



Report on the Audit Wales 'Together We Can' report recommendations

Governance & Audit Committee

25 October 2023

1. Executive Summary

In 2017, Swansea Council published **Working towards prosperity for all in Swansea: A tackling poverty strategy for Swansea**. This corporate strategy represented the Council's commitment to reducing poverty and the impacts that poverty has on the people of Swansea. In line with this commitment, tackling poverty is one of Swansea Council's well-being objectives defined in its **Corporate Plan 2023-2027**:

Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities so that every person in Swansea can achieve their potential.

On 23rd January 2023, Audit Wales published the report **'Together We Can' – Community resilience and self-reliance**. The report looks at the priority placed on community resilience and self-reliance in local authority plans, and how local authorities are equipping people to be less reliant on often overstretched local authority services. The report concludes that "local authorities face a challenging and uncertain financial future but find it difficult to empower people and communities to be more self-reliance and less dependent on services".

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the findings of this report (including the key recommendations for consideration) and set out proposals for our local response.

2. Context

Audit Wales published this report as the third of three key reviews relating to tackling poverty in Wales (the other reports being **'Time for Change'** and **'A missed opportunity'**). This report was compiled based on a high-level examination of all local authorities in Wales conducted between September 2021 and August 2022, using document reviews, data analysis, interviews and surveys to inform the final report.



The report recognises that community resilience and self-reliance is important for local authorities as part of a broad shift in policy from 'Doing' to 'Enabling' to 'Influencing' (where the focus for local authorities is moving away from being service providers toward equipping communities to become more resilience and self-reliant). Financial challenges, legislative drivers and the increasing demand for statutory services make this move essential for local authorities especially in dealing with some of the worst levels of poverty in the UK.

A key issue with this approach is that there are many different interpretations and meanings of community resilience and self-reliance, with the report finding different local authorities taking various approaches to defining it. These range from not making the definitions a priority to using different definitions across various services to believing it is not possible to define these things.

The report broadly uses the terms resilience and self-reliance to cover:

1. Community preparedness for adverse situations (to cope or thrive in adversity);
2. Support from within the community to promote individuals' independence;
3. Everything in between (such as addressing complex societal issues like poverty).

Achieving this will involve local authorities potentially ‘resetting’ their presence in communities, as evidenced by the main approaches currently being used; Community Hubs, and Community Connectors / Navigators. This has been partly achieved through the COVID-19 pandemic which sparked a resurgence in community activism and helped local communities pull together to support vulnerable people in their area. However, there is a risk that these good values are not embedded for the longer term and an opportunity may be missed to restate the role of local authorities within “resilient” communities.

The report identifies the essential components or ‘building blocks’ of resilience to be:

- **Human capital** – people and their skills, capacity and knowledge;
- **Social capital** – networks and connections within a community, groups working effectively within the community (such as voluntary organisations) and resources that support a community coming from public, private and third sectors;
- **Built capital** – physical infrastructure and commodities such as homes, roads and shared amenities;
- **Environmental capital** – natural resources such as green and blue spaces for community benefits;
- **Financial capital** – income, wealth and access to resources supported through civic and social enterprises.

The main barriers to creating more self-reliant and resilience communities identified through this review include:

- A lack of resources to drive the transformational change in this area;
- Inability to redirect resources from service delivery to supporting communities;
- Relationships between local authorities and community residents;
- A lack of appetite from communities to become more self-reliant;
- Internal culture to be direct providers of services, not enablers and influencers;
- Local-level partnership and collaborative working to influence communities;
- Lack of strategic vision and understanding the needs of the community;
- Wider challenges such as poverty, rurality, transportation and digital exclusion.

Measuring this transformation is complex as there are no established national measures to determine individual and community resilience. There are proxy measures that could be used as indicators, such as levels of active citizenship, social loneliness and levels of community cohesion. However, the report identifies that no local authorities in Wales are using these indicators effectively to evaluate community resilience.

