do. They included taking steps to develop a London living rent; finding measures to ensure newly developed homes do not stand empty; and supporting affordable house building through, for example, relaxing borrowing rules for local authorities investing in new homes. In Islington there was a proposal to bring empty space into residential use by eliminating empty space above shops through writing to all shop owners to discuss the opportunities and benefits.

(ix) Internet Access: In the Tower Hamlets report there was a recommendation for a partnership to be developed in which local universities and the creative digital industries, took the lead in making free access to wireless internet universal across the borough.

(x) Reducing energy bills: The Greater Manchester Poverty Commission recommended that the Greater Manchester local authorities and Housing Associations should assess the feasibility of becoming an affordable energy provider.

(xi) Food banks: In Sheffield there was a recommendation that the city should support food banks and other providers of emergency food relief.

(xii) Enhancing democracy: In Newcastle there was a recommendation to encourage voter registration and increase the number of voters, with a target to significantly increase the number of votes cast in the next council elections in 2014, and in the General Election in 2015.

3.4 Issues and Challenges for Fairness Commissions

(i) The Fairness Commission Model - Strengths and Weaknesses: The commission model has a number of advantages – it is time-limited, relatively inexpensive (all of the commissioners gave freely of their time and in most cases administrative and research assistance was provided by the council through officer support) and it provides a fairly swift means for raising awareness of issues. In many cases Fairness Commissions have generated compelling evidence and information about the issues affecting people and the impact of poverty and inequality in cities and areas across the UK. Such information, particularly, when captured in the form of stories, narratives and testimonies about the impact of poverty on individuals, families and communities provide a powerful means of raising awareness about the issues.

However, there are also potential drawbacks. For example, the relative swiftness in identifying the problems and issues and coming up with recommendations can belie the much more complex and protracted process - essentially political - of implementing recommendations and bringing about tangible change in people's lives and circumstances. To this end moving from identifying achievable recommendations to implementation and action is the challenge that many commissions and Councils now face and this is made harder where recommendations are too general or too ambitious, as has been the case in a number of reports. Islington, the first Fairness Commission established, provides a good example of where a set of achievable recommendations were identified and for the most part successfully implemented (see below). Also, what happens after commissions have reported and published their recommendations is sometimes unclear, particularly in terms of who the baton is being handed on to and what the next stage of the process will entail. The continued involvement of commissioners beyond publication of the report is likely to vary and this raises questions about sustainability and who follows the process through in ensuring progress towards recommendations is made over time.

(ii) An Emphasis on Partnership and Consensus: Beyond partnership and calls for more collaboration between public, private and third sector bodies, there has been little in any of the reports about alternative political strategies or recommendations about how tackling poverty and inequality might be advanced in the cut and thrust of public and political life. This is perhaps not surprising given the commission model and the nature of the process. However, the extent to which partnership and consensus alone can deliver the change that is required to significantly reduce poverty and inequality is debatable.

Implementing Fairness Commission Recommendations in Islington

Islington was the first local authority to initiate a Fairness Commission in the UK and since the publication of the commission report in 2011 has implemented a number of recommendations. They include the following:-

(i) Living Wage: Islington became the first accredited Living Wage local authority in the UK;

(ii) Action on Pay Ratios: The council cut the Chief Executive Officer salary by £50,000 and now has a pay differential ratio between the lowest and highest paid employees of 1:10;

(iii) Advice: The local authority established the first new Citizens Advice Bureau in London for 20 years which now has an estimated 1000 users each month;

(iv) Islington Giving: A scheme to encourage Islington residents to give time and money as a way of tackling poverty and inequality in the borough was devised. To date £2 million has been raised and 500 volunteers recruited.

Councillor Andy Hull, one of the co-chairs of the Islington Fairness Commission, highlighted the following benefits for the Council in undertaking the Fairness Commission:-

- The Fairness Commission provided Islington Council with clarity and simplicity of definition - people know what the Council is about and what it stands for;
- The commission put flesh on the bones of the 'fairness in tough times' mantra;
- It provided a rationale for the tough decisions the Council has to make;
- The commission enabled the Council to exercise influence outside of its authority.

