

No-One Left Behind: Ten Years On



A briefing on inclusive growth in Barking and Dagenham, 2016-2026



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Foreword by Mike Emmerich

A decade ago Barking and Dagenham stood at a turning point. The borough had been shaped for generations by large local industries – from the docks to Ford – and their contraction left deep economic and social scars. At the same time, the long-promised opportunities of the Thames Gateway had yet to translate into a coherent housing offer, new employment base, or renewed sense of purpose. Iconic housing estates like Becontree were shadows of their former selves. When Darren Rodwell and his colleagues took on the leadership of the Council, they recognised both the urgency of the challenge and the scale of the opportunity. The Growth Commission was established to help think through what a different future might look like.

The Commission's starting point was straightforward: if London's growth was moving east, Barking and Dagenham needed not simply to receive that growth, but to shape it – and to ensure that the benefits were shared. The report set out a long-term programme of change: new homes, new jobs, higher educational attainment, stronger institutions and a renewed civic life. But it also made a broader argument. Physical regeneration on its own would never be enough. Economic opportunity, social progress and civic participation had to advance together if the borough was to become a place in which everyone could see a future for themselves.

Looking back now, it is striking how much has changed in ten years – not only in Barking and Dagenham, but in the wider economic and political context in which the borough has been working. External shocks of the past decade tested the strategy in ways we did not foresee, and any honest reckoning with the results must account for that. Some of the ambitions set out in the report have moved forward more quickly than we expected. Others have proved more difficult than any of us imagined at the time. That is the nature of long-term change.

What matters most is that the work begun then helped to start a conversation and a programme of action that continues today. Inclusive growth was never going to be delivered in a single plan or a single decade. It is, and will remain, the work of many years to come.

About this briefing

I am Dr Dan Taylor, Senior Lecturer in Social and Political Thought at the Open University. These days I teach and research politics for the UK's largest university, but some years ago I was a disability support worker on the Becontree Estate, and it's been my pleasure to have worked on and off in Barking and Dagenham over the last 15 years. As most will know, there have been major and fast-paced developments in regeneration and housing development in the borough, as any view of the cranes surrounding Barking Abbey or Riverside will attest, but what has been the impact of this on local residents and communities?

Around three years ago, I set out to find out. Over that time, I've had hundreds of informal conversations about what matters to LBBB residents and what they'd like to see out of 'inclusive growth'. From those, I recorded 34 interviews and 6 focus groups with local residents (15), members of the community and voluntary sector (15), and local councillors and council officers (4). The briefing also draws on analysis of council strategy documents, cabinet papers, and independent reviews spanning the full decade, and on a purpose-built data workbook assembling public indicators – earnings, child poverty, housing, employment – from ONS, ASHE, DLUHC and other official sources, benchmarked against London and peer boroughs.

My approach has been careful and methodical, and my research in LBBB continues, with a resident community research network being developed over 2026, and a funded PhD partnership with the Growth and Reform Network until 2029. My learnings from LBBB will form part of a wider book I am writing examining politics, place and democratic renewal across England. It has been a privilege to gain the trust of residents and the borough's deeply committed public servants, and I have learned a great deal from them.

This briefing note sets out some of my core findings. The aim is a sober and clear-sighted reckoning with a decade of local authority-led ambition and vision that collided with unprecedented funding constraints and once-in-a-generation crises like Covid, Brexit and the impact of the war in Ukraine on inflation. The keywords are choice and constraint: what was possible, what was not, what choices were made or not made, what constraints (local, national) did the local authority work under, and what was the response. Ultimately, the purpose is not to apportion praise or blame but to examine, practically and with an open mind, what the lessons are so far from ten years of work on inclusive growth in LBBB, both for the borough and for local government more broadly.

The findings were discussed at an invitation-only roundtable on 11 March 2026 at Barking ThreeSixty, convened with the Growth and Reform Network and attended by approximately forty participants including the council leader, council officers, developers, community and voluntary sector leaders, local residents, academics, and representatives of local authorities nationally. Our discussion was held under the Chatham House Rule and came just under two months before local elections across England that were predicted to be difficult for the council, a long-term Labour stronghold. The discussion broadly confirmed the analysis while sharpening two points

in particular: the importance and difficulty of building genuine trust and partnership between institutions with very different kinds of power, and the gap between the language of consultation and the experience of residents who feel (often with reason) that decisions have already been made. Contributors also identified the development of civic infrastructure by the voluntary and community sector as a dimension this briefing does not fully assess.

A final word about the framing of this briefing. Partnership is a word that recurs throughout: in the Growth Commission's original vision, in the council's current strategy, and in the testimony of residents and community leaders. But partnership between institutions with very different resources, incentives and accountability structures is inherently difficult. Goodwill is not sufficient, by itself. It requires candour about constraint, mutual respect between people who hold different kinds of power, and a willingness to be honest about what is and isn't working. That discipline of honest partnership is, in many ways, what the decade tested most severely. National and international shocks were not in the power of anyone in the borough, but attitudes and dispositions to relationships, partnership working and collaboration most certainly are.

1. No-one left behind: vision and intent

In February 2016, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham published *No One Left Behind*, the final report of its independent Growth Commission. The Commission, chaired by Mike Emmerich and comprising experts in regeneration, business and the London economy, had been established the previous year by a new council leadership – new Leader, new Cabinet, new Chief Executive – that recognised the borough was at a turning point.

The context was urgent. Between 2010 and 2015, Barking and Dagenham had fallen from the 21st to the 3rd most deprived local authority in England on the Index of Multiple Deprivation – a shift driven partly by relative changes across authorities, but indicative of a rapidly deteriorating position. By the time the next IMD was published in 2019, the borough had become the most deprived in London and the fifth most deprived nationally, with more than half its lower super output areas in the most deprived national quintile and none in the least deprived.¹ Unemployment stood at over 10%. Nearly half of all households earned under £25,000 a year. Only 29.7% of residents worked in the top three occupational groups – managers, professionals, associate professionals – compared to 53.2% across London. The borough's job density was the fourth lowest in the capital, with barely one job for every two working-age residents, and that ratio was declining. GLA Economics has since shown that Barking and Dagenham was among ten London boroughs that had not recovered their 1971 job levels by 2015, as professional and real estate services shifted westwards and largely bypassed outer east London.²

Behind the statistics lay a political crisis whose shadow was already lengthening. In the 2000s, Barking and Dagenham had become the only council in Britain where the British National Party formed the official opposition. The BNP's twelve-seat breakthrough in 2006 – winning every seat it contested – represented a near-takeover of council opposition. Academic analysis by Ford and Goodwin attributed the surge to rapid demographic change, Labour's failure to engage white working-class constituents, and the absence of credible opposition parties.³ The party's rise was fuelled by housing pressure and the sense among established white working-class communities that their status and security – once anchored by Ford, the docks, and council housing – had been pulled away without anything to replace it. The Commission's Part 2 data documented the specifics: 163 of 252 young people not in education, employment or training were White British; White British residents had the lowest proportion of Level 4+ qualifications of any ethnic group in the borough, at 11.3%; White British claimants of Employment Support Allowance were rising sharply while other groups grew modestly.⁴ By 2016 the BNP had been comprehensively defeated – every councillor lost their seat in 2010, following sustained Labour campaigning and Hope Not Hate community organising – but the conditions that produced it had not.

Dominic Twomey, then Deputy Leader of the Council and a councillor first elected in that 2010 fightback, traces the BNP's rise to something more fundamental than demographic anxiety: the Labour Party's own failure to maintain a relationship with the communities it claimed to represent. He recalls the contact rate when he first stood:

“something ridiculous, like 4 or 5%. So in essence, the Labour Party knew how 4 or 5% of the people in the borough were going to vote”. The literature was poor, the door-knocking absent, the community engagement non-existent. Worse, the council of that era was, in Twomey’s words, “doing to the community rather than speaking, consulting, engaging” – a description that echoes the experience of his own mother, who had won a council seat as an independent in the early 1980s precisely because residents felt decisions were being imposed on them. The BNP filled a vacuum that Labour had created through institutional withdrawal from community life. The fightback, when it came, was a machine – “hundreds of people coming in from all over the country” – but beating the BNP was never going to be enough. “The thought behind that”, Twomey says, “is *and then what*. We’re going to make sure that the mistakes of the past are never repeated again”.

The Growth Commission, in this light, was not only an economic strategy but the institutional answer to a political crisis rooted in disconnection. The Commission’s report never mentioned the party by name, but its language was unmistakable: it called for a strategy in which “no-one, and no ethnic group, is left behind”.⁵

Patti, a long-standing resident whose recollections span the decades of change, connects the sequence directly: industrial decline, institutional withdrawal, fear, and the politics of resentment. Thames View, when she arrived, was a self-contained village – two pubs, a youth club built by local tradesmen, shops along Bastable Avenue where you knew the butcher by name. By the time the Growth Commission reported, most of that infrastructure had gone: the youth club burned down and never rebuilt, the pubs closed or converted, the quality shops replaced by poundshops or nothing at all. Her account of how “left behind” is lived – as status loss and institutional abandonment, not simply income loss – is the emotional ground on which every strategy in this briefing was built. Allan Thacker, chair of the Thames View residents’ association, has heard the promise that followed: “we’ve heard it so many times – no resident left behind.” His verdict, a decade later, is measured but unsparing.

The Commission did not arrive in a vacuum. Significant physical investment was already planned or under way before 2016: the Town Square development, with a new library, health centre and leisure centre, the last of which required lobbying of the NHS, had been secured; Coventry University’s Dagenham campus was agreed; and the decision to begin demolishing parts of the Gascoigne Estate to create what would become the Weavers Quarter had been taken around 2010. Barking Riverside, conceived long before the Commission, was already progressing, slowly, owing to the scale of land decontamination and transport infrastructure required, under its GLA/L&Q partnership. What the Growth Commission offered was not the starting point of investment but a framework for making it coherent: linking individual projects to a borough-wide theory of inclusive growth.

The Commission’s diagnosis was sharp. Barking and Dagenham was “London’s Growth Opportunity” – growth was moving east, the borough had land, and a choice had to be made between shaping that growth or having it happen to residents. The prescription was a twenty-year programme of transformation: 35,000 new homes, 10,000 net

additional jobs, educational attainment raised to the London average, unemployment brought below the London average, and at least two anchor institutions established to thicken the borough's thin institutional base. A new delivery vehicle – envisaged as a multi-stakeholder regeneration company involving the council, the GLA, TfL, and the private sector – would drive the physical programme. Alongside it, a civic revolution: community engagement, volunteering, a Borough Manifesto co-produced with residents, and the building of an “active and assertive citizenship” to replace generations of what the Commission called paternalism.⁶

It was an extraordinary document: intelligent, sincere, and remarkably ambitious. It diagnosed many of the borough's problems with unusual clarity. Its prescriptions were sensible. The council adopted it with enthusiasm and, in a move that would prove significant, inflated the targets beyond what the Commission itself had recommended – to 50,000 new homes and 20,000 jobs by 2037. The Commission itself had reported into a council that had already made £100 million in savings and faced a further £63 million over four years.⁷

What the Commission did not address in the same level of depth was the question of money. Austerity was acknowledged almost in passing. The report invoked the Becontree estate as a precedent for building at scale, without engaging with the fact that Becontree was a massive state-funded programme, built by London County Council with Public Works Loan Board money, in an era of fiscal confidence that bore no resemblance to 2016.⁸ The answer to the resource question was entrepreneurialism: the council would borrow, create companies, leverage partnerships, and use the proceeds of growth to fund inclusive outcomes. It was a theory of change built on the assumption that local agency, combined with London's growth dynamics, could substitute for central government investment.

