

Waltham Forest Equality Diversity and Inclusion: Making a Living Strategy



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Foreword

Waltham Forest is a place where people want to live, work and study because of the incredible diversity and spirit of its communities. During the Covid-19 pandemic, residents across the borough came together as neighbours to support one another like never before. At the same time, the unequal impact of the pandemic, coupled with national protests about systemic injustices and the cost-of-living crisis laid bare the stark reality that many residents face systemic discrimination and barriers to living healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives. We are in no doubt as to the scale of entrenched inequality across the UK.

It is the role of everyone in Waltham Forest and beyond to call out injustice and face up to the challenges our society faces. Despite over a decade of austerity imposed by central Government and increased inequalities across the country, we are determined to work differently to support residents to make a good living and live well over the course of their lives. Our top priority as a Council is to support equality, diversity and inclusion for our staff and residents.

In Waltham Forest, we have not been afraid of undertaking radical approaches to tackle the bigger challenges faced by our communities. The world's first Citizens' Assembly on hate crime demonstrated that when we trust our residents and actively involve them in developing solutions, meaningful change can happen for everyone's benefit.

More broadly, the pandemic highlighted the daily barriers that prevent residents from living well, and the systemic challenges that lead to unequal life outcomes. It showed us that we need to work differently, handing more power and influence to those who do not have a voice. It further evidenced the need to make decisions affecting our communities hand in hand with our residents.

The State of the Borough report framed in sobering detail the facts and figures of the unequal society that we live in, but it only began to tell the full story. Our community conversations allowed us to hear from residents and better understand their deep frustrations about these issues. The EDI Making a Living Summit brought the lived experience and evidence base together for participants to have constructive and informed debate and agree upon a set of recommendations to build a more inclusive and equal Waltham Forest.

The message from these conversations was clear: for many, the wider system works against residents trying to make ends meet. Residents shared that there are not enough well-paid, flexible and good quality jobs in the borough, and systemic discrimination at all stages of life makes it even harder to access good jobs in supportive workplaces. For those unable to work due to their health or because of caring responsibilities, the benefits system is over-complicated and support is insufficient. There is not enough local childcare, meaning it is often affordable. For residents at retirement age, the cost-of-living crisis makes it even harder to make ends meet on meagre pensions and state benefits.

Residents also told us about how failures of the systems and processes meant to support them impacted on them as individuals: people shared the challenges of being assessed as fit to work when they felt unable to; asylum seekers and refugees in our borough told us that a lack of documentation forced them into unsafe working conditions; others discussed the lack of employment opportunities for those without a clean criminal record and the barriers created by often unnecessary requirements to have binary pronouns. In total residents shared over 90 ways in which systems and processes created barriers to them being able to make a good living and living well.

We are grateful to everyone who has given over their time in this process and to all the residents who shared their experiences both in the community conversations and at the EDI Making a Living Summit. Whilst it is impossible to eradicate inequalities overnight, the 15 recommendation areas for action agreed over the Summit's three days are the first step towards change.

An independent and democratic deliberative process would not have been possible without the Democratic Society, who provided guidance during the engagement and facilitated the Summit, enabling participants to collectively create the recommendation areas for action. We offer particular thanks to the voluntary and community groups who gave up their time and provided their expertise to run supportive, welcoming, and inclusive workshops and participate in the EDI Making a Living Summit. Their knowledge and passionate advocacy was invaluable. Finally, a personal thank you to Councillor Ahsan Khan, who was instrumental throughout the whole process. His personal ambition to support all residents to make a better living and bold desire to work differently has driven this programme.

This Strategy is the hard work of so many residents across the borough and is firmly built on the foundations of their challenges, their experiences and their solutions. It is a call for the Council to act on recommendations to reimagine its services and improve its own ways of working, but also to use its influence and partnerships to scale up the response across the borough. While our strategic recommendations are challenging they are fully achievable with a real commitment to change.

The hard work now begins to create a borough where all workplaces are truly inclusive, where all residents can find and keep a good job, where everyone can access learning and skills support when they need it, and where we can build a fairer and more caring system that does not abandon people who are the most disadvantaged. This is how we can collectively build the fairer and more equal borough we want for the future, where everyone can make a good living and live in financial security throughout their lives.



Cllr Grace Williams, Leader of the Council



Cllr Vicky Ashworth, Portfolio Lead for Jobs, Social Inclusion and Equalities

Executive summary

The EDI Making a Living Strategy is the culmination of a year's work by the Council, residents and voluntary and community groups (VCS) working together in Waltham Forest. The strategy is built on the evidence base of the State of the Borough report. This publication gave an analysis of both the economic challenges and opportunities in Waltham Forest and the wider systemic challenges facing residents, alongside new evidence about the lived experiences shared through the community conversations. The strategy outlines four priorities that came forward from the community conversations and 15 recommended areas for action agreed by a representative group of residents and VCS representatives at the EDI Making a Living Summit event in March 2022. This document sets out the legacy of this work, and the next steps for the borough to tackle inequalities.

Making a living was identified as one of the five key themes identified in the State of the Borough report, published in June 2021 detailing significant and persistent inequalities and their impacts on the lives of residents. Alongside this evidence the damaging consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly on those most impacted by structural inequalities, meant that making a living was prioritised as the first focus area.

Many people in Waltham Forest face multiple challenges to making a good living, including being more likely to experience discrimination because of who they are. The inequalities that people experience when trying to make a good living are not always visible to wider society, yet they have a profound impact on almost all aspects of people's lives. Inequality and discrimination can begin at the earliest stages of the education system and can continue as people try to find a good first job, seek to progress professionally and look for opportunities to retrain and reskill throughout their working lives. Opportunities to find flexible and fulfilling jobs that pays reasonable wages, and to draw a liveable pension in later life are also unfairly distributed.

Community is at the heart of this strategy. The residents and community groups of Waltham Forest have been active participants in community conversations and were at the centre of the design of the EDI Making a Living Summit in March. The summit brought together 32 residents and community group representatives. The summit participants created 15 recommendations which responded to over 90 challenges identified in community group workshops, ethnographic research and online and in-person engagement.