(iii) Generating Sufficient Political Traction: A number of commissioners highlighted the independence of many of the commissions as one of the main strengths of the commission process, the implication being that remaining non-partisan and at arm's length from party politics made for a more transparent, impartial and trustworthy process. Whether elected councillors sat as commissioners or not, in most cases commissions were initiated and supported by the council with an expectation that councils would act on the recommendations made. The important question, in our view, is not so much to do with the relative independence of commissions but rather about which structure best generates the necessary political traction and power to bring about change. Being independent for independent's sake makes no sense if the commission structure and process does not generate sufficient political purchase to ensure that progress is made. To this end, whilst on one level there is an argument for commissions to be seen at arm's length from party political influence, there would be an equally strong argument to be made for key politicians to be involved in the commission process, not least to be held directly accountable for progress made in addressing poverty and inequality within a locality.

(iv) Public Engagement: Public participation was seen as central to the fairness commission process but engagement varied across commissions. Some commissioners reported very good public engagement whilst others were disappointed in the turnout for commission events. In terms of the longer term engagement of citizens around issues of poverty and inequality post-commission, the extent to which many commissions have increased democratic activity within their areas is debatable and points to a potential weakness in the commission model. Plymouth provides a good example of a commission which adopted a creative and innovative approach to ensuring that public involvement was prioritised.

Public Engagement in Plymouth

The Plymouth Fairness Commission adopted a highly pro-active approach in seeking to engage with as many people as possible in gathering views about fairness and unfairness and recommendations for improvement and change across the city. During the summer last year a series of events were organised under the heading 'The Summer of Listening'. Among other things, they included the following:-

(i) Walkabouts: A series of 'walkabouts' in six different areas of the city allowed commissioners to familiarise themselves with the local area, and to hear directly residents' views and experiences of fairness and inequality.

(ii) Satellite meetings: A total of 27 meetings were held with a range of organisations including Age UK, MIND Mental Health Plymouth, Royal Marine/ Navy Forum, Young Carers, and Access Plymouth to help raise awareness of the Fairness Commission and to gather evidence and views.

(iii) Listening events: A series of Listening Events were arranged across the city for members of the public to 'drop-in' to meet some of the Commissioners, share the issues that affect them, and put forward suggestions to make Plymouth a fairer place.

(iv) Street survey: A research unit based at Plymouth University, collected views on behalf of the Fairness Commission from 151 Plymouth residents through face-to-face street surveys.

(v) Expert presentations: Experts presented on topics such as the role of public funding and the negative impact of inequality for all members of society.

(vi) Panel-led discussions: The commissioners facilitated 7 panel-led discussions between professionals, academics and the public on themes including financial inclusion, mental health, food, skills and business, housing, dementia and isolation and local procurement.

(v) The Language of Fairness: In an article in the Guardian entitled 'Fairness commissions: is it possible for politics to play fair?' Anne Perkins considers the utility of the language of fairness. She says:

"Of course, what makes fairness such a useful word is that it is enabling and inclusive and inoffensive, something every party and player can sign up to. At a time when politics and politicians struggle to inspire, it is a non-partisan gesture of good intent... But there is a lingering doubt over that word, fairness. Maybe it is too pallid an idea to tackle the reality of inequality".

In contrast to the language of fairness a word very much conspicuous by its absence in most of the Fairness Commission reports has been the word 'power'. Appeals to fairness and justice are more likely to be realised if accompanied by some form of power, reinforcing the importance of having public support and a constituency of active citizens supporting and backing the recommendations and their implementation. To this end whilst the language of fairness, as Perkins suggests, might be inclusive and inoffensive, the levels of poverty and inequality in the UK, requires that other terms, in particular the language of power and justice, is given as much priority in developing the political will and public imagination necessary to create a more just society.