Ten years later, that assumption is the thread on which the entire story hangs.

2. What the decade delivered: the numbers

A decade of data tells a story of genuine progress in some areas, stubborn stasis in others, and outright deterioration in the measure that matters most.

Figure 1. The decade at a glance: key indicators for Barking and Dagenham, 2015-2024, with London and national comparators

Indicator	Baseline (2015)	Latest	Change	London comparator	National change	National benchmark 2015	National benchmark latest
Population	206,450	232,747	+12.7%	+5.0%	+6.95%	54808676	58620101
Median gross annual pay	£23,901	£29,790	+24.6% (nominal)	+35.4%	+40.6%	£22,654	£31,850
Unemployment rate	10.4%	7.9%	-2.5pp	-0.8pp	-1pp	5.3%	4.3%
Child poverty (AHC)	43%	42%	-1pp	-2.2pp	+3pp	28%	31%
Households in TA	1,317	1,067	-19%	+52%	+104.5%	+64,710	+132,340
Net additional dwellings (annual)	666	975	+46.4%	-9.8%	+13.2%	+195,534	+221,409
Median monthly private rent	£1,000	£1,350	+35%	+16%	+41.7%	£600	£850
Life expectancy (male)	77.4 yrs	78.3 yrs	+0.9 yrs	80.5 yrs	+0.4 yrs	79.4	79.8
Life expectancy (female)	81.8 yrs	81.7 yrs	-0.1 yrs	84.7 yrs	+0.2 yrs	83.1	83.3
GCSE 9-4 English & Maths	60%	70%	+10pp	+6.6pp	+7.7pp	59.30%	67%
Core spending power	£148.5m	£244.3m	+64.5% cash	+7.6% real per head	+54.58	44,898m	69,405m

Sources: ASHE (ONS), ECP/Loughborough University, DLUHC, NOMIS, ONS/GLA DataStore, DHSC Fingertips, House of Commons Library. Full methodological notes in the IG10 data workbook. London column shows change over the same period unless otherwise stated. LBBB median pay was above the England median in 2015 but below it by 2024. All figures from ASHE Table 8.7a, all employees, gross annual including overtime. Rent data: 2015/16 vs 2022/23 (ONS series); Jan 2026 median is £1,681/month. HH in TA gives total number for England.

Housing is the area of clearest achievement. Net additional dwellings grew by 46% between 2016 and 2024, against a London-wide decline of 10%. By March 2025, the council had completed and handed over 2,774 homes under its direct delivery programme, 85% of them affordable, with a further 1,413 in the pipeline – over 4,000 in total when the current programme completes.⁹ By 2024-25, Barking and Dagenham was the sixth-largest borough in London for affordable housing completions on GLA programme data, up from twenty-second at the start of the decade, and ranked sixth for social rent completions specifically.¹⁰ The council’s *Lessons Learned* report describes it as “the only London Borough without a Temporary Accommodation problem”,¹¹ a claim that rests on comparatively low use of nightly-paid and out-of-borough placements rather than the absence of housing pressure (over 6,300 households

remain on the housing register and more than 1,000 are in temporary accommodation, with overcrowding affecting nearly one in five households), but whose significance grows with each passing year.¹² London councils now spend almost £5 million a day on temporary accommodation alone, and £5.5 million a day on total homelessness costs. Some 183,000 Londoners – including 90,000 children, one in every twenty-one of all London’s children – are in temporary accommodation. Across England, the number of families with children housed in bed and breakfasts for more than six weeks rose 662% between early 2021 and late 2024. The housing benefit subsidy for temporary accommodation has been frozen at January 2011 rates for over fourteen years.¹³ Against that backdrop, LBB’s housing achievement is not incremental, but exceptional.

But housing delivery, however impressive, has not reduced poverty – and the evidence suggests it could not have been expected to. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s research is clear: “evidence that poverty affects housing circumstances is generally stronger than evidence that housing circumstances affect poverty”. The critical mechanism is not the number of homes but the cost of living in them. Social rent – at a median of £151 per week for new lettings in London – directly reduces the housing-cost component of poverty; “affordable” rent at 80% of market rate does not. JRF modelling projects that the ongoing shift from social to “affordable” rents would result in significantly more people in poverty by 2040.¹⁴ The tenure breakdown of what was actually built makes the point concrete. Of the 2,774 homes completed by March 2025 under the council’s direct delivery programme, just 86 were at target rent, the nearest equivalent to traditional social rent. A further 583 were at London Affordable Rent, a tenure introduced by the Mayor of London at 50-65% of market rent – significantly below market rate, though still above traditional social rent levels. Together, these two categories account for roughly a quarter of the programme. The largest single majority, 1,361, was at what the council terms Discount Market Rent, set at 80% of market rate. A further 472 were market rent and 287 shared ownership. Only 669 allocations were made directly from the council’s housing register.¹⁵

This is the structural paradox at the heart of the decade: a borough can build more affordable homes than anyone else in its city and still see poverty unchanged, because the definition of “affordable” has been disconnected from the incomes of the people it is supposed to serve. The borough’s net social rent position is further complicated by demolition losses. Research by Dr Joe Penny at UCL found that by 2024, demolitions across the borough had resulted in the net loss of 1,063 council and social rented homes, with replacements provided at London Affordable Rent rather than target rent levels.¹⁶

Unfortunately, the borough’s low property values, being the very characteristic that made ambitious housing delivery financially feasible, have inadvertently compounded its disadvantage. Low values have traditionally attracted other London authorities purchasing properties to house their own high-need populations, adding to local service pressures without corresponding resources, and discouraging private developers: only L&Q and Bellway have built at Barking Riverside, which may reflect profit margins in LBB being thinner than elsewhere. The Growth Commission talked

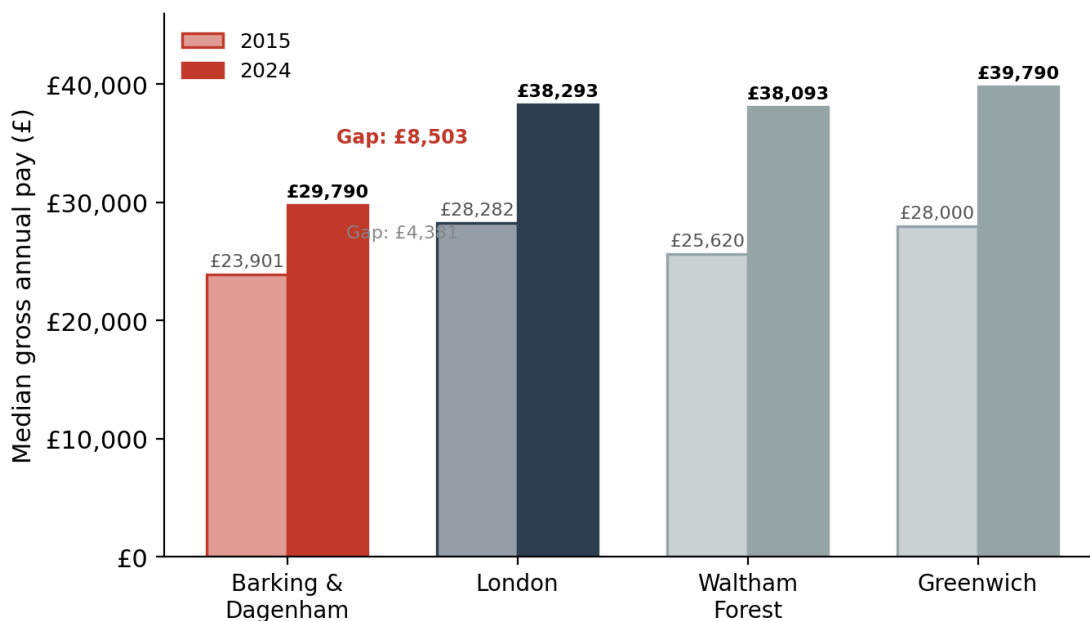
about homes in quantity but not their value, and the consequence is a structural feedback loop in which building affordable homes reinforces the borough’s position as a place where affordability is all there is.

Labour market indicators improved, but the quality of improvement was shallow.

Unemployment fell from 10.4% in 2015 to 7.9% by 2024 – a 2.5 percentage point drop – and around 7,000 net additional jobs were created in the borough.¹⁷ But median gross annual pay for residents – on a consistent series from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), covering all employees – rose only from £23,901 to £29,790 in nominal terms, a gain of 24.6% that sounds respectable until set against London’s 35.4% growth over the same period.¹⁸ The gap with the London median widened to approximately £9,000 - £10,000.

The ASHE data for 2023 confirms that Barking and Dagenham has the lowest median full-time weekly earnings of any London borough: £675, against a London median of £796, a gap of £121 a week or 15.2%. Nearly a quarter of residents’ jobs (23.8%) pay below the London Living Wage. The gap between higher and lower earners is also smaller, largely because the borough has relatively few higher-paid jobs, consistent with a post-industrial occupational profile dominated by caring, retail, logistics and skilled trades.¹⁹ More people are working, but in the same kinds of jobs, at the same relative pay levels. The occupational structure barely shifted.

The pay gap with London widened

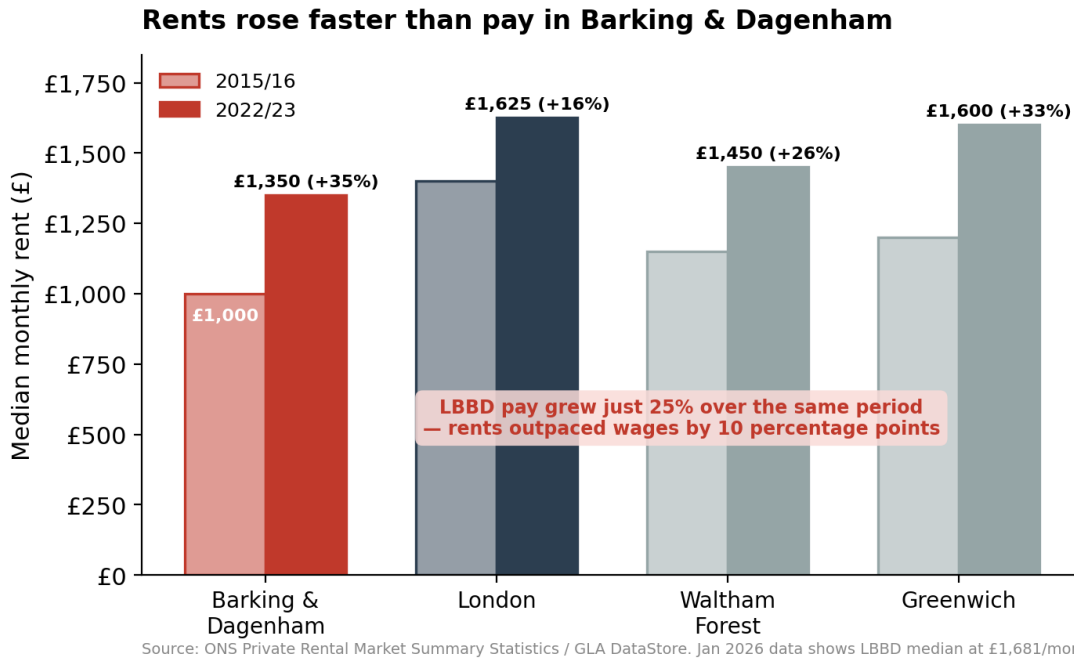


Source: ASHE (ONS) Table 8.7a, all employees, 2024 revised figures

Meanwhile, median private rents have accelerated dramatically. By January 2026, they had reached £1,681 a month – rising at 10.4% year-on-year, three to five times faster than the London average of 1.1% growth. Despite having among the lowest absolute rents in London, Barking and Dagenham is now one of the capital’s two least affordable boroughs by rent-to-income ratio, with 55% of take-home pay going to rent.²⁰ This is the toxic interaction at work: low local wages meeting rapidly accelerating rents, as

displacement from inner London intensifies. The borough’s affordability, the very thing that attracted new residents and fuelled growth, is being consumed by the growth itself.

