



**To/
Councillor Rob Stewart, Leader of
the Council, & Councillor Alyson
Pugh, Cabinet Member for
Wellbeing**

BY EMAIL

cc: Cabinet Members

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SPC/2022-23/8

16 February 2023

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Members following the meeting of the Committee on 17 January 2023. It is about the Delivery of the Corporate Priority of Tackling Poverty. A formal written response is required by 9 March 2023.

Dear Councillor,

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 17 January Scrutiny of Tackling Poverty

We are writing to you following our scrutiny session to monitor and challenge Council action in relation to Tackling Poverty, which is a standing annual item within the Committee work plan.

We thank you both, and officers, for attending the Committee meeting to present a detailed report on the delivery of the corporate priority, so we can comment on progress, achievements, and implementation of strategy, monitor improvement, and help inform future work / thinking.

Your report set out progress over the last 12 months. It presented evidence, insights and intelligence that demonstrated the contributions that have been made in delivering this Council priority, as well as future plans. It covered current challenges, including the impact of the cost of living crisis, and the Council's response. The report also considered the findings and recommendations of Audit Wales' 'Time for Change – Poverty in Wales' Report, published in November 2022, showing the Authority's response to the

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Audit recommendations, and planned action. We noted that the Audit Report includes several positive reflections of good practice identified in Swansea.

You spoke about the difficulties over the past few years, and coming out of COVID but into a financial crisis. You praised the work of Council teams and partners emphasising the 'person centred' and holistic approach to tackling poverty with a mix of preventative and reactive activity, and efforts working under pressure to process cost of living grants available to individuals and organisations to maximise the benefit. We noted that there is now a single web page on the Council website for [Cost of Living Help](#), launched a few months ago which has been well used.

This letter reflects on what we gained from the information presented, questions, and discussion. This included exploration of the level of resources to tackle poverty in Swansea and meet corporate objective, and, how in addition to a dedicated Tackling Poverty Service, this is embedded across the Council, with all departments playing a role, and partnership arrangements helping the Council to deliver on objectives. We also followed up on concerns from last year's session about efforts to improve employability and skills, and tackle barriers including access to public and personal transport. We heard about the various education, training and employment programmes, and initiatives and successes, including from Communities for Work, Workways+, Pathways to Work, Beyond Bricks & Mortar, and the opening of a 'pop-up' Employment Hub within the Quadrant Shopping Centre. We noted there is bespoke help and support for individuals facing barriers to employment, including transport and childcare, as well as wider Council initiatives. There was also discussion about the links between poverty and mental health, the mental health support available from partners and joint working between teams.

Committee views, including any outstanding issues / actions:

Overall, the Committee commended the work being carried out, with clearly laid out 'Ten Steps' towards achieving tackling poverty priorities, as set out in the Corporate Plan. Not least, ensuring that tackling poverty is everyone's business. We noted that the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy was being refreshed using an evidence-based coproduction approach, working with people who have lived experience of poverty to define and shape our vision for the future. This will inform the specific outcomes, objectives and planned activities for the Council to undertake, to tackle and alleviate poverty in Swansea. You reported intention to publish this mid-2023.

We are aware there are several service level performance indicators relevant to poverty which the Council reports on, but the Committee welcomes plans to develop a strategic Tackling Poverty Performance Framework to define how we align the objectives, indicators, measures, and outputs relating to tackling poverty, to outcomes. This is essential to provide the foundation for the measurement of performance (against clear targets), ongoing monitoring, and

overall evidence of success - showing to what extent we are achieving, considering the input of resources. We acknowledge this is a complex and challenging area of work, but is an issue that Audit Wales has also raised in its recent report. The focus should be on outcomes. Recognising that this will necessitate a mix of quantitative and qualitative information we are happy to see more case studies / stories being reported, showing the improvement to the lives of individuals and families from our interventions, as powerful examples of impact.

As the Cost of Living crisis has continued, the number of grants for individuals and organisations have increased. We noted how these are being administered. The Council will need to ensure and maintain robust arrangements to monitor the award of grant monies and effectiveness, to measure benefits and ensure it is helping those who need it.

In relation to reducing fuel poverty the Committee would appreciate any details on the impact the ECO4 grant scheme has had locally. This is meant to help improve the energy efficiency of housing stock occupied by low income and vulnerable households. You undertook to liaise with the Housing Service to find out more about applications and grant awards indicating how many residents have benefitted.

Councillors shared some experiences in trying to access advice from the Welfare Rights Team when undertaking casework, on behalf of residents. You undertook to clarify the process for Councillors to make referrals to the Team to help their residents. We would recommend you circulate details to all Councillors. There are many new Councillors who would benefit from this information.

The Council wants a Swansea where poverty is not a barrier to doing well at school. Given the number of children reliant on free school meals an issue was raised about the fact that many secondary schools provide lunch very late into the school day. With the likelihood that many of these children may not be having a breakfast, the lateness of the meal may be a hindrance to their concentration during the day and achievement in school. We asked whether there have been any examples where schools are addressing this issue, e.g., making use of Pupil Development Grant, to get food to children earlier in the school day? Could you liaise with colleagues to provide some information on this.

At our next Tackling Poverty Scrutiny session, we will follow up on the intended Council actions in response to the Audit Wales report, which made eight key recommendations.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within. Specifically, we would appreciate information, as described in the letter, about:

- a) ECO4 grant awards;
- b) Councillor access to advice/support from the Welfare Rights Team on behalf of residents; and
- c) Efforts to feed those in receipt of Free School Meals earlier in the school day.

Please provide your response to these, and any other comments about our letter by 9 March. We will then publish both letters in the agenda of the next available Committee meeting.

We will make arrangements to re-visit work on Tackling Poverty around December 2023. This will enable us to keep close watch regularly on progress, follow up on the issues we have raised, and enable scrutiny views to influence action and improvement.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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