4. Approaches to Reducing Poverty and Inequality: Key Themes Emerging

Addressing poverty and inequality from, and at, a local level is complex, made more difficult at a time of austerity and unprecedented public cuts. In sociological terms the challenge to reduce poverty and inequality can be thought of in terms of the contrast between structure and agency and the question about the extent to which people's lives are governed largely by the economic and political system and its structures or whether individuals, communities and their institutions can exercise forms of agency and self-determination.

4.1 Structure or Agency or both?

In a study into attitudes about poverty carried out by the Webb Memorial Trust and reported in a New Statesman supplement entitled 'Busting the Poverty Myths' published in March 2013, Knight sums up well the link between how a problem might be viewed or conceptualised and the sense that something, if at all, can be done about it. According to the study, statistical analysis found people could be divided into three types depending on what they believed to be the reasons for poverty:

"The first group believes people are poor because of factors beyond their control; the second that the poor only have themselves to blame for their condition; while the third believes poverty is an inescapable condition of society and there is little hope of solving it. It is evident that these three attitudes pull in different directions. The prevalence of each one goes some way towards explaining some of the myths of poverty as well as the policy paralysis that surrounds it. Assuming that we wish to tackle poverty, we can discount the attitude that nothing much can be done. Once this is done, a critical difference emerges between those who believe that people are poor because of factors outside their control and those who believe it is their fault. Putting this positively, the divide is between those who see structural or systemic reform as the key means and those who see individual agency as the key means. This does not have to be seen as either/or, it can be seen as a both/and".

(Knight, B., 2013, Busting the Poverty Myths, New Statesman
in association with the Webb Memorial Trust)

It is undoubtedly the case that if poverty and inequality are to be addressed in any fundamental way then both structural and systemic reform and individual and collective agency will be required. The initiatives highlighted in this report show that there are many examples of agency at a local level aimed at addressing poverty and inequality. One of the key challenges is to find ways to co-ordinate such efforts to generate greater influence and political traction at a broader level.

4.2 Scaling Efforts Beyond the Local

Following on from the previous point, the problem of how to scale up efforts from a local to a regional or even national level, represents one of the perennial challenges in any type of development or campaigning work. If we consider three of the main initiatives highlighted in this report - the Living Wage Campaign, Foodbanks and Fairness Commissions - we can see that they have all to a greater or lesser degree been driven or inspired by organisations independent of government and government funding – in the case of the Living Wage, Citizens UK and its offshoot, the Living Wage Foundation; in the case of Foodbanks, the Trussell Trust; and in the case of Fairness Commissions, the work of the Equality Trust and inspiration of the book, 'The Spirit Level'. This independence has been an important factor in the growth and profile of these initiatives but there is much more to be done, particularly in terms of research, to better understand other factors and processes involved in successfully moving from the local to a broader regional and national level.

4.3 Consensus- and Adversarial-based Approaches: In terms of Fairness Commissions specifically but also amongst many civil society organisations, in general, there has been a predominant sense and understanding in recent times that partnership working and better collaboration between public, private and third sectors provides the basis upon which progress to addressing poverty and inequality at a local level is best achieved. Such a consensus-based approach to social and political change has been a hallmark of neo-liberal shaped public policy over recent decades. We are not convinced that a partnership approach alone holds the solution to addressing poverty and inequality. Other more adversarial models of social change need to be considered alongside consensus-based models in order to compel decision-makers to address more radically the problems of poverty and inequality that exist in the UK. The model of community organising that has been successfully developed in the UK by Citizens UK, in particular the work of London Citizens, provides a good example of a model that develops power across communities and where necessary adopts more adversarial-based tactics to address issues of social justice.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

There are no simple solutions to reducing poverty and inequality. The causes of and issues associated with poverty and inequality are multi-faceted and as such require approaches and strategies which are also multi-faceted. All of the initiatives highlighted in this report, both civil society-led and local authority-led in the case of Fairness Commissions, represent important examples of pro-activity on the part of people in their localities and institutions to address poverty and inequality.