Long-term data reinforces this: between 2001 and 2021, the number of households increased by 10%, social renting decreased by 7%, home-ownership decreased by 16%, and private renting increased by 412%.²¹

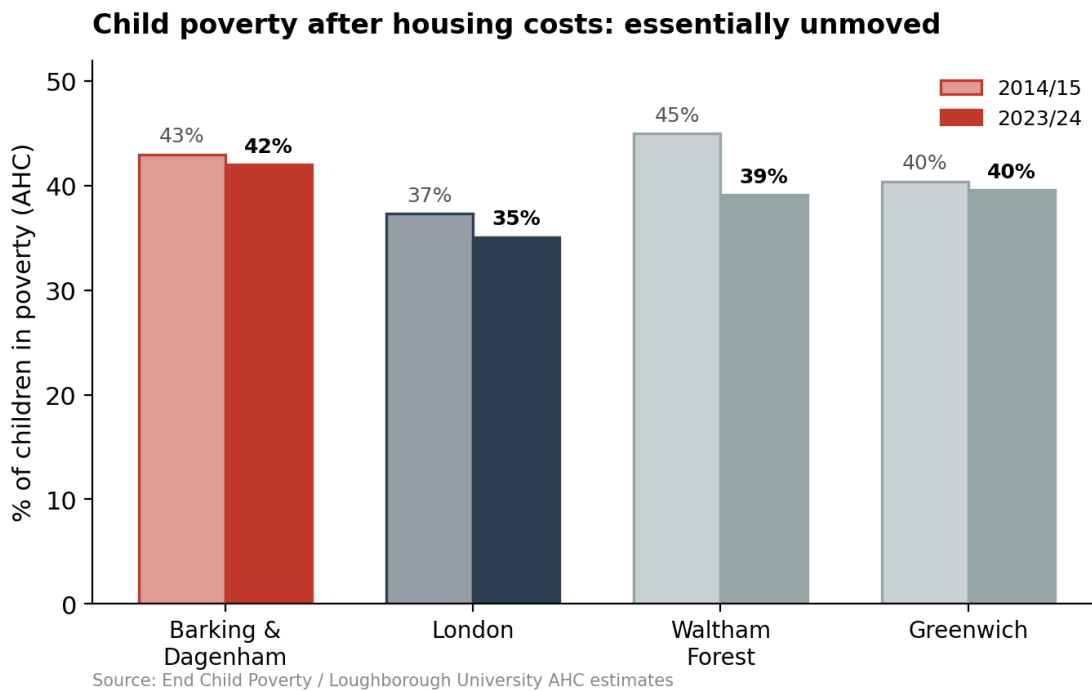


Education showed meaningful gains. The proportion of students achieving grades 9–4 in English and Maths at GCSE rose from 60 to 70% – a 10 percentage point gain against London’s 6.6 percentage points.²² By 2025, 96% of schools were rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. Early years development reached near-parity with London: 67.3% achieving a Good Level of Development at Reception, against a London figure of 67.8%. These are great achievements, driven by sustained effort over a decade.²³

Health improved modestly. Male life expectancy rose from 77.4 to 78.3 years. The borough’s participation in the National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme and its Outstanding CQC rating for adult social care (one of only three in England) point to genuine excellence in service delivery. But healthy life expectancy remains five years below the London and England averages, and long-term conditions develop earlier here than almost anywhere else in the capital.²⁴

Child poverty did not improve. On a consistent series from the End Child Poverty coalition, 43% of children in the borough were living in poverty after housing costs in 2014-15, and 42% in 2023-24 – which is to say, child poverty has essentially remained unmoved, representing approximately 26,600 children under sixteen.²⁵ The council’s own Lessons Learned report, drawing on a different methodology, puts the trajectory at 37% in 2016 rising to “nearly half” (46%).²⁶ The precise figures vary by source and methodology; the picture does not. An important caveat makes it worse: these estimates exclude children in households with No Recourse to Public Funds –

estimated at over 722,000 children nationally – meaning the true rate in areas with high NRPF populations like Barking and Dagenham is likely underestimated.²⁷



The evidence on why child poverty resists local intervention is now overwhelming. Loughborough University’s 2025 analysis found that constituency-level child poverty rates are “directly and strongly correlated” with the percentage of children affected by the two-child benefit limit – a national policy instrument that no borough council can touch. Welfare reforms since 2012 – benefit freezes, the two-child limit, the benefit cap, the bedroom tax – have removed approximately £40 billion annually from the social security budget.²⁸ A local authority can offer money advice, income maximisation, and emergency support. No local authority has been shown to meaningfully reduce its child poverty rate through local action alone when national policy is pushing poverty upward.

On no measure did child poverty improve, and on several it worsened, over a decade in which inclusive growth was the borough’s governing promise. **This is the single most important indicator of the decade.** The Growth Commission identified child poverty as a central problem, and the Borough Manifesto made tackling it a priority, but the number did not come down.

Nathan Grady of Kingsley Hall in Dagenham gives the statistic a human register: “People working two jobs are still having to use food provision”. His social supermarket and food bank now serve not only the unemployed but working professionals, like nurses and police officers. That sentence – working two jobs, still needing a food bank – is the lived reality of a growth model that builds places faster than it builds prosperity.

The overall position is perhaps best captured in a single sentence from the council’s own 2025 paper, *Our B&D*: “2025 data shows Barking and Dagenham’s rankings against all London Boroughs for Borough Manifesto indicators has generally

not improved since 2017, or in a few cases it has got worse”.²⁹ Eight years of the Borough Manifesto: London rankings unchanged or worse. And this from a borough that started at or near the bottom on almost every indicator.

The targets the council set itself tell the same story. Against a target of 50,000 new homes by 2037, approximately 6,800 have been delivered – 13.6%. Against a target of 20,000 jobs, approximately 7,000 have been created – 35%.³⁰ These are not negligible numbers, but nor are they on track. The Local Plan 2024-2037 now targets 1,944 homes per year – yielding approximately 25,000 over its period, roughly half the original aspiration (a reduction reflecting in part the government's revised methodology for calculating local housing need).³¹ Be First’s own housing delivery target has been scaled back from 4,550 to 4,156 new homes by 2030/31 (reflecting more detailed design work on individual sites).³²

These are the raw numbers, then. There is a great deal of complexity behind them: major geopolitical strife, central government austerity and social change. They may appear stark in isolation, and behind them are the stories, struggles and good intentions of residents, council officers and councillors, developers, local businesses, and the voluntary and community sector at a period of immense change. Let’s now take a closer look at what was built, and why.

3. What was built, and at what cost

The Growth Commission recommended the creation of a “borough-wide regeneration vehicle” with multi-stakeholder governance. What emerged was Be First, a wholly council-owned, arms-length development company, funded not by partnership but by council borrowing. By the time the model was restructured in early 2025, the council had invested approximately £1.3 billion through its Investment and Acquisition Strategy – approximately £1.1 billion on residential development and £200 million on commercial and industrial assets – within a total council borrowing position of approximately £1.5 billion (comprising £1.08 billion IAS, £180 million General Fund, and £295 million HRA).³³

That figure – over £1 billion in IAS borrowing alone – sounds alarming in isolation. But it looks quite different in context. The period in which Barking and Dagenham was borrowing to build homes was the same period in which other councils were borrowing to speculate. Thurrock, LBB’s neighbour further down the A13, borrowed over £1 billion from approximately 150 other councils to invest in 53 solar farms and commercial ventures, accumulating a deficit of approximately £500 million, the largest in UK local government history. Woking pursued a “Singapore of Surrey” vision, accumulating £1.84 billion in debt with debt servicing at 295% of spending power, while Spelthorne borrowed £1 billion to buy commercial offices despite an annual budget of just £22 million. All three issued Section 114 notices or face commissioner intervention.³⁴

In that landscape, what Barking and Dagenham did was something qualitatively different. It borrowed not to speculate but to build homes, in its own borough, backed by tangible assets (and often at low interest rates). It took on risk, but the risk was grounded in a physical programme with a social purpose. This distinction *does matter* for any honest assessment of the decade. From the outset, a genuine attempt was made for the borough’s extensive housing and economic transformation to be inclusive for existing residents, as well as to welcome and provide a home for young professionals who might have otherwise been traditionally driven out by the borough’s lack of new private housing.

The achievements are real and should not be understated. Be First transformed Barking and Dagenham from one of the worst-performing to one of the top-ranking local planning authorities in the country – achieving 100% of major planning applications determined within time over the two years to March 2024, a record shared by a small number of authorities nationally but a striking turnaround for a borough that had been among the worst performers. (A caveat: the “within time” metric includes agreed extensions of the statutory 13-week period, so it measures reliability and negotiating capacity rather than raw speed.) Over seven years, it returned more than £50 million in revenue to the council while providing planning and regeneration services at no cost to the General Fund. Since 2021, it has secured planning permission for 6,253 homes and over 315,000 square metres of commercial space. It delivered more affordable homes than any other borough in London. It attracted Eastbrook Film Studios and the Wharf Studios, Coventry University’s London campus, and helped secure the borough’s

Thames Freeport designation.³⁵ These are things that would not have happened without entrepreneurial council action.

Cameron Geddes, the cabinet member responsible for regeneration since 2012, frames the choice in terms of the alternative. Asked how he would explain the council's approach to George Brooker, leader of the council from 1986 until 1998 who invited but ultimately resisted working with private sector developers, Geddes ventriloquises the argument he has been fighting his entire career: "Stand up to the developers. ... You'll get the crumbs; we're going to get the main cake. ... And then I'm just sitting there thinking 'he's done bugger all, hasn't he? He's built nothing'". Geddes's point is structural, not personal: the councillors who blocked development were popular for it – "I blocked that, I blocked that... they won't be coming back" – but the result was decades of inaction on a site that, without council involvement, would have been developed anyway, by 'the formal invasion of a Docklands Development Corporation or the guerilla warfare of successful appeals to Planning Inspectors', with less affordable housing and less community input. The pragmatism defence is not that the outcomes are ideal but that the counterfactual is worse.

That pragmatism extends to the agonising trade-offs within the housing programme itself. Geddes describes the arithmetic bluntly: build at council rent levels and you can house 50 families; build at higher rent levels, covered by housing benefit, and you can house 75. "It's not a value judgement. Do you house 75 families off the housing waiting list or do you only house 50?" Either way, he says, "it would be criticised". The council has typically gone for the larger number – more homes at higher rents – but the consequence is a tenure structure where affordability depends on benefits, and where getting a job can mean losing the subsidy that makes the rent payable.

But the achievements look different from street level. The dominant resident experience of the growth programme is not homes delivered or planning applications processed. It is a perception of homes arriving faster than the everyday infrastructure needed to support a good quality of life, creating resentment and frustration in the process.

At Barking Riverside – the borough's largest development, flagged by the Growth Commission itself in 2016 as needing a formal pause and review – the infrastructure lag is often narrated by residents as one not of accident, but mismanagement and disregard. The development is managed by a GLA/L&Q partnership. In March 2026, the council approved revised outline planning permission expanding the site from 10,800 to 20,000 homes; so far over 3000 have been built, with £124 million in Homes England funding approved (it has operated on a different timeline owing to the scale of land decontamination and transport infrastructure required).³⁶ Alex, a young resident, describes a place where there are "lots of houses, not a lot of other infrastructure – shops not there except the Co-op, which is really expensive", and where the Youth Zone is "geographically close but would be two buses for about an hour". Some early community infrastructure was delivered before the main housing phases – the Rivergate Centre serves as both a school and a faith space – but the pace of residential

development has far outstripped the provision of shops, health services and transport connections, as residents consistently report.