Other findings of the report include:

- Most Local Authorities are operating with no clear definition of resilience or self-reliant communities and only three could define the characteristics of a self-reliant individual;
- Local authorities that included ‘communities’ within their corporate plan objectives were recognised for defining their commitment to supporting communities to develop;
- Volunteering is a key theme but requires a shift in culture and needs to be nurtured carefully to avoid burnout of the volunteering section;
- Empowering communities to do more for themselves can take a range of approaches from making grant processes more agile to taking a less risk averse approach to Community Asset Transfers (CAT);
- Community leaders, activists, and town / community councils play an important role in the community engagement and involvement for this work;
- The role of local authorities as a result of shifting from providing services to supporting communities to do more for themselves is unclear and requires planning and getting the right balance.

3. Findings

This report from Audit Wales highlights an opportunity for the Council to do more to achieve a clear vision for community resilience and self-reliance in Swansea. The findings of the report recognise that this is a continuing challenge and that a lot of good work has already been done but recommends some of the key approaches we could take including:

- Creating a clear vision of how things will work in the future;
- Holding a two-way dialogue and communicating what change will 'look' and 'feel' like;
- Revitalising the role of council members as community champions;
- Refocussing the work of council staff;
- Recognising that recasting community relationships will require different solutions in different places;
- Ensuring wealth stays local and works for all the community.

The report provides good practice examples from across the UK in these approaches but it encourages each local authority in Wales to undertake an internal evaluation of where it is now with community resilience and self-reliance. An **evaluation tool** has been developed by Audit Wales and is included in the Appendices of the 'Together We Can' Report, covering the following headings for local authority consideration:

- 1) Understanding the challenge and articulating your role;
- 2) Knowing your communities;
- 3) Skills and knowledge to build community resilience;
- 4) Making a difference.

4. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (R1)

The report states: To strengthen community resilience and support people to be more self-reliant, local authorities need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place. We recommend that local authorities use the evaluation tool (attached – *Annex A*) to:

- self-evaluate current engagement, management, performance and practice;
- identify where improvement is needed; and
- draft and implement an action plan with timeframes and responsibilities clearly set out to address the gaps and weaknesses identified in completing the evaluation tool.

Our response:

The Council welcomes the opportunity to evaluate its current position and identify actions, improvements and transformative work required to enable communities in Swansea to become resilience and self-reliant. Through the two oversight groups that coordinate the delivery of the Corporate Priority 'Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities' – these are the **Swansea Council Poverty Forum** and **Enabling Communities Group** – we have undertaken in internal review of the evaluation tool.

A table with our evaluation findings is including in Annex A of this document.

Recommendation 2 (R2)

The report states: To help local authorities address the gaps they identify following their self-evaluation, we recommend that they:

- formally approve the completed Action Plan arising from the evaluation exercise;
- regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and
- revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance.

Our response:

Based on the evaluation completed as part of the first recommendation, we have identified the following key actions to be taken forward:

Actions

- 1) We will explore what community resilience and self-reliance means with our partners and with the people we support to develop a co-produced set of **terms and definitions**.
- 2) We will develop a **clear approach** that embeds principles such as co-production, social value and strengths-based approaches to ensure that communities play a key role in developing community resilience and self-reliance.
- 3) We will build on our existing **partnership arrangements and wider networks**, forums and groups to develop collaborative opportunities to improve community resilience and self-reliance across Swansea.
- 4) We will develop the **tools and infrastructure** to conduct and sustainably maintain a mapping of community assets.
- 5) We will conduct and sustainably maintain **knowledge of local individuals and organisations** supporting community resilience and self-reliance across Swansea.
- 6) We will conduct a co-productive approach to planning and delivering **programmes and initiatives to improve community resilience and self-reliance** across Swansea.
- 7) We will explore existing relationships and develop new **partnerships / collaborative working practices throughout communities** across Swansea.
- 8) We will utilise opportunities to **encourage people to be more active in their community**, either through volunteering with the council, local volunteering in their communities or with our partners.

These eight actions will form the basis of developing a focused Action Plan, aligned with our Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities Corporate Priority action planning, delivery and performance management processes.