Outside of services and 'mainstream' policies designed to address poverty, civil society organisations - trade unions, voluntary and community organisations, faith groups etc. – are, in many ways, at the forefront and do most at a practical level to alleviate and reduce poverty. However, much more can be done and the analysis presented in section two of the report provided a framework for thinking about ways in which civil society organisations might more effectively work to reduce poverty and inequality. The recommendations below highlight potential areas that could help to encompass more effectively the different dimensions of civil society discussed above and increase the capacity of civil society organisations to reduce poverty and inequality in the UK.

Fairness Commissions are a relatively recent development and in many ways can be seen as a response, by a number of local authorities (in the main Labour-controlled), to address the impact of austerity and find ways to alleviate poverty and inequality at a local level. In many ways it is too early to assess the impact of Fairness Commissions in reducing poverty and inequality. Islington has led the way in implementing a number of recommendations but for many of the other commissions the challenge of moving from identifying to implementing recommendations remains. The recommendations below focus on ways in which the work of Fairness Commissions can help to both inform a broader anti-poverty strategy in the UK and identify key lessons and best practice for other Local Authorities looking to start similar initiatives in future.

5.2 Potential Areas for Development and Recommendations

In terms of some of the overarching themes emerging from the study, the analysis in section four of the report highlighted the need for ways to be found to co-ordinate and scale efforts beyond a local level and to develop more adversarial-based (alongside consensus-based) approaches to social and political change. The potential areas for development identified below and the accompanying recommendations reflect this agenda.

1. A UK-wide Anti-Poverty Alliance

One of the key issues identified in the report is the need to co-ordinate local efforts and bring together the different dimensions of civil society to more effectively address poverty and inequality. Whilst there are anti-poverty networks in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there is no UK-wide alliance. In response to the question in the civil society questionnaire asking people what scope they thought there was for co-ordinated civil society-led campaigns to reduce poverty and inequality in the UK most of the respondees identified this as an important area that needed to be developed. Such an alliance or network could help to do this.

Recommendation 1: The APPG on Poverty to host a seminar bringing together a range of different actors including funders, representatives from existing poverty networks and fairness commissions, and other key civil society players to explore whether and how the various networks and initiatives in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland could be coordinated and scaled up to form a national anti-poverty alliance.

Recommendation 2: An 'Assembly for Tackling Poverty and Inequality in the UK' sponsored by a number of Trusts and Foundations to be established in the next twelve months to examine the potential for a UK-wide Poverty Alliance.

Recommendations 3: As a potential step towards creating a UK-wide Poverty Alliance, lessons learned from the first 'Challenge Poverty Week' led by the Poverty Alliance in Scotland last year to be explored along with the possibilities for this initiative to be extended to other parts of the UK.

Recommendation 4: The Association of Charitable Foundations to host a meeting bringing together interested Trusts and Foundations to consider how they could strategically and collaboratively support a UK-wide Poverty Alliance. This could involve supporting the development of an anti-poverty network of research and policy practitioners working at local and national levels to inform policy makers across existing charitable trusts and foundations.

2. Civil Society-led Initiatives

The Living Wage Campaign represents one of the most successful civil society initiated and led campaigns in the UK in recent times. There is a great deal of potential for the Living Wage campaign to be scaled up significantly.

Recommendation 5: Key civil society organisations, including large charities, faith groups and unions to become accredited Living Wage employers/contractors and to take the lead in lobbying public, private and other civil society organisations to become accredited Living Wage employers/contractors.

Recommendation 6: All Local Authorities where Fairness Commissions have been established to implement the Living Wage for those they directly employ and to work with the Living Wage Foundation to become accredited Living Wage employers/contractors.

Recommendations 7: Universities to follow the lead taken by the National Union of Students to implement the Living Wage for those they directly employ and to work with the Living Wage Foundation to become accredited Living Wage employers/contractors.