This strategy and its recommendations set out the initial actions the Council, businesses and stakeholders in Waltham Forest must take to tackle the challenges residents face trying to make ends meet. The initial action plan sets out how the next six months will build momentum by delivering key jobs academies and employment support services, training and education programmes, and internal changes to the Council's policies and practices. A full action plan will then set out the costed and measurable interventions that must be made to enable everyone in the borough can live well and make a good living.

To meet the ambition of these recommendations in the longer term, a more proactive approach to tackling the challenges people face is needed, ensuring equal access to support and services, and creating a system that fits with people's lives, reaching all communities and providing multi-purpose community spaces that will bring people together.

The Mission: To make Waltham Forest a fairer and more equal borough, and support everyone to make a good living.

The Council, stakeholders, businesses, voluntary groups, and residents must work together to achieve meaningful change and support everyone to make a good living and live well over the course of their lives. This strategy is the first step in our commitment to work in a more participatory way to tackle inequalities both now and in the future.

Key themes:

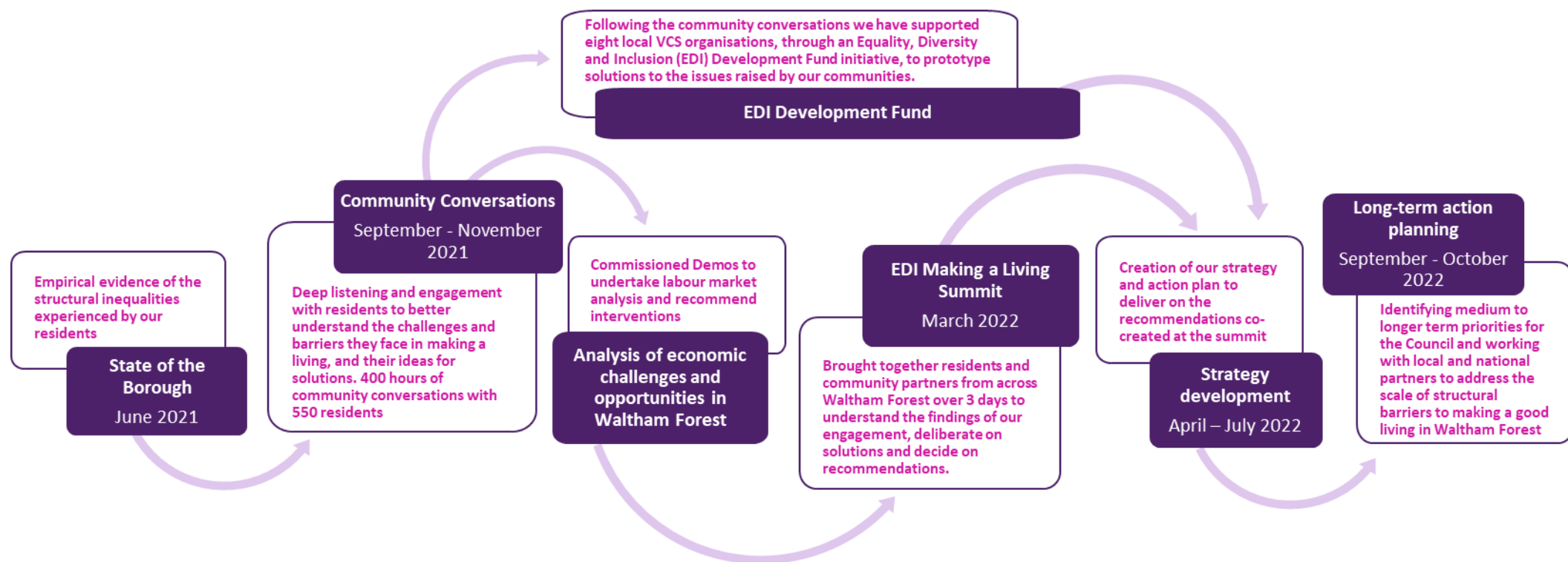
- **Building inclusive workplaces**
- **Developing good quality jobs for all**
- **Learning, advice, and skills support for those who need it most**
- **Creating a caring and fair system**

The story so far: Putting communities at the heart of the approach

Building an evidence base to drive change

Waltham Forest should be a place where every resident can make a good living and live well. To make this happen, residents, voluntary groups, the Council and local businesses have been working together develop solutions that respond to the experiences of people living in Waltham Forest, and their aspirations for change.

This strategy and the recommendations have been developed as part of a wider programme of engagement, informed by rigorous research and analysis. Throughout this process working in partnership between the Council, VCS groups and residents has been critical to building deeper connections and creating forums where people can share their experiences and use these to inform solutions. This approach has been fundamental to the success of this programme. It is only if we continue to work in this way that we will truly make the borough a fairer and more equal place for all.



In focus: State of the Borough report

The **State of the Borough report** was developed to establish an evidence base around inequalities in Waltham Forest. You can read the full report [here](#).

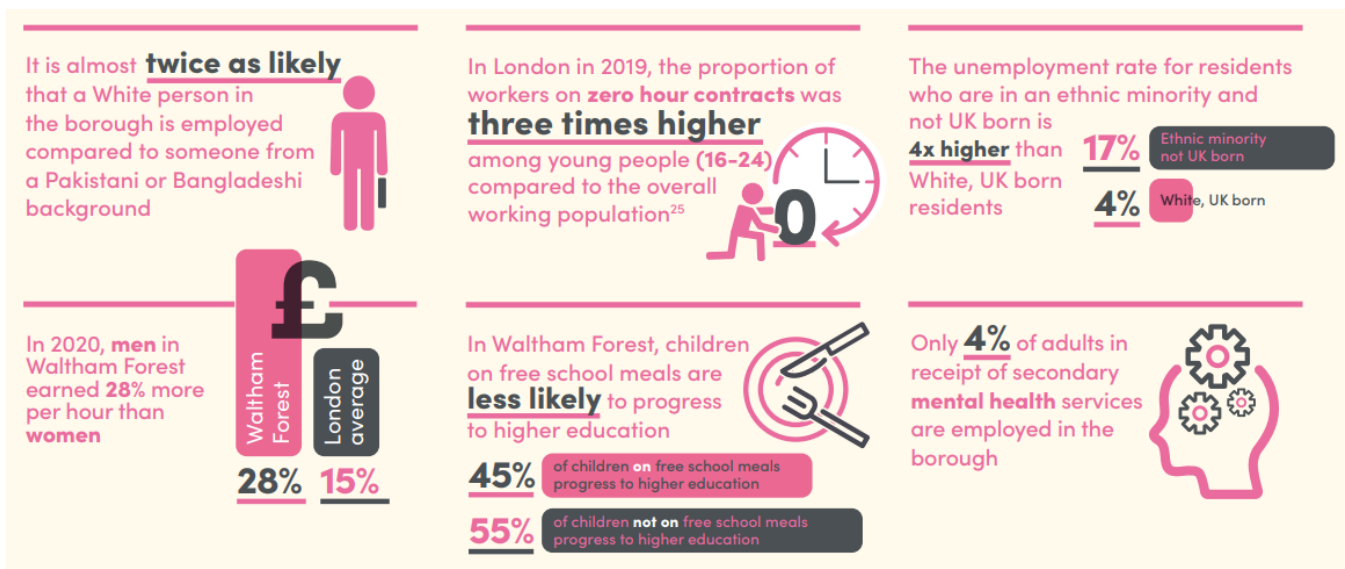
The report is based on national evidence and studies (such as the Marmot Review on the social determinants of health), local data and insights (about the borough and the people who live here) and the views of residents.

