

OLYMPIC HOPES

Elizabeth Finn Care and the LSE share findings on the benefits of Olympic regeneration in the borough of Newham. Anoosh Chakelian reports. Photos by Josh Kearns



In early July, anti-poverty charity Elizabeth Finn Care played co-host with Total Politics at a reception in Parliament to introduce the findings of its joint research with the London School of Economics into the Olympic promise of regeneration.

Will London 2012 provide a lasting legacy? Will it revitalise hitherto deprived Olympic boroughs, planned or merely represent a missed opportunity, leaving these areas with the same burdens as they carried prior to the Games?

The study, led by Professor Anne Power CBE of the LSE, focused on the borough of Newham. Power has been working on housing and social problems in Newham since the 1980s, and earlier this year began an investigation into the area's condition pre-2005, the year of the successful Olympic bid.

The full report will compare the civic health of the borough prior to the Games to that of the year following the closing ceremony, using figures from the ONS, the GLA, the Census and others.

The research team are also talking to "people on the ground," a method championed by Power, who asserts that "there is something to be upbeat about" despite there being "no easy route forward" in a place where social problems are very hard to eradicate.

Initial findings show that there has been a vast improvement in education and transport since 2005, with Newham overtaking the national average of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs A*-C, and "massive improvements" to the DLR, buses

"I'm deeply impressed with the work done in Newham schools in the build-up to the Olympics"

and railways, according to the LSE's findings.

Power was "deeply impressed" with the work done in Newham schools in the build-up to the Olympics, and Newham mayor Sir Robin Wales echoes this: "Education is critical... that's why we are investing in early years at a time of major cuts. We're trying to use the Olympics to inspire a generation, because we're not going to get this chance again."

However, some social problems have evaded the Olympic legacy development, and Elizabeth Finn Care will focus on these. Director Malcolm Tyndall explains: "We want to examine whether all that was promised is delivered, and if not, use this research to inform future regeneration projects."

Power admits that unemployment remains a stubborn sticking point: "The job recruitment for the London Olympics hasn't been what it should be." Although Newham bucked the national trend by increasing its new enterprises in 2008-11, it has seen more than double the London average rise in unemployment; 44 per cent from 2005-10.

Wales is striving to solve this. "This year so far," he explains, "we've placed 5,000 of Newham's long-term unemployed in work, but need 20,000 placed to reach the London average."

Newham remains the UK's second most deprived area, and its crime rate - though total crimes have fallen - continues to be more than double the London average.

Despite these intimidating obstacles, with the Olympics as its focus the borough is swiftly changing, and Wales is positive about the future: "From the Olympics, we've gained the concept of convergence. We're going to achieve the London average on housing, schools and jobs in one of the poorest places in the country." ■



THE SPEAKERS

PROFESSOR ANNE POWER CBE
London School of Economics
"Politicians will be very positive and upbeat about these things and there is something to be upbeat about."
"One of the things that's important to remember about Newham is that it's more like Liverpool than London."
"This particular project funded by Elizabeth Finn Care reflects that preoccupation that London poverty hasn't really changed in over 200 years."
"Newham is an outer London borough with inner characteristics - a mix of young people and young families, a big legacy in manual jobs."

"Newham has cumulative social problems that will be very, very hard to eradicate - it's got three times the national and London average of lone parents. The unemployment rate is very high, higher than the London average."
"To be truthful, the job recruitment for the London Olympics hasn't been what it should be."
"I was deeply impressed with the work that has been done to Newham schools in the run-up to the Olympics."
"In Newham, you have a sea of poverty and a desperate attempt to bring in more money."



MALCOLM TYNDALL Director at Elizabeth Finn Care
"We try to act as a voice for people who don't have the ability to pass the message on of those in financial need."



SIR ROBIN WALES Mayor of Newham
"I think Newham's dynamic, young; it's a wonderful place to live - but it's poor."
"Unless you know the reality of the situation, public policy will be directed the wrong way."
"From the Olympics, we are going to get to the London average on housing, schools and jobs in what is one of the poorest places in the country."
"We know in London the problem isn't jobs, it's getting access to jobs. This year, we've got 5000 people into work, half of whom were in long-term unemployment. To get the London average, 20,000 people in Newham who are long-term unemployed will have to work."
"We are trying to use the Olympics to inspire a generation, because we're not going to get this chance again."



STEPHEN TIMMS MP
Shadow employment minister
"I think it's beyond dispute that transformation has occurred in the Olympic boroughs."
"The promise was that there would be more opportunities in the future and opportunities for local businesses. It's the right time for asking whether these hopes have been fulfilled, and I'm very positive about it."