Recommendation 8: The APPG on Poverty to encourage MPs to champion the case for the Living Wage within their constituencies and to ensure that businesses and organisations that become accredited Living Wage employers receive public recognition. Also, MPs to be challenged to ensure they are Living Wage employers/contractors themselves.

There is also potential for action to be taken on inequality, in particular around lowering the ratio of pay differentials between the highest and lowest paid employees within organisations. This is easier done within public or third sector bodies but there is scope, for example through shareholder action, for private companies to be encouraged to publish pay differentials and work towards lowering the ratio between the highest and lowest paid employees, including contracted workers.

Recommendation 9: The Webb Memorial Trust to consider commissioning a study into the ratio of pay differentials across different sectors of employment in the UK.

Recommendation 10: The output from the proposed study of Recommendation 9 to be made available to wider civil society to explore whether there is scope for a campaign (similar to the 1:12 referendum campaign held in Switzerland last year) focusing upon lowering the ratio of pay differentials in private, public and third sector organisations in the UK.

3. Fairness Commissions

As the number of Fairness Commissions have increased there has been some talk about whether a Fairness Commission network should be established. Whilst we recognise that there might be some value in setting up such a network we believe that establishing a broader UK-wide anti-poverty alliance, as discussed above, which could encompass and fold in the work of Fairness Commissions, would be more sustainable and potentially have greater influence and political leverage.

Recommendation 11: The Webb Memorial Trust and the APPG on Poverty to continue to assess the impact of Fairness Commissions in reducing poverty and inequality and to look at ways in which the work of Fairness Commissions could inform a broader anti-poverty initiative.

Recommendation 12: The Local Government Association to encourage their members to adopt the principles of the Fairness Commission model outlined in this Report and highlight examples of good practice including successful implementation of recommendations and the steps involved in achieving them. To publish a report on progress on an annual basis.

Recommendation 13: The Webb Memorial Trust and the APPG on Poverty to host on their respective websites the more detailed Report on Fairness Commissions which includes the voices of fairness commissioners.

In May 2015 there will be a national General Election. This provides an opportunity for citizens to organise and for civil society organisations in cities and areas across the UK to develop an agenda for change which includes issues on poverty and inequality. As part of their community organising strategy, Citizens UK has taken the lead over almost two decades in organising large public assemblies - known as Accountability Assemblies. As the name suggests such assemblies seek to hold those seeking elected office to account for progress made on issues and get undertakings about what they would do going forward if elected.

Recommendation 14: Civil Society representatives from various Fairness Commissions to access Citizens UK training to look at ways of generating momentum and political traction around issues of poverty and inequality over the next twelve months leading up to the General Election in May 2015 – this could lead to Accountability Assemblies being organised in Fairness Commission cities and areas across the UK in the run up to the election. Charitable Trusts and Foundations to help support access to such training.

4. Invitation to National and Governmental Agencies to explore the following Broader Recommendations

The recommendations below are addressed to national governmental agencies and departments as well as to leading national organisations to examine ways in which they might jointly or co-operatively explore how the principles and practices outlined in this Report might be sustained.

Recommendation 15: To invite the ESRC and the AHRC to prioritise research funds to support the development of a network of academics and charitable organisations to provide independent advice and analysis on the impact of anti-poverty measures and initiatives and to support the development of the proposed 'Assembly for tackling Poverty and Inequality in the UK' (Recommendation 2).

Recommendation 16: The NCVO to support the formation of a 'National Assembly for Tackling Poverty and Inequality ' and to take a leading role in co-ordinating the support of other national infrastructure bodies in this initiative.

Recommendation 17: The Office for Civil Society to take a lead in ensuring ministerial involvement at the first 'Assembly for Tackling Poverty and Inequality in the UK'.

Recommendation 18: The Office for Civil Society to commission research into the impact of the initiatives led by local government agencies to reduce poverty and inequality. To issue an annual report on its findings.

Recommendation 19: The leaders of the existing city regions to support the dissemination of examples of good practice outlined in this Report.

