

# PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE PLYMOUTH FAIRNESS COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS

September 2014



## I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Plymouth City Council is pleased to receive the final report of the Plymouth Fairness Commission, and welcomes the opportunity to respond to the recommendations for fairness outlined within its report.

1.2 The Commission's report is a vivid reminder of what must be tackled in this city to address issues of fairness and inequality, yet it also provides a valuable reminder of what Plymouth has to offer - our abundant natural resources, a proud history, a resilient city spirit and the desire to really make a difference when we collectively choose to.

1.3 Plymouth City Council and its partners have for many years attempted to address inequalities across the city, with some notable improvements in outcomes for our residents. However, the gap in inequalities has not been significantly reduced, which remains of great concern to us all. The work of the Plymouth Fairness Commission has been essential to enable the city to refocus its energies on inequality.

1.4 As a Council, we fully support the Principles of Fairness outlined in the report and will continue to work with the Fairness Commission and other partners to identify ways to strengthen our approach to promoting fairness across all areas of our work.

1.5 In July 2013, the Council adopted a new Corporate Plan to be a Brilliant Co-operative Council. This Plan describes a new vision for the Council – 'Creating a fairer Plymouth where everyone does their bit' and introduces shared co-operative values that are central to the next phase of the Council's future journey. At its heart is a co-operative approach to engagement, co-production and delivery of services that puts people in control of their own communities and the services they receive. These themes are represented throughout the Commission's final report.

1.6 The Council also adopted fairness as one of its core co-operative values, and was a key reason for launching the Plymouth Fairness Commission in April 2013 to help make the city a fairer place to live and work.

1.7 Plymouth City Council remains committed to addressing fairness in the face of adversity. Significant reductions in funding alongside increasing demand, and costs, for local government services means that Plymouth City Council faces an estimated funding shortfall amounts of £64.5m over the next three years.

1.8 To address such challenges, the Council is currently embarking on a major Transformation Programme to fundamentally change the way it goes about its business by improving efficiency and reducing costs whilst still delivering benefits to customers. The principles of fairness will be an integral part of this ambitious programme and the benefits it is tasked to deliver, in line with the Council's vision, objectives and values.

## 2. CREATING A FAIRER CITY

2.1 Illustrations of work already happening as part of our ambition to become a Brilliant Co-operative Council, and which align with the principles of fairness include:

- The **Plymouth Energy Community (PEC)**, set up in 2013 as a members' co-operative run by local people seeking to address rising energy bills and carbon emissions in the city. The co-operative helps residents to save money on their fuel bills, reduce their energy usage, and raise awareness about their energy options. It is run by the community, for the community; giving residents the power to change how their energy is brought, used and generated. The cooperative currently has over 615 members and 145 investors in solar panels on schools and community buildings.
- The **1000 Club**, set up through the Plymouth Growth Board as one of 19 projects in Plymouth's Plan for Jobs. It aims to support young people into employment by identifying 1,000 companies in the Plymouth area to commit to providing a range of jobs, apprenticeships, graduate internships and work experience.
- The **Four Greens Development Trust** in the north west of the city covering Ernesettle, Honicknowle and West Park, Manadon, and Whitleigh neighbourhoods is community-owned and led. It aims to bring about long-term social, economic and environmental benefits to an area, and will create local jobs and improve local services.
- Plymouth City Council believes **community asset transfer** is fundamentally about giving local people and community groups greater control in the future of their area and their community in line with promoting the Council's co-operative agenda. The first transfer under consideration is for the Oaks Rugby Club to take over the management of Horsham Playing Fields. The Club works with schools in the Plymstock area and hosts several schools rugby festivals. The development of the existing facilities will enable the Club to increase the quality and quantity of these festivals.
- In support of a citywide campaign to protect citizens from **payday lenders**, Plymouth City Council was the first local authority in the UK that banned the advertising of payday loan websites on its city centre billboards as well as barring access via our network's internal and external PC's. We are now looking at leading on a network of Councils taking action against payday lenders.
- Plymouth City Council is already actively lobbying Government on a **fairer grant settlement** to fund its public health work, and also to urgently address Plymouth's need for a **fast and resilient rail line** connecting the South West to the rest of the UK.
- During these difficult economic times, Plymouth City Council has elected to **maintain many of its existing services** including, but not limited to, keeping all our children's centres open across the city, free entrance to the museum, concessionary fares, free wifi and online books access in our libraries, discounted admission to the Plymouth Life Centre for young people.
- In 2013, Plymouth City Council agreed to amend tender documentation for construction projects to request bidders confirm they do not subscribe to **blacklists** that vet recruits in order to keep out trade union and health and safety activists. Furthermore, the Council agreed to exclude tenders which do and to terminate contracts where contractors are subsequently found to be using them.

- Following changes to the welfare system, Plymouth City Council launched its **Council Tax Support Scheme** in 2013 to replace Council Tax Benefit. Further to the statutory protection for low income pensioners and despite significant funding cuts, the following vulnerable groups were identified, based on local need, as being eligible for this scheme: veterans, war widows and widowers, disabled customers, low income households with children, those at risk from homelessness and residents in receipt of benefits or on a low income.
- In addition, in a move designed to bring hundreds of homes back into use, Plymouth City Council also agreed in 2013 that any property that has been empty for more than two years will have to pay 150 per cent council tax.

2.2 In addition to Plymouth City Council's comprehensive response to the recommendations outlined in the final report, the following initiatives illustrate the influence of the Plymouth Fairness Commission process over the past year, for example:

- Plymouth was successful in receiving **Cities of Service** status over two years to deliver two specific projects on heating and eating. The selection of both issues was heavily influenced by the Plymouth Fairness Commission process. The project will recruit and train volunteer energy champions and help people to save money by implementing energy saving measures. The 'Our Grow, Share, Cook project' will address by increasing the number of volunteers engaged in growing fresh fruit and vegetables, improving the distribution of food to people who most need it, and developing and delivering food awareness and cooking sessions.
- The '**Framework for Working with Citizens and Communities**' has been adopted as an approach to be taken by the Council, and was developed with input from the Plymouth Fairness Commission. Alongside this, conversations amongst agencies within the city have begun. A 'Systems Leadership' approach to facilitating these conversations means that there is genuine joint ownership and responsibility towards ensuring that agencies come together to align the work that they do to strengthen communities. The common aim is to enable all communities, whether of geography, interest or identity, to become self – organised, and as such, to hear the voices of the 'hard to listen to' as well as the 'hard to ignore'.

### 3. A CITY-WIDE RESPONSE FOR FAIRNESS

3.1 A comprehensive response is attached for those recommendations where the Council is specifically named. However, while individual agencies and partnerships are also compiling their own response to the Fairness Commission recommendations, Plymouth City Council agrees with the Commission that tackling issues of fairness and inequality requires a joined up citywide approach.

3.2 As such, the Council will provide a leadership and coordination role for how the city will collectively respond to the Plymouth Fairness Commission's call to action. This includes, but will not be limited to, collaborating on key activities and creating the conditions that enable the right conversations to happen with the right people to ensure that meaningful change emerges.