Ramatu, a young mother who moved to Riverside in 2020, arrived to find a construction site with almost nothing – “the only shop was the Co-op on that side” – and a top-floor flat with no lift, where summer heat was “excruciating” because of poor ventilation and windows had to stay closed against mosquitoes from the river. The nearest gym was a ten-minute drive across the A13, and the traffic coming back made it unworkable: “I just stopped going”. She cancelled her membership. She now pays £900 a month for nursery – three days a week – and cannot save towards the deposit the intermediate rent scheme tells her to accumulate. She is the person the growth strategy was designed to attract: a working family drawn by affordable new-build housing and good transport links. Her experience of what was actually there when she arrived is the infrastructure gap measured in daily frustrations rather than planning shortfalls. Another resident observes that “there’s one GP for such a huge population – it’s a big challenge” (a BRL-funded temporary health facility was approved in late 2025 and is expected to open in late 2026).³⁷ A third captures it: “Riverside – it’s a good place but it’s empty”. The A13 is described repeatedly as a barrier – not just a road but a line that separates new development from the rest of the borough, crossed through a tunnel that Alex calls “the scariest place I’ve ever been in my life”. (Notably, earlier plans to tunnel over the A13 and build a vast new neighbourhood were quietly shelved by 2023 due to costs).

The Commission anticipated this. Its 2016 evidence base noted concerns about Barking Riverside’s isolation, its single-use residential character, and a school proposed next to a switching station, on a former landfill site, under pylon lines. It recommended a formal review of the development’s progress and trajectory.³⁸ The concerns were well-founded, though no such review took place.

On affordability, distrust runs deeper, with a marked gap in what current residents perceive as affordable (or not) versus the more nuanced picture with tenancies. Matt Lismore, a community campaigner in the Gascoigne and Weavers Quarter area, cited documents he says were shared from within the council which point to minimum income expectations for properties marketed as “affordable” rent: “For a three-bed, you need to be earning £62,000. They list the professions – teachers, builders, nurses. None of those professions could rent a property. Their own criteria immediately rules it out for those people. It’s a lie”.

BD Reside's allocation policy (revised 2019) confirms that the scheme does apply an income floor: households should spend no more than 40% of gross income on rent – itself a looser threshold than the 30% conventionally used to define affordability. At that threshold, a three-bed Reside property at 80% of the ONS median market rent for LBBB (£1,900/month, April 2024 to March 2025) implies a required household income of around £45,600. For a dual-income household in the professions the scheme names, that is achievable. For a single earner in any of those same professions, it is not. The model assumes a household structure that a significant number of families in the borough do not have. However, it should be noted that this is part of the design: to build

new homes for key workers who might otherwise leave the borough for lack of good quality private housing options.

Kevin Hudson, a resident and environmental campaigner, voices a widely shared suspicion: that only a fraction of new homes are genuinely affordable and that the rest are “sold off-plan to foreign investors”. Whether or not those numbers are precise, they circulate because tenure categories are opaque and residents have no independent means of verifying what is built for whom, with key details either buried in council papers or discovered only through consulting council officers. This perception gap and widespread mistrust about (often disruptive) new developments has become critical to the local story around inclusive growth.

The council’s position, articulated by Dominic Twomey, then Deputy Leader, is that “all of our borrowing is supported by assets – the units, the flats, the housing we built”. That is a coherent financial doctrine. The tension is not between truth and falsehood but between two ways of measuring the same programme: by the assets on the balance sheet, or by the residents who cannot afford to live in them.

The model also carried institutional risks that the council’s own documents now acknowledge. The external auditors, Grant Thornton, flagged in January 2025 the “scale and complexity” of the structure of the companies and performance monitoring.³⁹ The council’s *Lessons Learned* report states that governance of the companies “required a complete overhaul and weaknesses that should have been apparent at their outset have been addressed”. The legal implications section of the same report warns, with unusual candour for a published Cabinet paper, that council-owned companies are “a source of great risk” and that “the Council cannot be the banker of last resort or give parental guarantees”.⁴⁰ The pattern continued: in February 2026, Cabinet was told that BD Homes Ltd’s Articles of Association did not accurately reflect its board composition – although the board had in practice maintained the required independent majority for three years, the Articles had not been updated to state this. The discrepancy was only identified when the company began preparing its application for registered provider status, and decisions made during the period of non-compliance required retrospective ratification by the parent council.⁴¹ The IAS itself was found to be non-compliant with statutory investment guidance, with its legal officer concluding that it was “positioned in an earlier era” and did not “align with current financial environment in terms of risk and compliance with guidance from the Government and professional bodies”.⁴² UCL research has found that 83% of English councils now operate council-owned companies involved in housing or property activity, but Be First stands out for its scale and integration of planning, regeneration and direct delivery functions – a distinction that carried both unusual benefits and unusual exposure.⁴³

The economic context changed under the model’s feet. The pandemic, the Ukraine war, and the resulting inflation drove construction costs sharply upward, reducing the viability of Be First’s development pipeline. Interest rates rose from the near-zero environment in which the borrowing strategy was conceived to levels that made the model unsustainable in its original form. The scale of the shift is captured in two numbers: the 2,000 completed Reside homes were funded at approximately 1.98% on

long-term borrowing, while the 1,300 homes still in the pipeline are being funded at 4.85% on short-term debt.⁴⁴

The financial interdependence between the council and its housing subsidiaries runs deep. The interest rates at which the council on-lends to Reside vary by site; the council's own IAS paper describes these as representing "a subsidy of c£600 million in comparison to market borrowing levels", linked to "the viability of schemes requiring reduced borrowing rates on 'disposal' to Reside, where there have been increased building costs".⁴⁵ The £600m figure does not represent a cash transfer – the council charges Reside above its own cost of borrowing on each loan – but rather the difference between the council's internal lending rates and what Reside would pay if it borrowed on the open market without the council's backing (a notional comparison required under the Subsidy Control Act 2022, which the council has declared to the Subsidy Advice Unit).⁴⁶ That the figure is large enough to require formal declaration shows the extent to which the programme's viability depends on the council's ability to borrow at rates its companies could not independently access. The IAS commercial portfolio "currently struggles to make a surplus return as rental income does not cover the cost of capital", and the IAS reserve – designed to buffer against underperformance – is likely to be fully depleted by the end of 2026/27. Stalled development sites have incurred approximately £16 million in costs that will become abortive if schemes are discontinued.⁴⁷

In February 2026, the council formally drew a line under the Investment and Acquisition Strategy. It will no longer acquire new investment properties or carry out direct development funded by general fund borrowing.⁴⁸ The successor model pivots from direct delivery to public-private partnerships and institutional investment, with a development framework seeking private sector partners for new homes on council land. Be First's business plan does not forecast a dividend to the council in any year through to 2031 – fifteen years from the IAS inception without a financial return to the general fund. More than half (51%) of Be First's forecast revenues carry a red risk rating; if private partnerships do not materialise, the company's long-term viability is uncertain.⁴⁹ The housing delivery target has been scaled back again, from 4,550 new homes by 2030/31 to 4,156.⁵⁰

Alongside the commercial strategy sat a parallel experiment in service delivery. Community Solutions, launched in October 2017, was designed as a single front door for people-based services: welfare, homelessness, domestic violence, youth services, libraries, mental health, skills, and family support, brought together under generic job descriptions and a matrix leadership model. The ambition was to break down silos, intervene early, prevent problems from escalating, and reduce demand on expensive statutory services.

The council's own verdict, published in July 2025, is unsparing. "The vision for prevention was not realised. The way services were reorganised did little to reduce demand, and in some areas it increased".⁵¹ The children's front door was removed from Community Solutions in 2021 on advice from Ofsted. Early Help services were withdrawn in September 2022 following significant increases in demand and quality

concerns. Generic job descriptions “diluted efforts and was a significant contributor over time to less specialist and more generalist offers of support”.⁵² An LGA Peer Review in 2021 found it “not possible to quantify the impact of Community Solutions” on the council’s long-term aims.⁵³ Over half the respondents in a subsequent Cost-of-Living survey said they did not know where to access advice, support or guidance – despite the community hubs that Community Solutions was supposed to connect them to.⁵⁴

The lesson the council itself draws is stark: “simplicity, accountability and transparency alongside innovation, trump experimentalism”.⁵⁵ Community Solutions won awards and energised the workforce. But it did not reduce demand, it diluted professional practice, and it depended on charismatic leadership that could not be sustained or replicated. The contrast with Wigan is instructive. Facing a comparable 40% budget reduction, Wigan developed the “Wigan Deal” – an informal agreement between the council and residents built on relational, strengths-based principles. The King’s Fund’s independent 2019 evaluation found genuine transformation: female healthy life expectancy increased by 23 months (contrast these with the LBD figures earlier), early cardiovascular deaths fell 29% for males and 25% for females over six years, and the council achieved £26 million in cashable efficiencies while improving outcomes. The critical difference was that the Wigan Deal was internally driven and embedded across all council operations – not an externally designed experiment vulnerable to leadership change or funding withdrawal.⁵⁶

It’s worth noting however that Wigan Council would end up revising their strategy by 2024, after an engagement and research process found that local economic and health inequalities had in fact worsened, despite the Deal’s cultural achievements – reinforcing the argument that even well-embedded local strategies could not offset the structural headwinds of the period.⁵⁷ Developing internal capacity and trusting well-established CVS partners to co-design and deliver work in partnership with the council will be crucial for the next decade.

4. What fell away

Not everything the Growth Commission envisaged was built. Some things were built and then collapsed. The pattern of what fell away reveals as much as the pattern of what was delivered.

Every One Every Day, the flagship civic participation programme, was launched in 2017 through a partnership with Participatory City Foundation. Based in the Warehouse near Barking Riverside, though spread across various facilities across the borough, it aimed to create a platform for resident-led projects – everything from shared cooking to repair workshops to neighbourhood gardens – and to build the active, assertive citizenship the Growth Commission had called for. At its peak it was celebrated nationally and internationally as a model of participatory placemaking. Over its lifetime, the programme spent over £9 million – mostly public funds – and worked with nearly 10,000 residents.⁵⁸ By 2023-24 its programmes came to an end, with the Warehouse closing and residents protesting its loss.

The programme's failure was not simply a story of funding withdrawal. The original 2016 cabinet paper had envisioned a self-sustaining endowment funding the programme beyond five years; this never materialised. A detailed critique from *Municipal Enquiry* identified deeper structural problems: the programme had “actively prohibited some of the most energetic grassroots groups from even meeting in its spaces”, characterising community advocacy groups as “political”, while the council had already cut 50% of its funding to such groups. Critics described the approach as semi-detached social design practice – externally designed, professionally managed, and insufficiently rooted in the community power it was supposed to build. PCF's own CEO acknowledged that the team had sometimes failed to explain its aims and wished they had found “mutual strength with other organisations”. No independent academic evaluation of the programme's full impact appears to exist.