Recommendation 20: The Office for Civil Society to take the lead across Whitehall in promoting the recommendations of the Fairness Commissions with specific reference to health, housing and youth unemployment.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Context and Approach

1. The approach adopted by the Research Team was negotiated with the Webb Memorial Trust and the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty. The key focus for the research was to undertake an evaluation of civil society initiatives to reduce poverty and the work of Fairness Commissions with a specific stress on identifying the lessons learnt and to offer proposals on how such lessons could be disseminated and learnt for key agencies and organisations including both the Trust and APPG on Poverty.

2. The study comprised a number of discrete phases of data collection which included the following:

- Exploratory interviews by the Research Team with the Webb Memorial Trust and the Chair of the APPG on Poverty;

- Desk research and review of relevant literature by the Research Team;

- On line survey completed by 25 Civil Society organisations;

- Analysis of nine Fairness Commission reports;

- Analysis of on-line survey completed by 33 Fairness Commissioners;

- Semi structured face to face interviews with 5 Fairness Commission Chairpersons;

- 3 telephone interviews;

- Facilitation of meeting at the House of Commons with over 40 participants and representatives from 14 Fairness Commissions present;

- Analysis of data collected at the House of Commons meeting which identified over 15 separate themes;

- Liaison with the Webb Memorial Trust on progress.

3. The interviews were transcribed and then analysed. The methodology adopted by the Research Team was to use each phase of the process as a way of informing the next. The overall research design itself was informed by seeking to triangulate the data collected by reference to the policy literature, the work of civil society organisations and Fairness Commissions and the views of the participants.

4. The result is a very rich data set from a variety of individuals, settings and sources. The analysis by the Research Team and the subsequent identification of themes and emerging issues provide further opportunities for learning and critical reflection by those who have commissioned the research as well as those engaged in the development and implementation of anti-poverty initiatives.

5. The drafting of this Final Report has been another phase in the process. The identification of specific recommendations and their relationship to the Trust and the APPG on Poverty has involved further discussions with key individuals involved.

6. The research and evaluation undertaken by the externally commissioned research is an indication of the willingness of those involved to draw upon external reference points. This phase of the process (the drafting, redrafting and submission of the Final Report) is an important part of completing the evaluation cycle.

7. The Research Team have throughout the process reflected upon the ethical issues identified by the research. These can be summarised as follows:

- The need to ensure that the research process and methodology were approved through the University's research ethics procedures;

- The need to ensure that no one individual can be identified from their comments in the Report or during the data collection stage;

- The need to ensure an independent perspective on the research, its findings and the implications this may have for policy and practice recommendations;

- The need to ensure that the findings and recommendations are based upon the evidence collected and analysed;

- The need to ensure the relative independence of the Research Team.

Appendix 2: Civil Society Online Questionnaire

Current Approaches to Reducing Poverty and Inequality

1. Do you think civil society currently does enough to address poverty and inequality in the UK?

2. Can you identify specific civil society-led initiatives which have helped to reduce poverty and inequality at a local or wider level in the UK?

Challenges and Barriers to Reducing Poverty and Inequality

3. What do you see as the main challenges and barriers for civil society in reducing poverty and inequality in the UK?

4. Given the structural constraints imposed through austerity what difference do you think civil society can make in addressing poverty and inequality in the UK?

Potential Strategies for Reducing Poverty and Inequality

5. Going forward what do you think should be the main focus of civil society in helping to reduce poverty and inequality in the UK?

6. What scope is there for co-ordinated civil society-led campaigns to reduce poverty and inequality in the UK?

Appendix 3: Fairness Commission Online Questionnaire

The Commission Process

1. Why do you think you were chosen to be a commissioner?

2. In terms of the commission process

(i) What worked well?

(ii) What could have been done better?

3. What do you see as the main advantages of a commission process?

Addressing Poverty and Inequality

4. Has your experience as a commissioner confirmed or in any way changed your understanding of the nature of social and political change?