The findings set out the scale of challenges that people face in Waltham Forest, as some key examples demonstrate:

- Only 4% of adults in receipt of secondary mental health services are employed in the Borough.
- In London in 2019, the disability pay gap was 16.6%, having increased by 2.4% in the last 5 years.
- Nationally, women carry out an average of 60% more unpaid work than men, including unpaid care and domestic work. This leads to higher levels of economic inactivity among women.

The report showed that inequalities in Waltham Forest are structural and that many residents experience multiple, overlapping inequalities which significantly and negatively affect their lives.

Through the report, five key areas were identified in relation to a person's life. Making a Living was chosen as the first priority, following in particular the unequal socio-economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. The importance of work and securing a good income was self-evident in the data, but it was also clear that for those who cannot undertake paid work because of their wider responsibilities or due to living with a life-limiting health condition, and for those trying to draw a liveable pension in later life, that the wider system prevents many from being able to live well and be financially secure.



In focus: community conversations

Following on from the State of the Borough report, the community conversations explored the lived experience of the inequalities and structural challenges that people in the borough face daily. Held throughout autumn 2021, the community conversations identified the barriers many people in Waltham Forest face to making a good living, and the solutions they suggested. The voluntary and community sector played a significant role in enabling these conversations, with nine local voluntary and community organisations leading key parts of the community engagement and creating safe spaces for honest discussions.

The State of the Borough report identified groups who experienced the greatest barriers in making a good living due to structural discrimination and systemic challenges. From this, six key target groups were identified to share their lived experience, including Black men, south Asian women, younger and older residents, disabled people and migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers. There were many other groups who also face systemic barriers to making a good living, and workshops were held with other groups including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual+ (LGBTQIA+) people, people with mental health difficulties and people experiencing long-term unemployment.

Through the community conversations, 550 residents shared their experiences through over 400 hours of engagement including:

- 20 workshops with nine different groups, hosted by a leading member of the Voluntary and Community Sector
- Ethnographic research with 13 participants
- Street-based face to face engagement
- 120 spontaneous conversations at mass engagement events
- A digital survey which received over 250 responses

In total the community conversations identified over 90 challenges and 75 potential solutions. These insights were used to inform further conversations and to co-design solutions with residents at the EDI Making a Living Summit in March 2022.

In focus: EDI Making a Living Summit

Taking place over three days, **the EDI Making a Living Summit brought together people from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints to co-design ideas for action and recommendations for change.** 32 participants from a range of ages, ethnicities and employment statuses came together, with the majority having previously engaged with the community conversations. Participants were a mixture of residents and voluntary and community sector group representatives who worked with marginalised communities. Over one third of participants identified as disabled, and one in six were from the LGBTQIA+ community.

The residents who attended came together because they wanted to share their own experiences of trying to make a good living and live well in Waltham Forest, and because they wanted to make a positive difference for their communities. During the summit, they discussed four themes identified through the community conversations, with each day having a different focus:

Day one: Understand: Participants were introduced to the State of the Borough and community conversation findings, with presentations from elected members, officers, and testimony from a resident.

Day two: Deliberate: Participants reviewed analysis of the economic challenges and opportunities in Waltham Forest and evidence of best practice before identifying potential solutions relating to each of four themes. Their ideas were tested with expert practitioners to develop them further.

Day three: Decide: Participants developed their ideas into recommendations, reviewing each other's work and presenting the final recommendations to the whole group for collective agreement through a democratic vote.

By the end of the Summit, residents had agreed 15 recommendations to tackle inequalities around making a living, as outlined in this strategy.

In focus: the EDI Development Fund

Building the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to support people in the borough to make ends meet and live well has been a key commitment through this work. VCS groups were integral to the community conversations and will continue to be heavily involved with the delivery of the strategy.

Eight voluntary organisations were provided with a budget of £1,250 each to prototype solutions to the issues raised through the community conversations as part of an EDI Development Fund. The fund ran from January until May 2022, with projects piloting solutions which could potentially be expanded and delivered with additional funding over the longer-term. Projects included:

- A weekly drop-in service trialled by Age UK Waltham Forest to support older people to understand and maximise their benefit entitlements
- Training workshops for local employers, delivered by ELOP, exploring the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ staff and strategies to support LGBTQIA+ people in the workplace
- Digital skills sessions hosted by Waltham Forest Disability Resource Centre
- Waltham Forest Women's Network hosting workshops creating a safe space for women from a South Asian background, Black women and domestic violence survivors to speak about the challenges they face and what type of support they want and need to make a living. Relevant organisations attended and delivered sessions on support available to help people find or to stay in work

Learning from these projects will continue to inform the approach to supporting residents to make ends meet and make a living.

Findings: the challenges to Making a Living in Waltham Forest

The residents of Waltham Forest detailed the range of challenges they face in trying to make ends meet and supporting their loved ones, and set out how discrimination is at the root of many of these issues. These challenges span the frustrations of entering the job market to the course of people's careers. They focus on the quality of available jobs, lack of easy access to skills and support to help people pursue professional ambitions, inflexible employment opportunities, and inadequate pension provision alongside often complicated personal and family commitments.