The closure of the Warehouse, a former printworks turned into a vast makerspace, was accompanied by further dismay when resident appeals to the council as landlord to keep it open were overruled. Allan, speaking in 2024, described a campaign in which residents produced a business plan, approached external funders who confirmed they could support continued community use, and brought the proposal to the council. “They didn't even look at it”. The council's position was that the site could generate £200,000 a year in commercial rent – “the money is the bottom line”. Equipment too large to move, requiring three-phase power, would likely be scrapped. Residents who moved into a temporary space at the council's new Industria centre were told they would receive preferential rates initially, but that commercial rents would follow. Allan's assessment was weary rather than angry: “if only we could talk to the council, talk reasonably with them, put our point of view across and see what they say. We can't even get in the door”.

The City of London markets relocation – Billingsgate fish market, Smithfield meat market, and New Spitalfields fruit and vegetable market – was identified by the Growth Commission in 2016 as an anchor institution opportunity. It became one of the

council's most prominent growth bets. Tess Lanning, the council officer then responsible for LBBB's inclusive economy strategy, describes what was negotiated: "We got this endowment of £3 million to support a programme to improve access to healthy and affordable food, and we also negotiated 25 years of jobs and apprenticeships from the markets for local people, which is pretty good... they've got about 25 apprenticeships a year for 25 years, which is good for apprenticeship numbers". It was, by her account, "one of our strongest negotiations" – the product of the City of London's deep pockets and a carefully constructed section 106 framework that LBBB council officers had spent years developing. The relocation to Dagenham Dock would have brought thousands of jobs, a unique economic identity, and the kind of institutional weight the borough conspicuously lacks. In 2024, the deal collapsed. The council's *Lessons Learned* report references the City of London Corporation's continuing interest in the site "for employment use", with the council retaining some Section 106 funding, but the markets are not coming.⁵⁹

The Borough Manifesto, adopted in 2017 with input from 3,000 residents, was the Growth Commission's recommended vehicle for civic ambition. By 2022, the Barking and Dagenham Delivery Partnership that was supposed to monitor its 38 indicators had been "informally disbanded". The last State of the Borough Conference was held that year.⁶⁰ The Commission's recommendation for "an annual public review" lasted six years at most. By 2025, the council concluded that the Manifesto had "lost its relevancy" and that its indicators were "not fit-for-purpose, or fit-for-times".⁶¹ Its replacement, *It Starts Here*, was shaped through partnership boards, two VCFSE workshops, a Youth Forum session, and a "Loud and Local" community engagement project in Autumn 2025. The Youth Forum flagged personal safety, affordability of housing, and lack of local job opportunities as critical issues – concerns that echo every resident interview behind this briefing.⁶² This was genuine engagement. But it was consultation *about* a strategy, not participation as a structural feature of governance. The Borough Manifesto was built with 3,000 residents; *It Starts Here* was built through partnership boards and ratified by Assembly.⁶³

The economic development strategy that the 2019 stocktake identified as the borough's most critical gap never materialised during the decade (though a commercial-facing prospectus was produced in early 2022).⁶⁴ Metro Dynamics noted in 2019 that the 20,000 jobs target had been given "nothing like the same attention, focus, resourcing or institutional weight" as the 50,000 homes target.⁶⁵ Lanning's account of her arrival in 2019 explains why. The Growth Commission had recommended ambitious inclusive growth goals and high-level KPIs, but there was less evidence or examples to draw on for setting out how to improve the quality and quantity of jobs in a deprived area in practice. The Council's Inclusive Growth team was set up to operationalise the strategy, with Lanning leading on inclusive economy, employment and skills. "The challenge was that there wasn't really a budget for economic development – a reflection of the wider financial pressures facing local government, and the lack of national resource for this sort of activity at a local level. So it was initially just me, and then a very small team trying to secure levers and resources across the council". The gap between the Growth Commission's vision and the institutional investment behind it could hardly be starker: a twenty-year programme of economic transformation, and

initially one officer with no budget to deliver it. The borough never carved out a distinctive place in the London economy. An “Inclusive Growth and Place Strategy” is now confirmed as forthcoming in 2026 – referenced across multiple recent council papers – but it arrives a decade after the Growth Commission first identified the need and seven years after the stocktake called it the most critical gap.⁶⁶ The council’s partnership strategy, *It Starts Here*, does not mention the 20,000 jobs target at all.

The civic participation agenda – the fourth P in the 2019 stocktake’s framework of People, Place, Participation and Partnerships – has been quietly dropped. *It Starts Here* operates on three guiding principles: “People, Place and Partnerships”.⁶⁷ Participation is no longer a strategic category. Community land trusts, citizens’ assemblies, deliberative policymaking, the Becontree centenary as a model of democratic renewal – all proposed in the 2019 stocktake – left no institutional trace.⁶⁸

“Not really. No”, says Allan, asked whether there is meaningful consultation on changes in the borough. “You just have to scan the local press for details of what’s happening. But by then it’s done”. (A community-led monthly Planning Forum exists, organised by Thames Life for some years and focused on the south of the borough; in the past, council officers, councillors and developers’ representatives have attended).

The institutional losses described above – EOED, the markets, the Borough Manifesto, the economic development strategy, the participation agenda – are experienced by long-standing residents as the latest in a longer sequence. Patti, whose family has lived in Thames View for decades, inventories what has disappeared from the estate: the youth club that burned down and was never rebuilt, the Curzon Club built by local tradesmen and now in decline, the Short Blue pub converted into flats, and then further, into Barking town centre, Fletcher’s butchers driven out when the council doubled the rent, and the independent bookshop gone after six months of negotiations. When she heard about council plans to transfer the local library into community ownership, it inspired not hope but cynicism: “it’s all very well saying, oh, we’re going to hand it over to the community. Nobody’s running a library. It’s just a way of offloading.” What the council describes as community asset transfer, she experiences as abandonment dressed in the language of empowerment.

What connects these losses is a pattern. The things that fell away were, almost without exception, the things that depended on sustained investment of money, time and political capital in activities whose returns were long-term, diffuse and hard to measure: civic participation; anchor institutions; economic strategy; community capacity. The things that survived were the things that generated measurable, near-term outputs: homes built, planning applications processed, revenue returned. The Growth Commission wanted both, but the decade delivered one.

5. What was not in our power

“How do you make bad jobs better?” – Tess Lanning, council officer then responsible for inclusive economy

The question Lanning posed captures the central structural problem of the decade more honestly than any strategy document. The council’s inclusive growth programme was asked to do three jobs at once: build physical capacity, repair social harm, and upgrade an economy largely outside its control. It had real levers for the first. It had some instruments for the second. For the third, it had some levers to influence the behaviour of major suppliers and developers, but beyond that, very little.

This is not presented as an excuse, but to set out a foundation for analysis without which the decade cannot be fairly assessed.

The fiscal position. The austerity settlement for English local government is now among the most thoroughly documented policy episodes in recent UK public finance. Government grant funding to councils fell 49.1% in real terms between 2010-11 and 2017-18. Core Spending Power per person fell 22.2% in real terms between 2010-11 and 2024-25. Even after partial recovery in the 2020s, it remains approximately 9% below its 2010-11 level in real terms.⁶⁹

The distributional impact is the critical finding for this briefing. The IFS reports that cuts averaged £587 per resident (a 35% reduction) in the most deprived tenth of areas, compared with £174 per resident (15%) in the least deprived. Council tax’s share of Core Spending Power rose from 34% in 2009-10 to 55% by 2025-26, a shift that structurally punishes boroughs with low tax bases.⁷⁰ Service-level cuts were devastating: youth services and Sure Start centres down 70%, housing spending down a third, highways and culture down over 40%. Adult and children’s social care now absorbs 65% of council budgets, up from 50% in 2010-11, crowding out the discretionary spending, such as on economic development, community engagement, skills, which could have supported inclusive growth.⁷¹

Likewise, the pay stagnation LBBB residents experienced was not local but national. Across England, real wages have been essentially flat since 2008, the longest period of wage stagnation since consistent records began, and the worst since the Napoleonic Wars.⁷² The UK fell from fifth in the OECD for real wage growth before 2007 to sixteenth afterwards. **Against this backdrop, the widening of the gap between LBBB’s median pay and London’s reflects not a failure of local economic strategy but the structural disadvantage of a post-industrial, predominantly working class borough in an economy where the gains of recovery were captured overwhelmingly by higher-paid sectors concentrated in inner London.**

The fiscal constraint shaped everything. It is why the council turned to municipal entrepreneurship: borrowing to build, creating companies to generate income, using growth to plug the gap left by central government. It is why Community Solutions merged specialist services into generic roles. It is why the Borough Manifesto’s

accountability machinery was allowed to dissolve. It is why economic development – non-statutory, discretionary, and therefore vulnerable – never received the resourcing the 2019 stocktake said it needed.

Twomey, who has overseen ten consecutive budget cycles, puts the constraint in human terms. Of the council’s general fund budget of just over £200 million, “about £140 million is adults, disabilities, children’s social care. Phenomenal amount of money. When you think 70% of the budget probably only touches 5% of the population.” The result is that “huge swathes of people out there, the only dealings they ever have with the council is having their bins collected.” He also identifies a self-inflicted wound: the council froze council tax for eight consecutive years, a decision he opposed at the time and now estimates has cost a cumulative £35 million a year. “I wish I had that £35 million in the coffers today... we could invest that. But the people at the time in power were like, it’s a great thing.” No resident, he says, ever thanked them for it on the doorstep.

Lanning, from the operational side, confirms the picture: the “key risks” to inclusive growth were always “budget cuts, leadership changes, uncertainty about ongoing commitment”. Since 2017, and amid significant population increase and entrenched inequalities in the borough as the earlier data show, the council has made £103 million of savings in order to remain solvent.⁷³ At the same time, between 2010 and 2025, the council’s workforce decreased from 4,453 to 2,619 – a reduction of 41%, at a time of rising need.⁷⁴

The structural economy. The borough’s job density, barely one job for every two working-age residents, was declining before the Growth Commission reported and has not fundamentally changed since. 61% of residents commute out for work. The dominant employment sectors remain logistics, distribution, caring, and retail: sectors characterised by low pay, limited progression, and precarious contracts. The occupational structure is the deepest driver of the borough’s income position, and it is almost entirely beyond the reach of a local authority.⁷⁵

Lanning is blunt about this: “for all the sort of Preston rhetoric, councils have very little influence over their local economies. It’s tiny”. In care, the council is a significant player because the population is poor enough that most care is publicly commissioned. Councils can use procurement to influence the behaviour of suppliers to some extent, and planning laws enable them to promote local employment and some other community benefits on major new developments. “But in other sectors like the retail sector, the hospitality sector... we have limited levers over them outside of engagement, advice and support”. Economic development itself is not a statutory function; in the coalition years its budget was cut entirely, and when Lanning arrived in 2019 to rebuild it, the funding for her programmes came almost entirely from external sources – endowments linked to new developments and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund – not the council’s own budget. Geddes, asked who really holds power over housing outcomes, answers without hesitation: “the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who needs to find the money”, and “the Minister for Local Government or Housing”, who can direct

councils to build. The chain from council investment to resident benefit is, as the interviews reveal, long, leaky and mediated by partners the council does not control.⁷⁶

The national policy environment. The Growth Commission reported into a world of low interest rates, pre-Brexit, pre-pandemic, pre-Ukraine. Every major assumption underlying the investment strategy – cheap borrowing, stable construction costs, continued London housing market growth, EU labour supply for the construction sector – was overturned by events between 2016 and 2024. None of this was foreseeable in 2016. But the Commission’s lack of reckoning with fiscal risk – to ask what would happen if resources didn’t materialise – left the strategy without a theory of resilience.