5. Given the structural constraints imposed by the wider political economy what difference do you think Fairness Commissions can make?

6. What do you see as the main barriers to addressing poverty and inequality at a local level?

Post-Commission

7. Going forward how do you think the momentum generated by the commission can be maintained?

8. What do you hope your Fairness Commission will best be remembered for?

9. What scope is there for collaboration between cities and across regions in bringing issues to national attention?

Appendix 4: APPG Fairness Commission Meeting in Parliament - Attendees

Kate Green - MP for Stretford and Urmston and Chair of the APPG on Poverty
Paul Flynn - MP for Newport West
Chi Onwurah - MP for Newcastle Upon Tyne Central
Louise Ellman - MP for Liverpool Riverside
Baroness Beverley Hughes - Greater Manchester Poverty Commission
Barry Knight - Webb Memorial Trust
David Urquhart - Bishop of Birmingham
Cllr. Andy Hull - Islington Fairness Commission
Kristina Glenn - Islington Fairness Commission
Cllr. Claudia Webbe - Islington Fairness Commission
Cllr. Mick O'Sullivan - Islington Fairness Commission
Naomi Eisenstadt - Camden Equality Taskforce
Cllr. Sally Gimson - Camden Equality Taskforce
Dame Suzi Leather - Plymouth Fairness Commission
Candice Sainsbury - Plymouth City Council
Steve Smith - Newport Fairness Commission
Gideon Calder - Newport Fairness Commission
Huw Williams - Newport City Council
Frank Hont - Liverpool Fairness Commission
Lindsay Mackie - Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission
Graham Fisher - Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission
Rys Farthing - Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission
Frances Jones - Tower Hamlets Council
Cllr Simon Blackburn - Blackpool Fairness Commission
Amanda Bennett - Blackpool Borough Council
Sara Crawford - Southampton City Council
Cllr Satvir Kaur - Southampton City Council
Cllr Joyce McCarty - Newcastle Fairness Commission
Steve Slack - Sheffield Fairness Commission
Tony Maltby - Sheffield Fairness Commission
Matthew Borland - Sheffield City Council
Natalie Qureshi - Manchester Poverty Action Group
Martin Miller - Greater Manchester Poverty Commission
Lyn Collins - Greater Manchester Poverty Commission
Richard Browne - Birmingham City Council
Deborah Kinghorn - Bristol City Council
Cllr Rachel Eden - Reading Council – Tackling Poverty Subgroup
Cllr Richard Davies - Reading Council – Tackling Poverty Subgroup
Duncan Exley - Director of Equality Trust
Sarah Vero - Citizens UK Living Wage Foundation
Joe Penny - New Economics Foundation
Frank Soodeen - Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Roxanne Mashari - Webb Memorial Trust
Paul Bunyan - Edge Hill University
John Diamond - Edge Hill University

Appendix 5: APPG Fairness Commission Meeting in Parliament: Key Discussion Points

1. Different models of Fairness Commissions: key characteristics – independent chair; diverse membership – broadly representative of constituencies of interest; linked to local authority at both political leadership and officer levels; and different conceptual models too from the need to be flexible and pragmatic to being clear about concepts and scope;

2. Impetus for FC – varied: local authorities tend to be unitary and urban and initiated by political leadership (Leader of the Council) and restricted to the boundaries of the local authority;

3. Other examples of leadership included local MPs acting to bring greater number of authorities together; elected mayors taking over sponsorship role; linking FC to boundaries of the LEP;

4. Examples of good co-operative working with local key agencies/organisations included involvement of local universities; faith groups; leaders of faith groups who are seen to have authority and independence;

5. Strong links to policy and analysis units/teams at local authority who ensure FC are 'data rich' – question of extent to which FC are connected with the different geographies/ communities of their locality so being data rich is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a FC;

6. Robust data sets can lead to targets for intervention/potential to embed the work of the FC into the work of the local authority but where do other key agencies sit: health / public health / education in a more fragmented local context and impact of austerity;