"Already three steps behind in the queue from the start...you're facing an invisible barrier in trying to get to that first line of interviews".

Reflections on finding work from one Black resident

Inclusion in the workplace

When people face barriers to finding work, there are significant consequences on their lives and the communities to which they belong. Lack of employment deprives people of a decent income, of the opportunity to fulfil their potential and to make social connections. Being unemployed, particularly long-term, contributes significantly to poor health.

Key themes emerging from the Community Conversations:

- **Inclusive recruitment:** People shared their frustrations around the complexity of job applications, which can be a significant barrier for people trying to find good jobs, particularly for people who experience digital exclusion or are less confident in their English language skills. Many workshop participants felt that 'white passing' names enabled people to access interviews, whereas names which did not sound 'white' were often overlooked.
- **Respectful workplace cultures:** People spoke of discriminatory workplace practices they had experienced, including micro-aggressions, toxic environments, bullying and lack of diverse representation in senior roles which led to many participants feeling left out of workspaces physically and culturally. This has a negative impact for individuals' emotional wellbeing and quality of life.
- **Supportive workplace practices:** In the community conversations, residents stated that they were often missing support around flexible working, particularly when this was needed to allow them to work alongside unpaid caring roles. Residents who identified as disabled raised issues of inflexible Human Resources policies, bullying, and discrimination, saying their confidence was lowered as a result.

"My employer said she would deduct my wages if I had to go home to deal with an emergency situation for my cared for family member" – Participant in workshop with people with caring responsibilities

There are just over two people of working age for every job in Waltham Forest, the third lowest rate in all of London. The neighbouring boroughs of Redbridge and Haringey are also in the bottom five, suggesting there is a shortage of local jobs in the wider area. The shortage of local jobs is not felt equally and there are large inequalities in education and employment outcomes, as well as structural issues of racism and discrimination that affect the high proportion of our non-white British residents. White British people in Waltham Forest are twice as likely to be employed compared to their Pakistani and Bangladeshi peers. The employment gap between these two groups is 34.5%, compared to the London average of 21.5%. The gender pay gap in Waltham Forest is also larger than average, a 23% median pay gap compared with 16% on average in London and 15% in Britain overall.

Developing good quality jobs for all

Work can and should be a force for good, with everyone able to access well paid jobs. People are of course driven by different motivations at different points in their careers and lives, but many features of what a good quality job is apply in any scenario. Good quality jobs provide people with opportunities for progression, fulfilment, dignity and a sense of pride. Security, workplace protections, decent pay and conditions are also at the heart of high-quality work, so that residents feel well looked after, can live comfortably and enjoy a good work life balance.

The community conversations showed that too many people in Waltham Forest are not in good quality jobs and don't have opportunity to access them. This means not everyone in the borough is able to fulfil their potential and enjoy the benefits of good work.

"I want a job that I feel like I make a difference to others in, especially for young people in care. I want to feel valued and a part of something that supports others. The only thing is, I think I'm going to have to have a job where I can work from home, otherwise I'm going to really struggle physically."

Niomi, Ethnographic research participant.

Key themes emerging from the Community Conversations:

- **Good quality career opportunities:** Residents spoke about the impact of low pay on their lives. People reflected on how challenging it can be to progress into permanent roles following apprenticeships or programmes such as the Kickstart scheme. Residents said in practice, this meant they have to balance their desire for progression with their financial reality. Many also said that in-work progression is a challenge, with many feeling they hit a glass ceiling in a range of industries.
- **The Council leading the way:** Residents identified the crucial role the Council can play in developing good quality jobs locally. As a large employer, service provider, and commissioner, the Council has relationships and influence to effect change across the private sector, commissioned services and with public and voluntary sector partners. Driving positive change at scale would address some of the issues around lack of jobs, job instability, low wages, and lack of training in Waltham Forest.

- **Supporting local businesses:** Residents highlighted that local businesses are important employers that play a crucial role supporting people to make a living. However, residents also reflected that there are barriers to setting up businesses, particularly a lack of advice on finance.

"My experience I have is that I have got to work that little bit harder, clean your clothes that little bit better" – Participant in workshop with Black men

There are not enough good quality, skilled and well-paid jobs for everyone in the borough. Jobs in Waltham Forest are currently more likely to be classed as lower skilled than in many other London Boroughs, with 55% of the employed people in the borough working in managerial positions compared to 62% for the London average.

Skills, qualifications, learning, and access to advice

Developing the skills you need to access and progress in employment is essential to being able to make a good living. Education, training, and qualifications open opportunities to access more rewarding roles and the chance to pursue dreams and ambitions. Making sure people in the borough have the right skills, learning, and educational opportunities is also important for the development of local businesses and the economy. Lifelong learning opportunities must be adaptable to meet people's needs at different points of their careers.

As the world of work is changing, it is also crucial that residents are equipped with access to high quality advice and guidance so they can make positive choices that are right for them and their loved ones.

"It would have been really helpful to get support from the council/job centre to help me find out about going back to study. When you're entering as a mature age student, I found less support in place" – Donna, ethnographic research participant

Key themes that emerged from the Community Conversations:

- **Careers advice and support:** Residents identified a lack of careers advice and support in secondary schools and colleges as a challenge. Some also spoke of being unacceptably denied work experience opportunities due to poor behaviour, and about how this often compounded inequalities.
- **Information and support:** Residents reflected that accessing information around finances from the Council, voluntary sector, and other organisations is difficult. Residents reflected that this was partly a problem about lack of awareness, and partly a problem of accessibility as digital-based services could exclude some residents who don't have access to the internet or who don't feel confident accessing support online.
- **Opportunities to build connections:** People spoke about how hard it can be to get and progress in good jobs without knowing the right people who can help. People also stressed the importance of knowing the right people to find good role models and feel a sense of belonging.

- **Reintegration into the labour market:** Many residents highlighted that they had faced challenges getting back into work because they had gaps in their employment histories, regardless of their reasons for these gaps. Residents highlighted that this is particularly an issue for women who disproportionately shoulder caring and childcare responsibilities. Residents also spoke of the financial impact of periods of unemployment.
- **Lack of access to digital services:** Being unable to access digital services, either through lack of confidence or knowledge in using digital and web services or through a lack of access to the internet was a key issue highlighted in the community conversations (approximately 6% of residents in Waltham Forest do not have regular internet access and 25% do not have the *Essential Digital Skills for Life* needed to safely benefit from, participate in and contribute to the digital world.)

"I dropped out of uni because I didn't have money to survive – my parents were out of the country sending me money - I had to prioritise living rather than getting an education." – Participant in workshop with young people on / formerly on Free School Meals

Educational outcomes in Waltham Forest vary compared to the rest of London, for example:

- 9% of residents have an equivalent of a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 1 qualification, compared to 6.3% across London.
- 56.9% of residents have qualifications higher than Level Four, compared to 58.5% across London.

A fair and caring system

Making a living is about so much more than jobs. Not everyone can work, and many people have retired after a lifetime of hard work, surviving on meagre pensions and benefits. Many people in Waltham Forest provide unpaid care and play a vital role for their loved ones and for the health and care system, but this can also restrict their ability to work full-time or at all. Some residents have disabilities or health conditions which similarly restrict their ability and capacity to work or affect the type of work they can do. People surviving on the basic state pension do not have enough to live on, and many do not know about benefits they are entitled to.

For many, being in work is not a guarantee of being able to make a living. The rise of the gig economy means many residents are in insecure work, where they are not guaranteed full-time hours each week. 40% of people working in Waltham Forest are in jobs that pay below the real London Living Wage – making it hard to make ends meet.

Residents made it clear that the system feels uncaring, unfair, and unsupportive. Examples included the risk of losing benefits for three months when getting a job, the rising cost of living combined with stagnating wages and a lack of affordable childcare and caring services to enable people to access employment. Systems which are digital by default also make life extremely challenging for people who cannot access things digitally. Often, just a little support is needed from a fairer system for people to thrive, not survive.

“It’s tough living on such a low income, you can’t do things you want to do, you miss out, you lose motivation” – Jason, Ethnographic research participant

Key themes that emerged from the Community Conversations:

- **Income support:** Residents stated that benefit applications are overly complicated, particularly for those with fewer digital skills. It can be hard to get the right help with completing applications. Residents with caring responsibilities said that carers allowance fails to account for the number of people being cared for which means that they struggle financially.
- **Rising cost of living:** High housing costs in the borough means that for many wages do not cover the cost of living. Other financial challenges ranged from struggling to afford travel to job interviews to having to drop out of university because of financial pressure. Residents also felt that the cost of childcare and a lack of flexible working opportunities present a key challenge preventing people from returning to work.
- **In-work poverty and wage gaps:** In the community conversations, people spoke of how low wages and a lack of finances to fund training makes existing inequalities and barriers worse.
- **Digital exclusion:** residents explained how the increasing requirements to do everything online excluded them, making them give up and feel frustrated.

“With my health issues, the stress of this situation could cause me to lose everything. But with a little bit of help, I could avoid a crisis and additional health risks” – Atikur, ethnographic research participant

The rising cost of living directly impacts the level of income that people need to live healthy and happy lives. With inflation at the highest levels for 30 years, people must meet a high cost of living to afford food, energy bills, rent and other basic essentials. For most residents, buying a house in the borough is out of reach, yet rental costs in the borough are very high in comparison to wages. The average rental costs in Waltham Forest are now £357 per week, increasing more rapidly than both the London and national average. With over 30,000 residents of retirement age, older residents are finding their pensions and benefits often provide inadequate income support to make ends meet. These high living costs means it is common that residents struggle to afford a decent standard of living even when in employment.

Making Waltham Forest fairer and more equal

Participants at the EDI Making a Living Summit co-designed 15 recommendations. The recommendations cover four themes identified through the Community Conversations and have been designed to make the borough fairer and more equal, supporting everyone to make a good living and live well.

To make Waltham Forest a fairer and more equal borough, and support everyone to make a good living.

Building
inclusive
workplaces

A borough that gives voice to marginalised and under-represented groups by working with charities and community organisations to support employers with creating welcoming, accessible and safe workplaces for all.

Developing
good
quality jobs
for all

A borough where people's and communities' needs are understood and met, where all jobs and employees are valued and able to progress for the wider community to benefit in a holistic way, to enable greater economic development and social integration by meeting and matching the needs of businesses and residents

Learning,
advice and
skills support
for those
who need it
most

A borough where no one is excluded from learning, advice and skills, goods and services, inclusive of IT skills or access, asylum seekers, race, gender, sexual orientation, housing status, language barriers, education level, age and disability – and understanding the purpose of businesses and services in the community.

Creating a
caring and
fair system

A borough where the leaders tackle the limitations and barriers, including for marginalised groups, to accessing support and creating an equal system from grassroots level.

In depth: Building inclusive workplaces

Problem Statement: Residents and employees report an absence of inclusive workplaces in Waltham Forest. In turn, this has highlighted a lack of well-paid local opportunities for marginalised and unrepresented individuals.

Vision Statement: A borough that gives voice to marginalised and under-represented groups by working with charities and community organisations to support employers with creating welcoming, accessible, and safe workplaces for all.

Recommendation 1: Reasonable Adjustment Passports

"I had to choose between my health and my work, which was difficult because I am my sole provider." – Participant in workshop with people with health conditions

Aim: To remove the need to repeat reasonable workplace adjustment needs throughout working life, make it easier to start the conversation, reduce stress and simplify changing roles.

Recommendation 2: Facilitating Flexible Working

"...representative from the DWP stated that there were not many roles 'for people like you who are looking for employment and had caring responsibilities.'" – Participant in workshop with people with caring responsibilities

Aim: To get the most from employees, remove barriers to optimising work, enable a wider range of employees and make the employer more attractive.

Recommendation 3: Make job adverts and application forms available to all by making digital and hard copies

Spotlight on the EDI Development Fund

The EDI development fund projects aimed to respond to the challenges identified in the community conversations. Two of these focused specifically on ensuring workplaces are inclusive:

Employment solutions support: MTC learning supported a group of 27 residents who had experienced challenges in gaining access to employment. The support included workshops and other engagement to understand their experiences and individual needs.

Information, advice and guidance for employment, development of action plans, and development of CVs and cover letters was given to residents. Following the sessions, 93% of participants reported increased confidence levels, as well as an increased understanding of key aspects of employment.