The limits of local agency. Fairness requires acknowledging that some of the most important outcomes, such as median pay, child poverty, occupational structure, deprivation ranking, are determined overwhelmingly by national policy: the benefits system, the minimum wage, housing benefit levels, the funding of public services, the structure of the labour market. A London borough cannot offset the withdrawal of state capacity through entrepreneurialism alone. The 2019 stocktake was clear about this: “inclusive growth outcomes in any part of the country depend significantly on the policies of the national government and the wider economy”.⁷⁷

But fairness also requires saying that this was known from the start. The council chose, reasonably, to act with the tools it had. What it did not do – what no iteration of the strategy has done – is say clearly, to residents and to government, what it cannot do. That gap between promise and power is where trust erodes.

The analytical distinction between council choices and national constraints is important. It is also, for residents, largely invisible. Patti, whose account of Thames View spans the decades of change, does not separate the two: “every spare bit of land seems to have flats built on it, they must be getting all that extra council tax. And yet you’re not seeing it invested in anything.” The council is the institution she can see. The new builds are visible. The council tax revenue they generate is assumed. The continuing erosion of local services is experienced not as the consequence of national funding decisions but as a failure of care by the authority that promised no one would be left behind. Whether that perception is fair in structural terms matters less than the fact that it is widespread – and that nothing in the council’s communication over the decade has equipped residents to hold the right institutions to account. As far as people getting left behind, Patti says, people have been left behind.

Kevin Hudson, whose knowledge of the borough’s development structures is extensive, sees a different dimension of the power problem. The council created Be First to avoid the fate of Tower Hamlets, where the London Docklands Development Corporation overrode local authority and community input. The intention was to retain control. But in Kevin’s analysis, the institution was captured by the logic it was created to resist: “what happened is they became like them, they became assimilated and they even started to do the same sort of things, like lying to the public, leaving information out, making it difficult to access information”. This language reflects a strongly-felt perception among some residents that decision-making around regeneration –

particularly that led by private developers – has become difficult to scrutinise and insufficiently transparent. The concern expressed here is not a demonstrable pattern of dishonesty but a wider sense that the boundary between public authority and commercial development had become blurred. The external constraints were real. But so were the internal choices about how to navigate them.

6. Where things stand: the strategy inherited

The council's current strategic framework, published in 2025, represents a fundamental reorientation. Two companion Cabinet papers – *Lessons Learned from Austerity* and *Our B&D* – are accompanied by a partnership delivery strategy, *It Starts Here*, formally adopted by Assembly on 25 February 2026, which sets out ten missions for the borough. A new Housing Strategy 2026-2031 has also been adopted (the first since 2012-2017), a nine-year gap during which the borough's most intensive period of housebuilding took place without a current housing strategy in force.⁷⁸

The Growth Commission imagined the council as an economic development agency that would reshape the borough's place in the London economy. *It Starts Here* imagines the council as a neighbourhood services coordinator that manages deprivation as well as it can with the resources available. The unit of analysis has shifted from the borough's economic identity to the individual resident with a long-term health condition, a child not school-ready, a household in financial crisis.

The ten missions are: healthy and thriving children; building financial resilience; access to good work; prevention of long-term health conditions; independent living; zero tolerance to domestic abuse; feeling safe; better homes; clean neighbourhoods; culture and heritage placemaking. The key outcome measures are specific, measurable and in most cases already close to or at London averages.⁷⁹

That last point matters, with a caveat. On several specific indicators, the borough has quietly caught up, though the overall deprivation picture remains severe. Early years development is within half a percentage point of London. Non-decent social housing (8.5%) is better than the London average (11.4%). Victim-based crime (72.7 per 1,000) is well below London's rate (91.7). The CQC Outstanding rating for adult social care is shared with only two other authorities in England. These are not the marks of a failing borough, but one with real capacity in specific domains.⁸⁰

The structural innovation is neighbourhood working. The borough is being divided into four neighbourhoods, each with networks of community navigators, multi-disciplinary teams, and links to a voluntary sector positioned as a genuine delivery partner. The council is a pioneer in the National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme. BD Giving's CEO is a signatory to *It Starts Here* alongside the council Leader, Chief Executive, the NHS, and the police.

Indeed, work over the last decade has resulted in significant developments in social infrastructure and participatory grant-giving within the borough. BD Giving has developed a participatory investment model in which residents are involved in decisions about where community funds are directed. Capitalised through the Community Infrastructure Levy, it manages a community-controlled endowment fund that has distributed over £1 million in participatory grants since 2020 and attracted over £2 million in external philanthropic funding, more than doubling the original council transfer.⁸¹ The BD CVS and the John Smith House consortium of twelve grassroots

organisations have built collaborative infrastructure for a sector that remains, as the LGA Peer Challenge noted, one of the smallest relative to population in London. Creative Barking and Dagenham has piloted a fantastic sortition-based citizens' panel for cultural decision-making at the Galleon Arts Centre, a model now being scaled to a full citizens' assembly for culture with Arts Council investment.⁸² In the process, and from many different directions, signs of an emerging civic capacity. These developments are not peripheral to the inclusive growth story. They represent the civic capacity — the organised, resourced, independent community voice — that the Growth Commission called for but that the council's own strategy was not designed to build.

The Growth Commission had called for increased civic capacity. Ten years on, a strategy document like *It Starts Here* is smaller in ambition, more specific in focus, more honest about constraints, and more grounded in the evidence of what actually works. But there are gaps the new strategy does not address.

No economic development strategy. *It Starts Here* does not mention the 20,000 jobs target. Its employment mission focuses on connecting three cohorts of economically inactive residents – people with learning disabilities, women facing intersectional barriers, people with long-term health conditions – to existing opportunities. This is sensible targeted work. But it is not a strategy for raising job density, shifting the occupational structure, or closing the pay gap with London. The structural drivers of poverty remain entrenched.

The comparative evidence suggests this gap could be partially filled. The Preston Model – community wealth building through redirecting anchor institution procurement locally – produced significant results with minimal risk: locally-retained spend increased from 5% to 18.2% in Preston and from 39% to 79.2% across Lancashire between 2012–13 and 2016–17, representing £74 million in additional local spend. Living Wage employment rose from 76% to 88%. Crucially, the Preston approach used existing spending flows rather than leveraged debt, making it replicable by boroughs with constrained resources.⁸³ LBBD – with two university campuses (Coventry and UCL Pearl), film studios, a Freeport, and a recently announced dentistry centre in partnership with QMUL – now has more anchor institutions than at any point in its history. The question is whether their procurement, employment and training practices can be coordinated toward inclusive outcomes. Social value commitments are currently weighted at a minimum of 10% when evaluating council contracts over £100,000; the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge recommended raising this to 20%.⁸⁴ The tools for community wealth building are available; they have not yet been fully used.

A note of caution on Thames Freeport. The designation projects around £4.5 billion in new investment and over 21,000 skilled jobs, with retained business rates estimated at approximately £10 million for local reinvestment. But the IFS cautions that location-specific tax incentives primarily displace activity from elsewhere rather than creating net new economic output, and evaluation of earlier UK freeports and enterprise zones found evidence supporting this concern. CLES and trade unions have raised concerns about employment quality in warehousing and logistics – precisely the low-pay sectors that already dominate the borough's economy.⁸⁵ Whether the Freeport delivers

genuinely new, well-paid work or entrenches the existing occupational structure depends on governance choices that are being made now.

No education mission beyond early years. The Growth Commission placed education at the centre of its long-term vision. *It Starts Here* has a mission on school readiness but nothing on GCSE, post-16 pathways, or university access. The 2019 stocktake noted that improvements in school results had “not yet translated into improved progression rates from secondary education into further learning or earning”.⁸⁶ Dropping education as a strategic priority feels premature. That said, education has been one of the few areas more safely under local control and it is here that, in many respects, the borough has done well, genuinely increasing opportunities for its significant young population.

No Be First, no Barking Riverside. The council’s flagship delivery company and the borough’s largest development do not appear in the successor strategy. The IAS has been formally concluded and Be First is in a precarious transition to a new model, yet the physical growth programme has not stopped – homes are still being built, the Local Plan runs to 2037 – and someone needs to ensure that the next phase of development does not repeat the infrastructure lag that residents describe with such force.

Participation has been dropped as a strategic lens. The 2019 stocktake argued for four interlocking dimensions of inclusive growth: People, Place, Participation, Partnerships. *Our B&D* operates on three. *It Starts Here* was developed through some public engagement activities, but consultation *about* a strategy is not participation as a structural feature. The resident experience described in this briefing – of governance as closed, of decisions made elsewhere, of information flowing one way – suggests the distance still to travel.

On the national funding environment, a necessary correction. The headline national settlement for 2025-26 was 6.8% in cash terms, or 4.3% in real terms, but it was deliberately redistributive: a new Recovery Grant and enhanced Social Care Grant directed disproportionate funding to deprived areas, with LBB’s specific increase likely approaching double digits.⁸⁷ Expert consensus is unambiguous, however, that even the most redistributive settlement in years does not reverse the long-term decline: real-terms funding in 2028/29 is still projected below its level almost two decades earlier.⁸⁸ What has changed is predictability: the government has published a multi-year Local Government Finance Settlement covering 2026/27 to 2028/29 – the first in a decade. For a borough whose strategy was repeatedly destabilised by single-year funding cycles, this matters. It does not restore what was lost, but it allows planning on a timescale longer than twelve months.

In a nutshell, despite significant further constraints, there are good bones for residents, the council and the community and voluntary sector organisations to build upon. Let’s now examine what might be taken forwards.

7. Ten years on: what the decade teaches

This briefing has tried to do something simple but difficult: to hold two truths at the same time.

The first truth is that the council did remarkable things with constrained resources. It built homes when others couldn't. It attracted institutions to a borough that had none. It transformed its planning function. It maintained social housing to a standard above the London average. It brought early years attainment to near-parity with London. It achieved an Outstanding CQC rating. It navigated a pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis, and fifteen years of austerity without issuing a Section 114 notice, at a time when eight councils around it had issued twelve such notices and its immediate neighbour effectively went bankrupt. These are not small achievements but accomplished by officers and members who worked with energy, creativity and genuine commitment to a borough they cared about. It is impressive, and yet it has also often been thankless.

The second truth is that inclusive growth, the governing promise of the decade, has not yet delivered what it promised. Child poverty remained stubbornly high. The pay gap with London widened, and deprivation rankings did not improve. The Borough Manifesto's targets were not met, and then its accountability machinery was dissolved. Community Solutions did not reduce demand. The economic development strategy was never written. The civic participation agenda was tried and abandoned. The markets deal collapsed. The Investment and Acquisition Strategy has been formally wound down, its reserves nearly exhausted, its housing company not yet registered as a social landlord, its commercial portfolio struggling to cover the cost of capital. The things that mattered most to residents, like safety, cleanliness, affordability, a sense that someone was listening, were not the things the strategy was designed to deliver.

The council's own assessment, published in July 2025, confirms both truths simultaneously. Growth was real. It "failed to address long-standing social and economic inequalities which have worsened and left some people behind".⁸⁹ The title of the 2016 report was *No One Left Behind*. Ten years on, people have been left behind, and the council knows it. Twomey said as much, unprompted, during his interview: the motto is "no one left behind", but "we leave people behind every single day. Unfortunately not intentionally, but it's a really hard thing to live up to actually". That is not a confession of negligence but an acknowledgement, from the person who held the borough's finances for a decade, that the promise was structurally beyond the council's capacity to keep.

Ramatu, who we met earlier in Barking Riverside, holds both truths in a single life. She likes the area. The transport links are "fantastic". The Uber boat takes her to medical appointments in central London. She values the community of parents, the Thames Life events, the sense of involvement: "I actually feel valued in this area". But she won't buy – shared ownership "seems like too good to be true, like there's a catch" – and she won't send her son to local schools. She looked up the safest boroughs in London and Barking was not on the list. She plans to drive him to Romford for primary school. Asked about the future, she says: "if it gets too busy, we'll just up and move". Hers is exactly

the young family the growth strategy was designed to attract and retain. The development brought her here, but it has not yet given her a reason to stay.

