

BURY COMMISSION ON LIFE CHANCES

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Commission will conduct an audit of life chances in Bury and make recommendations of how the local authority can improve them. Its objectives are specific: not to say in general terms what might be done, but to contribute to good, effective policy at local authority level.

Its principal objective is to consider how the local authority, partners and stakeholders can work together to better align education, skills and employment.

The ultimate outcome is that the skills and life chances of the population of Bury will be improved. The Commission will seek to be as concrete as possible, attaching its prestige to specific changes and improvements.

1. Prologue

The first part of the Commission's work will define the idea of life chances, consider the nature and purpose of a borough like Bury, within a major conurbation and set out a vision of what its work hopes to achieve.

The prologue will set out the enemies of good life chances: poor health, poverty, low aspiration, poor services for the least well off, and a lack of employment opportunity. These are the five giants standing in the way of good life chances for people in Bury. The Commission will be a contribution to slaying them.

It will also suggest ways in which Bury as a borough might conceive a prosperous future for itself.

The substantive work of the Commission will be grouped broadly under four headings:

1. To improve the skills of residents so that the quality of employment in the borough can be improved and the options for residents outside the borough can be enhanced.
2. To improve access to skills and training for those in work, especially those in low paid occupations.
3. To give hope and opportunity to those people for whom the current education system offers little.
4. To improve educational attainment in Maths and English as the foundation subjects of good opportunity.

2. Power Audit

The purpose of the Commission is to offer useful advice to the local authority and partners, not to make vague comments about life chances in general. It is therefore important to make a serious assessment of the levers of power that are available to civic leaders.

Those powers are not all formal. The Commission will investigate the capacity of inspirational local leadership to shape a place. The conversation about a borough can be changed by good leadership and, although this is a less tangible part of politics, it can make a measurable difference.

Most of the available powers are formal and they are currently in a state of considerable flux. The audit will seek to clarify how power can best be deployed in these changing circumstances, what can realistically be achieved at this level and which aspirations need to be addressed by other bodies. The aim here is to make effective change, not just to feel good about some warm words.

The Commission will provide a comprehensive analysis of all the provision in Bury which is relevant to education and skills and employment opportunities.

It will analyse and interpret the results achieved by students in Bury with a view to establishing the extent, the nature and the source of the problems to be fixed.

Where there is poor performance, the causes may (or may not) be systemic. The Commission will seek to establish where teaching is adding value, in trying circumstances, as well as those places where raw achievement is low.

3. Policy on Life Chances

Bury's performance, relative to its region and to the nation as a whole, is far from bad. There is a great deal of success and good work being done. There are though, some areas of high deprivation and difficulty (East Bury and Radcliffe, for example) and some parts of the education system (performance in Maths and English for example) that need to be improved.

The Commission will also paint a portrait of Bury's occupational structure and how the borough's economic life maps onto the wider region. A good skills policy is always, at least in part, a way of equipping students with the skills the economy will soon need, rather than those needed today.

A serious assessment of how Bury thrives economically is vital before making recommendations about how schooling and work-based training can be organised to meet it.

This audit will be the foundation of the Commission's work. It will establish the precise questions that the policy work to follow will seek to answer.

The Commission will proceed by defining specific questions and related problems, to which it will then seek the answers. Tight definitions of the problems will enable good evidence-gathering to be arranged.

Key Questions the Commission will ask:

- What potential impact will acadamisation have on the borough of Bury - what role will the local authority have in this?
- How are vulnerable children supported to achieve positive life chances in line with all?
- How does the impact of high quality early years affect life chances?
- How do we support higher attainers to achieve?
- What provision do we provide for students unable to access a traditional curriculum?
- What is the quality and appropriateness of vocational provision?
- Are local businesses fully engaged in this agenda?
- Are Bury residents too reliant on public sector employment?
- Are Bury residents as resilient and autonomous as in other GM districts?
- Are we aware of all best practice and sharing widely?
- How do we engage with the role of education governors to achieve successful outcomes?
- What is the role of Higher education institutions linked to Bury?
- Do we support and engage entrepreneurs?
- Do employers invest in and improve the skills of their workforce?

4. Recommendations and Tracking

The main body of the Commission's work will be to provide specific policies, with measurable and defined outcomes, wherever possible. The Commission will have failed if it delivers a single report and then sees no follow-up. It will be a greater success if it has identified certain metrics for success and tracks them to monitor progress.

Although the formal proceedings of the Commission will be completed by February 2017, its work should not simply cease at that point. The follow-up will be as important as the initial work. The Commission could propose an annual report on progress, as a way of ensuring that focus is not lost.

Philip Collins
Commission Chair
August 2016