Seeing to believing project: ELOP ran two EDI workshops with the local LGBTQIA+ community to identify changes that would have the biggest positive impact. The key recommendation from the workshops was the provision of training for employers to address the negative experiences for LGBTQIA+ people in the workplace, and the impact on their mental health and wellbeing, and ability to make a living.

ELOP delivered a pilot training workshop for local voluntary sector organisations exploring the challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community and strategies for developing accessible and affirmative practice.

"I can't get a job because of my language – even though people tell me my English is ok, I don't feel confident" – Participant in workshop with speakers of English as a second language

Aim: To make it easier for people to find jobs available, with everyone having access to paper as well as digital applications (choice) because not everyone can access computers and internet.

Recommendation 4: Consultation with all staff seeking their input for creating all-inclusive workplaces, including future proofing, acoustics, lighting, heating, accessibility, braille and inclusive male, female, gender neutral and disabled staff.

"Being supported in a job is hard. I've been mocked for my lifestyle and out-ed without my consent. I've been known as 'the lesbian in the office'. – Participant in workshop with members of LGBTQIA+ community

Aim: To support an open and honest inclusive environment for staff views and needs which supports the green agenda and is cheaper in the long run, using a loop system, recycled air and providing prayer rooms and wheelchair accessibility.

The Council's commitment to making this a reality

Exclusionary workplace practices and environments have significant consequences on staff wellbeing and morale. Poor recruitment practices make it harder to get a foothold into a good career. As a Council, it is our aspiration to be an employer of choice for residents and staff. Being inclusive is crucial to this, and over the last few years we have taken several steps forward, including:

- Being accredited by the Mayor of London's Good Work Standard;
- Gaining recognition as a Disability Confident employer;
- Developing staff networks to support HR practices, encourage inclusive workplaces and promote safe space clinics; and
- Implementing a range of family friendly policies that go above and beyond minimum statutory requirements.

However, we can always do more to help existing and future colleagues to thrive. We will invest in our staff and keep striving every day to be an inclusive employer, including introducing reasonable adjustment passports before the end of this year to better meet the needs of our staff. We will continue to develop new ways of working which further commit to flexible working, and consult staff on workspace design as we develop a new civil building at Fellowship Square. Full details of all projects, programmes, and policies can be found in the initial action plan.

As the largest employer in Waltham Forest, we must lead the way for how every employer, large and small, can create more equal and inclusive workplaces so people can be themselves at work without facing barriers to professional progression. We need to leverage our influence and build partnerships with other local employers to make this happen.

In depth: Developing good quality jobs for all

Problem Statement: The Council needs to do more work in understanding the wider community needs and barriers, both of residents and businesses, to ensure more good quality, accessible and sustainable jobs for everyone. The problem is that not all jobs pay a living wage, which itself is not even enough, given the context of rising living costs.

Vision Statement: A borough where people's and communities' needs are understood and met, where all jobs and employees are valued and able to progress. This means the wider community benefits in a holistic way, with greater economic development and social integration achieved as the needs of businesses and residents are met and matched.

Recommendation 1: Improve transport and public transport accessibility and affordability so that more employees can access jobs in the borough and more customers travel to local businesses, leading to more sales, growth and economic opportunities.

"If you can't afford to get there, you will never get anywhere" – Participant in workshop with young ex-offenders

Aim: To provide affordable transport which enables everyone to access employment and reduce pollution, increases access to local shops, increases economic growth and employment, reduces loneliness and ensures everyone can safely travel to work.

Recommendation 2: Encourage and support the creation of local internships, apprenticeships and enterprise programmes (preferably paid), as well as mapping and co-ordinating existing provision, resulting in a clear online and in person (within community hubs) directory for people to use. These programmes should be for everyone, but also with a large number specifically for marginalised and under-represented groups, as well as those that aim to fill gaps within the community's needs.

"Most of us don't know the existence of those services. We need to look more, you can go to Jobcentre but no proper help" – Participant in workshop with migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers

Spotlight on the EDI Development Fund

Of the eight projects funded by the EDI development fund, three were specifically targeted at getting people into good quality jobs.

Employment Support Programme for young people:

Project Zero ran employment support sessions for 45 young Black residents in the Outset centre. All participants were also referred on to another Project Zero service to continue support after the sessions.

All participants reported that they found the session helpful and 87% said they would recommend the service to a friend. One participant with learning difficulties has taken up part-time employment directly from the support and connections provided. Another participant with an interest in becoming a pilot has been signposted to a programme that supports Black candidates into the aviation industry.

Employment support for women: the Waltham Forest Women's Network delivered workshops for women to speak out about their barriers into employment, set goals and access support. Sessions were targeted at South Asian women, Black women, and women who have experienced domestic violence.

The Network invited support services tailored around women's wants and needs and participants were positive about the value of the sessions and the connections they had made.

Aim: To enable people, particularly groups who historically have been unable to access programmes due to prejudice and a lack of networks, to get a foot on the jobs ladder. This will be achieved through coordinated programmes and mapping what new programmes are needed, supporting residents' employment journeys and personal development.

Recommendation 3: Employment support programmes tailored to different needs, for example for older people, people moving back into work and young people.

"I think the event was meant to encourage us but it honestly just gave me a huge reality check on how difficult it is to get into law" – Amira, ethnographic research participant

Aim: To remove all barriers in a holistic way to support progression to higher wage work, creating a sense of worth and acceptance and positively impacting on mental health.

Recommendation 4: Council-funded mental health training for local employers (including the Council) developed in partnership with mental health services, so that employers can better support employees, provided by local practitioners. This will include information packs for all employees, advice on language around rejection, enabling people to work from home, and testimonies from people with lived experience.

"Care team are good at getting you in employment, but they don't support you when you are in employment. They don't believe you when you say you're not well" – Participant in workshop for people with mental health difficulties

Aim: To ensure everyone with mental health needs that need to be managed is supported, tackling stigma and increasing empathy and improving wellbeing to promote employability, flexibility and balance in employees' lives, boosting productivity and connecting people to further professional support if needed.

Spotlight on the EDI Development Fund (cont.)

