



London

Briefing for the local elections

- Helping our communities

These upcoming local elections provide an opportunity for London boroughs to reflect on the challenges that all boroughs face, and the needs of London residents. As the London recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic, Londoners are increasingly impacted by cost of living challenges. As well as creating new and severe issues that drastically affected the quality Londoners lives, the pandemic exacerbated the problems London's communities have faced for years, namely

- widening social inequalities both between and within London boroughs
- more people live in poverty in London (28%) compared to the rest of the UK (22%)
- the growing impact of social isolation and digital exclusion

According to the London Poverty Profile, the costs of living in London are 15-58% higher than the rest of the UK, housing issues are a major driver of poverty in London, and the in-work poverty rate across London is rising.ⁱ These trends are likely to accelerate as the cost of living crisis bites.

Citizens Advice across London boroughs have seen a 16% increase in client numbers over last three months (compared to the last 3 months of 2021).

Social welfare advice has a vital role to play in economic and social fairness in London. It assists Londoners to deal with everyday welfare problems. It makes a proven contribution to tackling health inequalities and poverty, maximising the income of Londoners and reducing their indebtedness, preventing homelessness and improving housing situations. There is good evidence that social welfare advice interventions can also lead to improved social cohesion and address some of the underlying causes of stress related health, crime, and financial exclusion. Enabling Londoners to access the right advice in a timely and appropriate fashion impacts on the wellbeing of London as a whole.

However, advice services in London struggle to secure the resources they required to address unmet need. Funding for advice services at borough level is largely discretionary. There is no statutory duty on Councils to fund advice services, although boroughs are required to take steps to ensure that they meet the 2014 Care Act duty to ensure that information and advice about support for older people and their families or carers is available. Supporting independent advice services can also help boroughs meet other statutory duties such as homelessness prevention and tackling domestic abuse.

ⁱ <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/lpp2020/>

We are therefore calling on candidates this election to ensure that their boroughs

- 1. Maximise their engagement with, and support for, charities and community groups**
- 2. Work to strengthen the capacity of community advice services to address social and financial exclusion in their borough**
- 3. Share best practice so that approaches to commissioning and working with London's advice agencies are more consistent across London**