What does the decade teach?

First, that the theory of change was flawed from the start. The Growth Commission assumed that local agency, combined with London's growth dynamics, could substitute for central government investment. It couldn't. Building homes does not reduce child poverty; attracting a film studio does not close the pay gap. Creating a planning company does not change the occupational structure. The things that drive poverty in Barking and Dagenham, such as the benefits system, the minimum wage, the funding of public services or the structure of the labour market, are determined nationally. The £40 billion annually stripped from social security since 2012 cannot be offset by municipal entrepreneurship, however creative. A local authority can mitigate, but it cannot offset. The council's latest strategy, *It Starts Here*, implicitly acknowledges this by focusing almost entirely on service delivery and neighbourhood coordination rather than economic transformation. Whether that represents wisdom or resignation depends on whether you believe the national environment will change.

There is reason to think it might. The removal of the two-child benefit limit from April 2026, projected to lift 450,000 children out of relative poverty after housing costs by 2030, at a cost of approximately £3 billion a year, will likely do more for Barking and Dagenham's child poverty rate than any local intervention of the past decade. The IFS called it "one of the most cost-effective options the Government has to achieve a quick reduction in child poverty". Six in ten affected families were in work. CPAG estimates the cost of child poverty to the UK economy at £39 billion a year – more than ten times the cost of removing the limit.⁹⁰ This single national policy change is a reminder that the structural levers sit where they have always sat: with the government that sets benefit levels, wages, and the framework within which local authorities operate.

Second, that place ran ahead of people, and nobody closed the gap. This was identified by Metro Dynamics' own stocktake in 2019 and has been confirmed by every subsequent assessment. Physical change is visible, measurable and politically rewarding. Social change is slow, diffuse and depends on systems the council does not control. The result is a borough where new buildings stand alongside old deprivation, and where investment and attention have been dedicated to Barking, less so Dagenham. One where "affordable" housing is experienced by some as a language game that excludes the poor, and where the signature resident experience of growth is infrastructure lag – homes without GPs, new estates without shops.

Third, that participation is not optional, and not the same as consultation. Every strategy the council has produced since 2016 has acknowledged the need for resident voice, yet every strategy has under-delivered on it. The Growth Commission called for a civic revolution; the 2019 stocktake called for "a game changing approach to community engagement".⁹¹ *Our B&D* dropped participation as a strategic lens entirely. Why?

This matters not because participation is intrinsically virtuous, easy, or conducive to ‘pragmatic’ practical outcomes, but because the absence of participation has material consequences. When residents don’t know what’s planned, they can’t prepare. When they aren’t involved in design, schemes don’t reflect their needs. When they see change happening around them without explanation, trust collapses. “Enhancement” becomes a word residents distrust. “Affordable” becomes a word they mock (and many did). “Inclusive” becomes a word that describes the aspiration of people who aren’t being included. “Inclusive growth” then becomes a term of resentment and derision, not of collective ambition and uplift.

The decade’s evidence on participation, read as a whole, points to a clear conclusion. Externally designed programmes, however well-intentioned, do not build lasting civic capacity: Every One Every Day’s £9 million and the absence of any institutional trace are proof enough of that. What endures is participation that is institutionally embedded, asset-backed, and powered by genuine community control. Three examples are instructive. Granby Four Streets CLT in Liverpool, formed from decades of resident organising, is now nearly financially self-sufficient through rental income and has inspired over seventy additional home renovations in its neighbourhood. Newham’s permanent Citizens’ Assembly (the first in England, established in 2021) endures because it was institutionalised as permanent council infrastructure, with 89% of participants reporting greater connection to their local area. The Wigan Deal endures because it was embedded across all council operations as a cultural transformation, not delivered as a time-limited project.

The evidence shows that participation models survive when they involve community ownership of physical assets, genuine transfer of power and resources to residents, and sustainable financing through rental income or asset returns (not time-limited grants). Barking and Dagenham needs not copy any of these, but it does need to decide whether participation is an activity the council runs or a power the council shares.

What might participation look like if it were taken seriously – not as a programme to be launched and closed, but as a permanent feature of how the borough governs itself? Two possibilities are worth considering.

The first is structural: a regular forum in which councillors, the council leader, voluntary and community sector leaders, and residents meet not to be consulted but to discuss, listen, and share in decisions. Not a partnership board that reports upward, but a circle not under the domain of any one organisation, one that generates accountability sideways – between people who live in the borough and people who govern it.

The call for this comes not only from residents but from within the council itself. Speaking in 2024, Twomey identified what he called a “communication gap” between the council and the voluntary sector as the area where inclusive growth has been least successful. The relationship in the past was, he says, too often transactional: “We are going to fund you and you’re beholden to us and we want you to hit these targets is not the way forward”. What he wants instead is collaboration at the same level – “you have

to work at the same level” – with frank exchanges and shared objectives, particularly on stubborn problems like child poverty that no single agency can address alone.

The resident experience suggests the distance is greater than the institutional accounts acknowledge. Allan has spent years trying to engage the council through exactly the channels it says it wants residents to use – campaigning, producing business plans, attending meetings, writing to councillors. His verdict is blunt: “No resident left behind. But we’d like to be consulted on what goes on. Not after it’s done. It’s too late to say anything once the build starts”. The council’s rhetoric of resident involvement is, in his experience, “a one way road. It’s the council and nothing else. Nothing comes back”.

Kevin describes the asymmetry that makes meaningful participation impossible. Real consultation, he argues, requires access to the same information the developer holds: full planning documents, land contamination data, site histories, financial structures – not “an A5 leaflet saying, here’s what you’ve got to go on”. It also requires considerable planning expertise and time to scrutinise documentation. Without that, the relationship is rigged: “If I play poker with you and you know what my cards are, you know where the aces are... that’s not a fair game”. He wants to work constructively with the development – his Footpath 47 campaign explicitly offers a positive alternative, conservation alongside housing, an exemplar “the developer could come back to in 20 years’ time with their children and say, see that?” But constructive engagement requires information parity, and the system is designed to prevent it.

Ramatu reveals a different face of the same problem. Asked where she would hear about the council’s plans for the area – the A13 tunnel, the densification, the 50,000 homes target – her answer is immediate: “Where would I even hear about that?” She gets information from Thames Life’s WhatsApp group and BRL’s Instagram. The council does not feature in her information landscape at all. She would attend community events if they provided food and childcare, but assumes planning meetings are “too technical for me”. She is not hostile to the council, nor unaware that decisions are being made. She simply does not register the consultation architecture as something designed for her.

These three testimonies describe not one participation failure but three interlocking ones: active exclusion, where residents who try to engage are turned away; structural opacity, where the information asymmetry between institutions and communities makes genuine partnership impossible; and invisible barriers, where planning consultation processes often do not reach residents whose lives are most affected. And then, who speaks for others who would also have a profound stake in future developments, like families in insecure or temporary accommodation? Twomey’s call for genuine partnership addresses the first. The second and third require something more fundamental: a redesign of how, when, where, and for whom participation is organised, and an ethical and holistic model for ensuring development truly meets the needs of borough residents, not simply government housebuilding targets or shareholder bottom-lines.

My many conversations with councillors and council officers point towards the direction of an open partnership with the community sector. The interviews suggest residents would welcome it, if it were real, felt authentic, and could be tied to meaningful accountability and results. The test is simple: does information flow both ways, and do residents see their input change what happens?

The second is methodological: putting residents in charge of understanding their own borough. Community research – in which residents design the questions, conduct the inquiry, and shape the findings for their own priorities – is a form of participation that produces knowledge that no local authority, developer, business or community charity could generate on their own. It picks up what formal consultation misses, because the researchers are embedded in the communities they study. It builds the civic capacity that every strategy since 2016 has called for and none has sustained. Initiatives of this kind are beginning to take shape in Barking and Dagenham, led by residents and community organisers rather than by the council, including one I am supporting in partnership with Thames Life. They deserve support, not because they will solve the participation deficit overnight, but because they represent something the decade has consistently lacked: residents with agency over the story of their own place.

The third, that honest accounting is the precondition for trust. The council's 2025 papers are, in many respects, models of institutional honesty. They acknowledge failure, identify lessons, and propose a different course. But this honesty has come late – nearly a decade after the Borough Manifesto was adopted, years after its monitoring machinery dissolved. The annual public review the Growth Commission recommended was never sustained. The data that would have shown, year by year, whether inclusive growth was working was not published in a form residents could access and scrutinise. The Housing Strategy lapsed in 2017 and was not replaced until 2026 – a nine-year gap spanning the borough's most intensive housebuilding programme.⁹² The economic development strategy was never written at all.

For the next decade, the lesson is plain: say what you are trying to do, measure whether it is working, publish the results, tell the truth when it isn't, and engage residents and the local community in frank and ongoing dialogue. *It Starts Here* has specific, measurable outcome indicators. If it also has transparent, regular public reporting – the thing every previous strategy promised and none delivered – it will be doing something genuinely new.

Finally, that the borough's work is far from over. Barking and Dagenham in 2026 is not the borough of 2016. It has institutions it didn't have – film studios, a university campus, a Thames Freeport, a Youth Zone, a network of community hubs. It has a housing stock that other boroughs envy. It has schools that work well. It has a social care system rated Outstanding. It has a young, dynamic, diverse population with energy and ambition that my interviews capture vividly. And it has, for the first time in a decade, a national government that has removed the two-child benefit limit, increased local government funding with the most redistributive settlement in years, and published the first multi-year finance settlement in a decade.

The question is whether these foundations – physical, institutional, demographic, political – can be converted into the thing the Growth Commission promised and the decade did not deliver: a borough where growth reaches the people who need it most, where the gap with the rest of London narrows rather than persists, and where residents experience change as something they shape rather than something they endure.

Geddes, asked how he would want the work of these years to be understood by someone examining the record in twenty years' time, offers the aspiration that runs through every institutional interview in this briefing: "I hope they'll just say it's an area that's quite popular, that ... bearing in mind the constraints under which they were operating, they've [the council] done pretty well". That is a reasonable hope. Whether it is fulfilled depends not only on what the council does next, but on whether the constraints themselves change.

And what is hope without trust? Clearly the partnership between institutional ambition and residents' experiences over the last decade has become tried and sorely frayed. The event held to discuss this briefing illustrated the challenge. Council figures, developers, community leaders, academics and national policy voices were in the same room – and many for the first time in this way, as equals – and the discussion was candid. Yet even in that room, some of the most consequential decisions affecting the borough's future were being shaped by forces outside it (BRL's application to nearly double the consented housing at Riverside would be approved six days later).

Partnership is not simply a phrase to be performatively declared but a practice to be maintained, especially when the real constraints – like national policy, capital markets, ministerial decisions – press harder and hardest. What is in the borough's power is the quality of its internal relationships: the willingness to share information, to listen to criticism without defensiveness, and to treat residents and the community sector as equals in a shared enterprise whose outcome is by no means assured.

There is one more lesson the decade offers, drawn not from Barking and Dagenham's experience alone but from the comparative evidence assembled here. The most effective local strategies for inclusive growth were not the most ambitious, the most innovative, or the most expensive. They were the ones that used existing resources differently – Preston redirecting anchor procurement, Wigan embedding relational practice across its operations, Granby Four Streets organising residents around physical assets they controlled. What these examples have in common is not a particular economic or civic theory but a practice of institutional patience: doing specific things, with the tools available, for long enough to see results. Barking and Dagenham has more tools now than it did in 2016. It also has, perhaps, a clearer-eyed understanding of what those tools can and cannot do. That combination – more capacity, less illusion – may be the decade's most valuable inheritance.