Career development and progression support for Black men: ELBA ran a series of 'Future Focus' workshops for Black men in Waltham Forest to offer insights about jobs and career progression in engineering, finance, and insurance. The initiative supported 17 individual residents aged 21-50.

Workshop participants reported increased confidence and skills, improved career awareness and an appreciation for improved access to employer contacts.

Three people who attended subsequently applied for jobs at the companies who supported the scheme and others who attended are continuing to access support from ELBA.

The Council's commitment to making this a reality

We know that there are not enough good quality job opportunities in the borough, and that more jobs in Waltham Forest are classed as lower skilled than other London boroughs. The Council is ambitious about developing more good quality local jobs that offer opportunities for progression and increasing income. Over the last few years, we have supported residents into good quality jobs through:

- Futures Programme supporting underrepresented young residents to upskill;
- Passport to Work scheme equipping residents with key skills;
- The Fair Deal Jobs Programme engaging 3,500 residents and supporting 350 into work placements; and
- Gaining accreditation as a London Living Wage organisation.

We want to go above and beyond our existing programmes in the coming months and years. To support mental health in the workplace, we will encourage partners to sign up to and promote the Mindful Employer Charter. We must look at how we can support people experiencing unemployment so that travel and finances are not barriers to work. We will also review how services such as apprenticeships and internships currently support residents so that we can better support people in under-represented groups to access employment. We also recognise that the London Living Wage does not mean financial security and we will work to better understand the financial challenges people face and to build fair solutions so no one must choose between buying food, paying for rent or heating during a cost-of-living crisis. It is vital that we go above and beyond our existing programmes across the borough in the coming months and years to scale up our response.

Developing good quality jobs across the borough is not something the Council can do alone. It is the responsibility of employers, businesses, anchor institutions and partners to proactively support more opportunities for residents. We must build these relationships with partners and businesses to create a job market in the borough that benefits communities and businesses alike.

In depth: Learning, advice, and skills support for those who need it most

Problem Statement: The Council and other businesses are not sufficiently active in identifying and addressing inequalities in the learning, advice and skills sector, not addressing issues and factors such as: young people's guidance through career choices; reskilling opportunities for adults at moments of change in life; childcare sponsors for single parents accessing education; support to access education and training for those with language barriers, mental health, disabilities and other challenges; older people excluded from learning, advice and skills; and asylum seekers and excluded Asian women.

Vision Statement: A borough where no one is excluded from learning, advice and skills, goods, and services. This should be the case regardless of IT skills or access, asylum status, race, gender, sexual orientation, housing status, language barriers, education level, age, disability and level of understanding about the purpose of businesses and services in the community.

Recommendation 1: A physical local building hub that provides tailored support, meeting the diverse needs of the wider community and empowering people to access skills, support and interests, which can lead to social inclusion and / or employment.

"One other thing that I find challenging is navigating all the support systems and programmes you can apply for - both for the children and for myself. I do my best, but there's a lot to find out about" - Rahmi, ethnographic research participant

Aim: To provide a holistic system that identifies and picks up everyone, regardless of personal background, aiming to address and treat people as belonging to the borough. The system should build safer, integrated communities, giving confidence and belonging and making services easier to use and access by bringing them under one roof.

Recommendation 2: Dedicated youth hubs that help young people and employers to take on young people on employment programmes that are paid and advertised well with thorough support, life skills and knowledge that is essential to the progression to the future of young people in Waltham Forest. This could be face-to-face and on social media, with online integration.

Spotlight on the EDI Development Fund

A lack of advice around employment, and the need for improved digital skills, both came out as key challenges in the community conversations. Because of this, two VCS groups focused their projects around these topics.

Digital Inclusion Project: Waltham Forest Disability Resource Centre ran a digital inclusion project supporting eight participants from a broad range of ages and backgrounds. Participants in the project had difficulty accessing digital services and information due to a learning disability, mental health condition and/or physical impairment.

The course tutors worked closely with participants to understand their interests and build skills that related to these. One participant, who loved 90s music and television was supported to find relevant media online, and to join a group singing session through Zoom. This gave the tutor an opportunity to teach them about email and other applications and to tutor them on online safety.

Information and advice drop-in sessions: the Work Rights Centre ran a drop-in session in Leytonstone Library, attended by nine people. The sessions provided confidential consultations on employment, including a needs assessments and advice on employment and welfare.

The sessions provided important advice for several people in difficult employment, financial and/or legal challenges who had limited understanding of their situations, or the solutions for tackling their problems.

“I heard about the kickstart programme through a friend, not my work coach. It's supposed to be for our age group, it's a bit stupid they didn't even let me know about it.” – Participant in workshop with young people

Aim: To empower young people to be who they want and have the potential to be, teaching skills which are not taught in schools such as finance, mental and social health, and to support employers to understand the value of apprenticeships and young people.

Recommendation 3: Evaluation of the wants and needs of under-represented groups, by signposting to relevant organisations. Follow-ups should ensure the signposting is a success through monitoring and evaluation. Ambassadors from groups should represent and support them by holding all services to account and ensuring members of the community get adequate support without bias.

“I was married at 17 and was just a stay at home wife and mother. I had no encouragement to get any employment and was just encouraged to get married” – Participant in workshop with South Asian women

Aim: To ensure all members of the community get adequate support without bias, ensuring services are held accountable and have measurable outcomes published in a simple way, in various formats, such as braille, easy-read etc.

The Council's commitment to making this a reality

Access to good learning, advice and skills opportunities at all ages is essential to getting a good first job, but also retraining and reskilling throughout working life. As a Council, we are committed to supporting our residents to develop the right skills, find worthwhile job opportunities, and feel supported and informed about their career and education choices. Several support services exist to assist residents accessing learning advice and skills, including:

- Steps into work programme – providing a personalised 1-2-1 service and helping residents into work;
- Supporting underrepresented young residents to upskill themselves to enter the enterprise, creative, tech and green sectors through the Futures Programme;
- Offering Early Help to residents who are not in employment and have multiple needs; and
- Adult Learning Service providing a wide range of opportunities, with half of learners accessing employment following completion of a course.