7. Membership of the FC and size of FC – from individuals with lots of 'social capital' to local residents and from quite tight groups (not more than about 15) to very large ones (Blackpool's 120);

8. Mixed practice on what next: from very specific local interventions/campaigns on Public Health/Pay Day Loans/Job Centre Plus/Right to Buy to uncertain decisions and dependent on local political leadership;

9. FC provide opportunity to highlight the scale and depth of poverty and link it to knowledge and understanding on diversity and equality – from income needed to rent and / or but to differential experiences of cuts and poverty;

10. Timescales vary: from the short term to a ten year framework;

11. Impact of austerity measures on local economy in terms of both loss of spending (changes to benefits) as well as job losses across public sector to withdrawal of support for VCFS;

12. Process of engaging by the FC: listening (what does this require in terms of skills and approaches) to being participatory (are these the same);

13. Presence / absence of relational and emotional changes and impact in the work of FC and of their approach to their work;

14. Links to Civil Society – as partners / co-members as picking up the baton of providing support both infrastructure as well as practical;

15. Civil Society as part of political process of lobbying / campaigning for change;

16. Impact of austerity and before on the scale / work / legitimacy of community development practice within local authorities from before 1997 but accelerated over the past 10 - 15 years;

17. FC as a way of highlighting impact of cuts but also of seeking to manage the cuts process more sympathetically;

18. Lessons from Living Wage Campaign may be helpful: LWC started in 2001 built up momentum over time established coalition of support to change the terms of the public conversation locally; potential for FC to build such a momentum – what learning is there on 'what works'.

Next Steps/Sustainability/Learning:

1. Potential of FC to act as a local catalyst for change by bringing in different agencies (from local authority to police) in a significantly different way from the LSP model;

2. Absence of the role of the RDAs and GOs providing data and frameworks for discussion may be an advantage in that responsibility is shifted but does illustrate 'institutional/organisational memory loss';

3. Potential to establish specific commissions on different areas (Employment / Equality and Diversity);

4. Focus on both what worked and what did not – key question who is the audience for the FC – national govt; other services/private sector – especially those who employ local people or could;

5. Communication Campaigns – powerful stories, i.e. Sheffield's 'Life Expectancy Bus Journey' as well as neighbourhood narratives and stories;

6. Need to support the development of a Civil Society infrastructure (?) – Claimants Union;

7. Use of practitioner research projects – need to have the 'unusual suspects' in the room;

8. Critical thinking and discussion needed too: structural barriers here need to be changed;

9. Potential of the FC model to exclude (the unintended consequence?) equalities work and the understanding/application of the Public Sector Duty and the use of Impact Assessments;

10. Risk of FC being dominated by elected members;

11. Potential offered by FC experience suggests a revival of local leadership and a wish to construct alliances which has scope for development and change.

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The Webb Memorial Trust

The Webb Memorial Trust has pursued the intellectual legacy of Beatrice Webb (1858–1943), who, together with her husband Sydney (1859–1947), embarked on a vigorous programme of social reform. Beatrice Webb had a plan of what a good society free from poverty would look like. It took 30 years for her views to be accepted, but they became the basis for Britain s welfare state, and in the 30 years following the Second World War, British society made good progress on poverty as a result.

Since 1944, the Webb Memorial Trust has worked to advance education and learning with respect to the history and problems of government and social policy. Initially delivered via debates and discussions at Beatrice Webb House in Surrey, in 1987 the Trust refocused efforts to concentrate on funding research and conferences that aim to provide practical solutions to poverty and inequality. Never has this work been more important. Tough economic conditions and changes to the welfare state mean more people are living in, or are at risk of, poverty than they have been for the last 20 years.

To find out how the Webb Memorial Trust aims to tackle poverty and inequality in the UK, and to learn more about the achievements of Beatrice Webb, visit www.webbmemorialtrust.org.uk

Edge Hill University **I4P** **All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty**