



Report of the Cabinet Member for Better Communities (People)

Cabinet – 20 June

Swansea Poverty Truth Commission

Purpose:	To consider for approval the proposed next steps in the development of a Swansea Poverty Truth Commission and agree the details of the required commitment from Swansea Council.
Policy Framework:	Delivering a Successful & Sustainable Swansea: The City and County of Swansea's Corporate Plan 2018/22. Working towards prosperity for all in Swansea: A tackling poverty strategy for Swansea 2018/21.
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that Cabinet : 1) Approves the proposal to implement the next steps of establishing a Swansea Poverty Truth Commission 2) Approves its commitment and support for a Swansea Poverty Truth Commission.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Poverty Truth Commissions bring together key decision makers with those living at the sharp end of poverty to work together towards overcoming poverty. Ensuring that those affected by decisions are central to decision making; recognising that we cannot hope to understand, let alone address the causes and symptoms of poverty unless we involve the experts, those with direct experience of poverty who live with the reality day in day out.

- 1.2 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), takes an evidence-informed view about how to solve poverty. The JRF report on reducing poverty in Wales, *Prosperity without poverty: a framework for action in Wales*, Nov 2016, focuses on solutions that are proven to work and includes this recommendation: 'Involving people with first-hand experience of poverty in shaping local policies and actions, e.g. Through Poverty Truth Commissions as established in Leeds and Glasgow;' p20 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/prosperity-without-poverty>
- 1.3 Poverty Truth Commissions have a lifecycle, from the Public Launch Event to the Closing Event and Final Report Publication of approximately 18 months. Prior to the Public Launch Event, there is a critical process that takes approximately 9 months. During this period a Start-Up Group is established, resources, finances and staff are put in place and Civic, Business and Community Commissioners are recruited. Learning from other areas tells us that the success of Poverty Truth Commissions is dependent on the time taken to build relationships between Community Commissioners during this start-up phase to build relationships and trust between Community Commissioners, Civic and Business Commissioners (**Appendix A** – Approximate Timeline for a Swansea PTC). During the Commission process, opportunities are provided for those making and influencing decisions to listen, stereotypes and titles are left at the door and power imbalances addressed so that commissioners can work effectively together.
- 1.4 Poverty Truth Commissions should not be owned or dominated by any single organisation, they should be independent and able to act as a 'constructive friend' for all with a responsibility for contributing to tackling poverty.

2. Background and progress to date

- 2.1 In the Tackling Poverty Scrutiny Inquiry Panel report: [Action, partnership, participation: How can the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy be improved?](#) February 2017, establishing a Swansea Poverty Truth Commission was a principle recommendation. This recommendation was subsequently incorporated into Swansea's current Tackling Poverty Strategy.
- 2.2 The Poverty Reduction Policy Development Committee (PDC) advocated the further development of proposals and next steps for a Swansea Poverty Truth Commission at their meeting in July 2018.
- 2.3 At the early stage of the process the Council has acted as an instigator, liaising with Poverty Truth Commission UK Development and Leeds Poverty Truth Commission representatives who have offered to provide continued guidance and support so that we might benefit from their experiences and expertise.

- 2.4 Following on from the direction to implement the Poverty Reduction PDC's recommendations, Officers set-up a series of meetings with key stakeholders on the 26th of February 2019. The aim of these meetings was for stakeholders to find out more about how Poverty Truth Commissions' work, what they do, ask questions and explore whether there would be interest in, and enthusiasm for, developing a similar process in Swansea. The meetings, attended by 64 representatives across the city were led and facilitated by Andrew Grinnell (Leeds Poverty Truth Commission) who, in partnership with JRF, have been supporting the development of PTCs across the UK. The outcomes were as follows:

The first meeting involved key figures in the Public Sector (which included members of Swansea Public Services Board), Registered Social Landlords and Civic leaders. Interest, enthusiasm and backing for developing a Swansea PTC led to:

- A number of post-meeting offers of contributions in terms of financing the running/staff costs of a Commission, including a significant offer from one partner of £20,000.
- Three offers to host the Commission.
- Offers to participate in a Start-up group / to become a 'Civic/Business Commissioner'.
- Various other offers in terms of resources, staff time, meeting space, hosting meetings etc.

The second meeting involved key organisations and individuals working at a grassroots level with people experiencing poverty:

- Overall, a broad sense of support for the idea of a PTC was conveyed and strong commitments to be involved.
- Officers also received positive feedback post event, and expressions of support going forward, from individuals and organisations who were unable to attend at that time.

The third meeting with a group of people with direct lived experience of poverty;

- This was a dynamic and candid session
- There was unanimous agreement from the group that Swansea should have its own Poverty Truth Commission and a desire to be involved.

- 2.5 Officers sent out emails to the 2nd and 3rd meeting invitees advising that as a result of the support and commitment expressed, we will now be moving towards establishing an independent, local Start-Up Group, and further updates on progress would follow.

3. Required commitments

- 3.1 The Poverty Truth Commission model requires funding to support the running and facilitation of the Commission, this usually equates to £35,000

a year. A total of £70,000 funding is required for the two year lifecycle of the PTC. This would cover running costs for the Commission including a small local facilitation team usually comprising of two/three people working part time.

- 3.2 Poverty Truth Commissions across the UK have accessed a range of funding to cover these costs including grants and partner contributions of between £5,000 and £10,000. The Start-Up Group will be responsible for identifying and securing the required funding. A mix of national and local funding, or local funding, is preferable as this gives a greater sense of local investment and buy in, with no single organisation providing all of the funding as they may feel, and others may perceive, that the PTC then belongs to them.
- 3.3 A commitment from Swansea Council is required in terms of nominating a 'Civic Leader' representative who will champion the Poverty Truth Commission and become a Commissioner themselves. In many other Poverty Truth Commissions across the UK, this commitment has been from Council Leaders / Deputy Leaders / Chief Executive or Lord Mayor. Local Government's commitment and active participation have been important factors contributing to the efficacy and success of Poverty Truth Commissions across the UK. It is their agency, role and status in the community that can engage Civic and Business Leaders, get key decision makers in the room and facilitate opportunities for voice for PTC Working Groups. As testified, by Cheshire West and Chester Council, involvement in the PTC has also greatly improved their relationships with residents. They felt their voice was being heard, input and experience valued and saw change happening as result of their involvement. As a result of the relationships built during the commission process, Community Commissioners developed a greater understanding of the way systems operate within the Local Authority and how decisions are made.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The PTC Model has a clear trajectory:

- **Establishing whether there is commitment and enthusiasm locally for a PTC.** (Completed 26th February 2019, see 2.4)
- **Establishing a Start-up Group** – Made up of a small group of people who are committed to establishing a Swansea PTC. This Team has a clearly defined role, it is a task and finish group and will cease to exist when the PTC is launched. Part of this group's role is recruiting a staff delivery team which will facilitate the Commission itself and identifying and engaging 'Civic and Business' Commissioners. Membership should ideally include; public sector, business, third sector and faith sector and those with lived experience of poverty.
- **Setting in place the Staff Delivery team** who will initially recruit and build relationships between Community Commissioners and later between Community Commissioners and Civic/Business Commissioners. The staff team have three main responsibilities – convening, facilitation and support.

- **Invitation and Public Launch of the Commission** - A high profile launch would then be held where the Community Commissioners present their stories. The public as a whole are invited to the launch. Senior city leaders invite key figures within the Civic, Business, Third and Faith Sectors. The event will be the first time both sets of commissioners meet.
- **The Commission** – Initially the full Commission meet monthly to build relationships and increased shared understanding. Through these meetings the Commission identifies particular issues to work on together within a limited timescale (12-18 months). Programmes for these meetings are developed by the staff team who are responsible for co-ordinating and facilitating them. Once the Commission has identified its priorities (usually three key issues) they split into sub-groups who then meet monthly to work on the issues identified.
- **Communication and Embedding** – The Commission reports on its work both through a second large public gathering and a short, accessible report highlighting what has been learned, what the commission has done, what individual commissioners aim to do, as well as a small number of policy and practice recommendations it is making. Although this reporting is important, the key thing is what commissioners **do** together rather than simply what they **say** need to be done, **a PTC is not a ‘talking shop’**.

4.2 PTCs, and the participatory approaches they use, offer an opportunity for more meaningful participation; this is more than just having a conversation with people and is framed around an action based structure. PTCs give people greater opportunities to influence decisions through participative and direct democracy rather than formal consultation exercises and focus groups.