The recommendations from Summit participants are clear: there need to be physical spaces where multiple support services can be accessed simultaneously. To respond to this, we are scoping the delivery of four dedicated youth hubs in the borough that can offer a range of services, including employment advice and skills support. We will look to improve the support available in libraries and better advertise services so that more residents can take advantage of the offer. We will look to pilot targeted drop-in sessions which enable residents to visit community spaces such as libraries or VCS venues and access a range of learning advice and skills support, from the Council, businesses, and voluntary organisations in locations that better work for residents.

In depth: Creating a fair and caring system

Problem Statement: There are wider issues than just having a job. Leaders need to address the limitations and barriers, including for marginalised groups, to accessing information, advice, benefits, childcare, decent housing and all Council services.

Vision Statement: A borough where leaders tackle the limitations and barriers to accessing support, including for marginalised groups, and create an equal system from grassroots level.

Recommendation 1: Creating a safe space where residents, especially those who are marginalised or vulnerable, can access a wide range of services and resources.

"They should get someone to help you to go through the jobs, what you need to do and what money is coming out of benefits" – Participant in workshop with people living with people with a long-term health condition

Aim: To address the local need for an accessible hub where people can access multiple services and career opportunities without being hindered by obstacles or barriers.

Recommendation 2: The Council to change its systems for accessing information and services so that people who are digitally excluded and/or not able to leave their homes can easily access all Council services.

"I don't even know what support is out there for me" – Participant in workshop with older residents

Aim: To address digital exclusion within Council services and change and improve services for digitally excluded residents and those who are not able to leave their homes.

Recommendation 3: There needs to be a system of employment (with policies in place) with fair hours and leave and where it is easier to raise issues regarding work conditions. This should apply across all sectors for marginalised groups – to include the whole community, new and old.

Spotlight on the EDI Development Fund

Whilst many of the pilot projects focused on jobs and employment, Age UK Waltham Forest focused their pilot on supporting residents in navigating a complex and often uncaring support system.

Income Maximisation Drop-in service: Age UK Waltham Forest helped publicise and run a one day a week service in a local Community Centre for eight weeks, staffed by a trained volunteer. The services sought to assist older people in maximising their incomes.

21 people were provided with advice on how to maximise their income from benefits, pensions and concessions. Eight of the participants were supported to take-up additional or increased income.

"I don't want to be on benefits and I do want to work, but everything in my life is stopping that for now" - Sadiya, ethnographic research participant

Aim: To allow employees to be treated fair and equitably, without making assumption that everyone benefits from the same support. This would deliver an improved and positive workforce.

Recommendation 4: The Council 'goes to' community spaces to engage with people who are prevented from leaving their homes, or are unable to because of coercion or domestic violence. This would highlight available services rather than expecting them to come to the Council .

"There was little support at work, it was the place to get away but the pressure of having to deliver services and also manage my own wellbeing was sometimes too much to handle" - Participant in workshop with survivors of domestic violence

Aim: To provide knowledge and services to groups, particularly those who have experienced domestic violence, giving them greater confidence to make decisions and deal with their life circumstances.

The Council's commitment to making this a reality

Residents highlighted the wider systemic challenges to make a good living, from digital exclusion in accessing services, to overly complicated routes into receiving lifelines of support. We must continue to think further than just employment as the key solution if we are to help all people make a living in Waltham Forest. To help residents navigate the wider system, we are:

- Working with partners through the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) partnership to promote safe homes and streets, raise awareness of support and offer bystander intervention and 'stand by her' training;
- Promoting Children's and Families Centres as a safe space where people can access services and resources;
- Committed to flexible working, encouraging staff to work in the way that supports them to deliver their best work for residents; and
- Giving opportunities for residents who are digitally excluded to learn digital skills.

Over the coming months we will look to go beyond our existing interventions, implementing a new EDI training programme to all Council staff and identifying barriers to accessing Council services faced by people who are digitally excluded or unable to leave their homes. We will also review how other organisations in the borough can be supported to ensure all employees are treated fairly and look at existing examples of bringing community services under one roof to discover what works best for our residents.

Whilst we are committed to changing our own systems and practices to be more inclusive, we realise that to create a more caring and fair system is not just the responsibility of the Council, but of all partner organisations in the borough. We will work to ensure minimum standards are enforced, but also to help local partners and businesses understand what more they can do to support residents and communities who are most affected by inequalities.

Conclusion: Legacy of the work and scaling up the response

As a process, the Waltham Forest EDI Making a Living Summit was the first of its kind in the UK. Building on traditional approaches to deliberative democracy, participants who had previously taken part in the community conversations came together to create the set of recommendations within this report. The strength of these recommendations lies in both the evidence base that preceded it, and the dedication of residents and community representatives at the summit to creating change for the communities of Waltham Forest.

There is an opportunity to use not only the recommendations, but also the principles of community involvement throughout the work to radically change outcomes for residents. For participants, the process provided an opportunity to vocalise their experiences and decide upon genuine change to the services they use and the area they care about. The 15 recommendations they decided upon, all of which received more than 80% support when voted on at the Summit, have been accepted by Waltham Forest Council in full.

The ambition to tackle inequalities in Waltham Forest is strong, but the scale of challenges faced by people in the borough remains significant. The Council is well-placed to drive positive change, as a place-based leader, the largest employer in the borough, and as a commissioner and provider of services. Delivery of the recommendations from the Summit will be a good starting point to guide the work needed, with partnership working across all sectors needed to implement these successfully. However, more consideration is needed for longer-term change.

This strategy does not sit in isolation. The initial action plan sets out the priorities of delivery in the next few months, so that the greatest impact can be made as quickly as possible. It has largely focused on what the Council is currently delivering, and can deliver within the next few months, directly or indirectly. The full action plan will be delivered later this year, setting out costed and measurable interventions to ensure everyone in the borough can make a good living and live well. Summit participants will continue to be actively involved throughout each step of creating the full action plan.

The delivery of this Strategy marks an important milestone in creating a fairer and more equal environment for people to make a living, but it is not the end of the journey. Making a Living is only one of five themes identified within the State of the Borough, and there is so much more to do to fully respond to the other stages of life where people face inequality and discrimination in Waltham Forest. A review of the State of the Borough report will take place next year to assess the progress that has been made to date.

Achieving better outcomes for residents around making a living and wider inequalities will require significant structural and cultural shifts. This strategy commits to a more participatory way of working with residents to tackle these inequalities both now and in the future. **Together, we must listen, learn and act.**