Susan, a retired school-teacher and trade unionist who has watched the borough change across decades, argues for something both simpler and harder than strategy: "pride, so people want to live and work locally", and the role of "visible civic events in

holding cohesion together”. That is inclusive growth at its most elemental – not a theory of economic change or a set of targets, but a place where people want to be, and a sense that they belong to it, are heard by it, and matter to it.

So – *no-one left behind*? The briefing’s title is borrowed from a Commission that meant it as a promise. Ten years on, it works better as a question, one the borough has earned the right to keep asking, but has not yet answered itself. The physical transformation – real. The institutional survival? At times, remarkable. The people who chose public service in one of England’s hardest places deserve more recognition than they will receive. But the residents whose lives were supposed to change – whose poverty was supposed to lift, whose voices were supposed to matter, whose children were supposed to inherit something better – they are still waiting. That’s not because nobody tried or cared, rather, that the things that would make the greatest difference were never in the borough’s hands, and some of the things that were in its hands were not done. The next decade probably does not need another strategy or vision document, nor another promise that no one will be left behind. It needs the harder, slower, less photogenic work of building trust where trust has been damaged, sharing power where power has been hoarded, and, above all, telling the truth – to residents, to government, and to itself – about what growth can and cannot do. That is not a conclusion. It is, at best, just a beginning.

About my sources

All quotations from residents, councillors, council officers and community sector participants are drawn from semi-structured interviews and focus groups that I conducted between 2023 and 2025 as part of an ongoing research programme at the Open University called ‘Growth for all along the A13?’ (project webpage here: <https://fass.open.ac.uk/polis/research/growth4all>). All participants gave informed written consent. Names of residents and community sector participants have been changed or abbreviated to protect anonymity; councillors and council officers who agreed to be identified are named.

All data in this report was sourced, verified and correct as of 10 March 2026. You will be able to access my project workbook and an Executive Summary through this [Dropbox link](#) now, or via the weblink above from April 2026, which includes data on a wide range of measures and against London averages and peers. If you happen to come across this work in the future, then Trust for London’s borough indicators will be a more up to date source for you (<https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/barking-and-dagenham-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/>).

A full methodology statement is available from me on request, and if you’re in the Barking or Dagenham area I’d be happy to meet you for a coffee to discuss my findings.

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Dan Taylor, 26th March 2026.

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- ³⁷ On 17 March 2026, the council approved a revised outline planning application to increase housing density at Riverside from 10,800 up to 20,000 homes – an expansion including two public parks, three additional schools, two community centres and a health facility. A £40 million Health and Wellbeing Hub had been approved by Cabinet in July 2021, combining GP services, a leisure centre and community space. By July 2023, construction cost inflation (related to the war in Ukraine) had increased the build cost from £39.9m to over £50m, the borrowing rate had increased, the leisure operator had terminated its contract, and the scheme's net value swung from +£1.7m to -£12.7m. The Investment Panel recommended pausing the scheme until conditions improved. Temporary GP pop-up clinics were provided, and in 2026 a temporary GP practice at Huggett Road was approved. See LBBd Cabinet, 'Green Light Given to Build Innovative New £40m Wellbeing Hub at Barking Riverside', 13 July 2021; LBBd Investment Panel, 'Barking Riverside Health and Wellbeing Hub: Update Paper', July 2023; LBBd Health Scrutiny Committee, "Interim Health Facility Barking Riverside – Update", 10 December 2025; Barking Riverside, "Barking Riverside to deliver up to 20,000 homes in major evolution for east London", 17 March 2026 (<https://barkingriverside.london/newsletter/barking-riverside-to-deliver-up-to-20000-homes-in-major-evolution-for-east-london/>).
- ³⁸ BD IGC, *No One Left Behind*, Part 1, Recommendation 36.
- ³⁹ Grant Thornton, *London Borough of Barking and Dagenham: Value for Money 2023/24: Governance Review*, January 2025, p. 4. The auditors' concerns related to the overall company structure and governance arrangements, not to BD Reside's financial performance specifically; BD Reside has generated significant surpluses for the council.
- ⁴⁰ LBBd, *Lessons Learned from Austerity*, paras 5.5 and 10.3.
- ⁴¹ LBBd Cabinet, 'BD Homes Ltd: Progress towards Becoming a Registered Provider of Social Housing', 16 February 2026, paras 1.5-1.6, 2.13.
- ⁴² LBBd Cabinet, 'Investment and Acquisition Strategy – Update and Future Proposals' [hereafter IAS], 16 February 2026, para 10.8.
- ⁴³ Morphet, J. and Clifford, B., *Local Authority Direct Provision of Housing*, UCL Bartlett School of Planning, 2021, p. 5.
- ⁴⁴ LBBd, IAS, paras 9.4-9.5.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, para 9.6.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, para 7.3.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, para 9.7-9.10.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Recommendation (i) and para 1.3.
- ⁴⁹ LBBd Cabinet, 'Be First Business Plan 2026–2031', 16 February 2026, paras 2.5, 2.7, 5.3.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para 2.6.
- ⁵¹ LBBd, *Lessons Learned from Austerity*, para 4.11.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, paras 4.14-4.16.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, para 4.20.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, para 4.13.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, para 5.3.
- ⁵⁶ Naylor, C. and Wellings, D., *A Citizen-Led Approach to Health and Care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal*, The King's Fund, 2019.
- ⁵⁷ Wigan Council, *Progress with Unity: A New Era for Wigan Borough*, July 2024.

- ⁵⁸ Municipal Enquiry, ‘What Happened to Every One Every Day?’, *Municipal Enquiry*, July 2023. Programme spend and participation figures from Participatory City Foundation, self-published impact reports, various years. (See <https://www.wereeveryone.org/every-one-every-day-research>).
- ⁵⁹ LBBB, *Lessons Learned from Austerity*, para 5.7.
- ⁶⁰ LBBB, *Our B&D*, July 2025, paras 1.9-1.10.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, paras 2.4, 4.1.
- ⁶² LBBB Assembly, *It Starts Here*, 25 February 2026, paras 4.3, 4.5.
- ⁶³ LBBB, *Our B&D*, para 5.2; *It Starts Here*.
- ⁶⁴ LBBB and Be First, “Unlocking growth so that no-one is left behind: An economic prospectus for Barking and Dagenham” (2022). <https://www.hwa.uk.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Economics-Prospectus-final.pdf>
- ⁶⁵ Metro Dynamics, *Growth Commission Stocktake: Towards Inclusive Growth for Barking and Dagenham* (January 2019), pp. 11-12.
- ⁶⁶ LBBB, IAS, para 2.1; LBBB *Housing Strategy 2026–2031*, para 8.4.1.
- ⁶⁷ LBBB Assembly, *It Starts Here*, 25 February 2026, para 2.1.
- ⁶⁸ Metro Dynamics, *Growth Commission Stocktake*; LBBB, *Our B&D*.
- ⁶⁹ Government grant funding fall of 49.1%: National Audit Office, *Financial Sustainability of Local Authorities in England*, March 2018, cited in House of Commons Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee. Core Spending Power per person fall of 22.2%: Institute for Government, *Performance Tracker 2025*, 2025. Core Spending Power approximately 9% below 2010-11 level: House of Commons Library, *Local Government Finance: England*, February 2026.
- ⁷⁰ Institute for Fiscal Studies, *English Local Government Funding: Trends and Challenges in 2024 and Beyond*, IFS Report, 2024.
- ⁷¹ Service-level spending reductions: Institute for Government, *Performance Tracker 2025*, 2025 (youth services, Sure Start, highways, culture). Adult and children’s social care share of council budgets: National Audit Office, *Financial Sustainability of Local Authorities in England*, various years.
- ⁷² Stephen Machin, “Wage Controversies: Real Wage Stagnation, Inequality and Labour Market Institutions”, *LSE Public Policy Review*, 3(1), 2024. <https://ppr.lse.ac.uk/articles/10.31389/lseppr.103>
- ⁷³ LBBB, *Lessons Learned from Austerity*, paras 2.2–2.6, 4.4. LBBB, *Our B&D*, para 2.8. Core Spending Power data from House of Commons Library, Local Authority Data: Finances, various years.
- ⁷⁴ Haywood, *Lessons Learned from Austerity*, LBBB Cabinet paper, 15 July 2025, sec. 2.23 (from the full report).
- ⁷⁵ BD IGC, Part 2, p. 45.
- ⁷⁶ Within this narrow space though, the council did genuinely attempt targeted economic development work. During 2019-2021, programmes were developed to improve job quality in the care sector, support local market traders, and connect everyday economy employers to better employment practices. Some work was disrupted by the pandemic; the markets initiative did not achieve its aims. My analytical frame focuses on the capital and housing programme, reflecting the priorities of the Growth Commission, but the parallel story of revenue-side, sector-specific economic development, smaller in scale but potentially closer to impacting residents’ pay and conditions, deserves fuller treatment than this briefing provides.
- ⁷⁷ Metro Dynamics, *Growth Commission Stocktake*, p. 16.
- ⁷⁸ LBBB Cabinet, *Housing Strategy 2026-2031*, 16 February 2026, para 1.1.
- ⁷⁹ LBBB, *It Starts Here: Partnerships for Change*, pp. 7-25.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁸¹ BD Giving, “5 Years of Barking and Dagenham Giving”, August 2025, https://bdgiving.org.uk/news/5-years-of_bdg/; grant data published via 360Giving <https://grantnav.threesixtygiving.org/org/GB-CHC-1166335>
- ⁸² See Creative Barking and Dagenham, <https://creativebd.org.uk/got-an-idea-for-an-event-that-could-happen-at-galleon-arts-centre/> (webpage contained, at time of writing, a URL with a detailed report on the Citizens Panel model).
- ⁸³ Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), various publications on the Preston Model, 2016–2022. Manley, J. and Whyman, P., *The Preston Model and Community Wealth Building: Creating a Socio-Economic Democracy for the Future*, Routledge, 2021.
- ⁸⁴ LBBB Assembly, *It Starts Here*, para 7.2; LGA, *Corporate Peer Challenge: LBBB 2025*, p. 15.
- ⁸⁵ Displacement concern: Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Freeports*, IFS Briefing Note, March 2023. Employment quality concerns: Centre for Local Economic Strategies, *Inclusive Freeports*, CLES, 2021.
- ⁸⁶ Metro Dynamics, *Growth Commission Stocktake*, pp. 27-29.

⁸⁷ Institute for Fiscal Studies, *English Local Government Funding: Trends and Challenges in 2024 and Beyond*, IFS Report, 2024; House of Commons Library, *Local Government Finance: England*, February 2026.

⁸⁸ Institute for Government, *Performance Tracker 2025*, 2025.

⁸⁹ LBB, *Lessons Learned from Austerity*, para 5.8.

⁹⁰ 450,000 children lifted from poverty and £3 billion annual cost: Department for Work and Pensions, *Impact Assessment: Removal of the Two-Child Limit*, November 2025; Office for Budget Responsibility, *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, November 2025. “One of the most cost-effective options”: Institute for Fiscal Studies, response to Autumn Budget 2025. Six in ten affected families in work: DWP analysis of two-child limit caseload data. Cost of child poverty at £39 billion: Hirsch, D., *The Cost of Child Poverty in 2024*, Child Poverty Action Group, 2024.

⁹¹ Metro Dynamics, *Growth Commission Stocktake*, p. 30.

⁹² LBB Cabinet, *Housing Strategy 2026-2031*, para 1.1