Commissioners are drawn from across the locality and from a range of experience, age, race, disability and gender backgrounds that are broadly representative of the demographics of the area. The process used for identifying and recruiting people who experience poverty to participate as Community Commissioners allows for contact to be made with those who are not ‘the usual suspects’ or simply easiest to reach in terms of participation.

5. Links, Strategic Fit and Example Outcomes

5.1 A Swansea Poverty Truth Commission could support and inform the work of the Public Service Board in the implementation of the Local Well-being Plan/Corporate Plan as well as projects such as Human Rights City and City Deal. A Swansea Poverty Truth Commission would also be an example of genuine co-productive working. It should be noted that the Poverty Reduction Policy Development Committee identified and recommended that Swansea work towards becoming a Human Rights City and that a significant part in achieving this would include the development of a Swansea Poverty Truth Commission.

- 5.2 The JRF recognises that ‘The new City Regions for Cardiff, Swansea Bay and North Wales provide an exciting opportunity to build a commitment to best employment practice to reduce poverty from the very start’ Pg. 30
<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/prosperity-without-poverty>.
- 5.3 **Appendix B** provides examples of the impact of other Poverty Truth Commissions and the differences that they have made at the level of individuals, organisations, policy and wider society. One such example from Scotland is where the Commission instigated a mentoring programme for Civil servants through which those who have direct experience of poverty coach senior policy leaders.
- 5.4 A Swansea Poverty Truth Commission could directly support the PSBs work to achieving the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) 2015 Act and well-being goals, including: a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a more equal Wales, a healthier Wales and a Wales of Cohesive Communities. It would do this as outlined in Section 1. Actions taken forward to reduce poverty and the impact of poverty through the Poverty Truth Commission process will directly support the delivery of these well-being goals.

Poverty Truth Commissions:

- Seek to address short-term issues that also sustain **long-term** needs.
- Consider the solutions to issues in collaboration, **integrating** meeting the needs of those experiencing poverty with the objectives of multiple organisations.
- Directly **involve** people with lived experience of poverty to share their experiences and work with organisations to identify solutions.
- Include city wide representation from civic bodies, front line services and members of the public. They work **collaboratively** to identify priorities and take actions to solve problems.
- Through the development of priorities and actions, **prevent** issues from getting worse and can also **prevent** issues from occurring in the first place. (See **Appendix B** for examples)

6. Risks

- 6.1 Extended delay, leading to a loss of momentum, thereby dissipating the energy, commitment and enthusiasm and support offered post the 26th February 2019 meeting.
- 6.2 If the decision now is to withdraw backing at a high level for developing a Swansea Poverty Truth Commission, (a principle recommendation of the Tackling Poverty Scrutiny Inquiry Panel report incorporated and approved as part of the Tackling Poverty Strategy/Delivery Plan) the Council risks losing credibility and the trust of its partner organisations, grassroots organisations in the third sector and, most significantly, with its residents who are experiencing poverty.

7. Equality and Engagement Implications

7.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Our Equality Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above.

7.2 The maxim of a Poverty Truth Commission is '**Nothing about us, without us, is for us**', the purpose of the Poverty Truth Commission is to empower voice within policy, putting people with direct lived experience of Poverty at the heart of decision making processes.

7.3 A full EIA has been completed (**Appendix C**).

7.4 The full EIA identified the following key points:

- The impact on different protected characteristics was seen as being mostly positive with a few characteristics having a potentially neutral impact.
- As part of the set-up process, the Start-Up Group would consider inclusion and involvement from people from protected characteristic groups.
- Good practice is identified through ongoing consultation with Poverty Truth Commission Development UK and Leeds Poverty Truth Commission.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 Funding of £70,000 is required for the lifecycle of the Commission, usually comprised of grants and partner contributions.

8.2 Funding options for the Commission would be explored by the Start-Up Group. It is proposed that the Council would make a cash contribution of £5,000 during the first year (this contribution would be allocated from 'Legacy Fund' grant awarded from Welsh Government). Staff time of 2 days per week would be allocated throughout the duration of the Commission.

9. Legal Implications

9.1 There are no legal implications other than those already mentioned in the report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A	Approximate timeline for Swansea Poverty Truth Commission
Appendix B	Poverty Truth Commissions: Example Outcomes
Appendix C	Full EIA Form