5. Way Forward

Overview of the report findings

In summary, we agree with the findings of the Audit Wales report and the recognition that, given the significant challenges that local authorities are facing as a result of the Cost of Living crisis, the impact on council services is likely to increase in the future. There is a vital role for communities to play in responding to this challenge and by helping communities to become more resilient and self-reliant, we can help people to do more for themselves and be less reliant on stretched statutory services.

We recognise from the evaluation which we have undertaken that there is more to be done to define, deliver and continuously improve our vision for resilient and self-reliant communities in Swansea. Under the Corporate Priority 'Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities', the Council is committed to taking action and working with our local communities to embed the principles, cultural changes and new initiatives.

Next Steps

The Council's is in a good position to take forward the identified actions and report them against the Corporate Priority 'Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities'. Existing governance in place for coordination of this Corporate Priority will provide oversight of progress against these actions. Work is underway to refresh our Tackling Poverty Strategy and this will include a range of co-production activities to understand the needs and priorities of our partners, stakeholders and the communities of Swansea.

Annex A – Self-Evaluation Table

Heading		Status	Current position	Target
<p>Understanding the challenge and articulating your role</p>	<p>We have clearly defined and agreed what community resilience and self-reliance means to us</p>	<p>Not started</p>	<p>There are a number of definitions used or referenced in different places but no singly definitive or co-produced definition. It is important that we develop the right terms and definitions for all parties so a co-production approach is essential. This approach should consider the needs of all of our communities including communities defined by shared interests and characteristics.</p>	<p>March 2024</p>
	<p>Our vision makes clear what we need to do and what others are best placed to do</p>	<p>Started</p>	<p>The Council's corporate plan vision is "In 2028 Swansea is a place that has a thriving mixed use city centre and local economy. It is a place where people can gain the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in life, where everyone can achieve their potential and where communities are resilient and cohesive. Swansea is a place where human rights are respected, and people are safeguarded from harm and exploitation. It is a place where nature and biodiversity are maintained and enhanced, and carbon emissions are falling."</p> <p>This vision and the wider context of the Corporate Plan 2023-2027 establishes some elements of the priorities for enabling communities to become more resilient self-reliant but additional work is required to explore these priorities through our partnerships, networks and forums.</p>	<p>December 2023</p>
	<p>We have identified by service, the activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that the authority must continue to provide; • those that can be delivered in partnership with others; and • those that the community can lead on. 	<p>Started</p>	<p>Service Plans based on the corporate priorities defined in the Corporate Plan have been developed and define the role of the Council in not only working with partners but in improving the capabilities of our communities to lead on initiatives such as social enterprises.</p>	<p>March 2024</p>

Heading		Status	Current position	Target
	We have communicated our definitions widely to ensure all key stakeholders understand what we want to achieve through our work on community resilience and self-reliance	Not started	As above, work on properly defining community resilience and self-reliance in a co-productive approach is required before engagement and communication actions can be taken. Planning will be based on utilising existing channels and forums as well as exploring opportunities unique to each of our communities.	December 2023
	Our key partners have identified how they will collaborate with us to strengthen community resilience and self-reliance	Started	Key partners are involved in our planning process through Council-led groups and events such as the Swansea Poverty Partnership Forum and the Safer Swansea Partnership. Existing relationships have been used to deliver collaborative approaches to community resilience and self-reliance. Partners in areas like Education, Police and Health have their own community engagement methods to support these partnership approaches.	March 2024
	We have completed a place-based asset mapping exercise to assess community resilience and capacity for increased self-reliance.	Not started	Asset mapping exercises have been carried out previously in 'snapshot' exercises but a robust model of community asset assessment and reporting needs to be considered as to whether this is a priority and required for Swansea	March 2024
	We know the number and types of organisations working locally that can help us improve community resilience and self-reliance	Started	Good relationships exist with communities through partnerships and approaches like Local Area Coordination. This allows us to have a good understanding of what organisations and services are operating on local and hyper-local levels. Organising and coordinating this data in a sustainable and accessible way is the next challenge.	December 2023

Heading		Status	Current position	Target
	We know where there are gaps that we need to address	Started	Planning has been undertaken in a number of areas to identify gaps and opportunities for development. The Enabling Communities Group provides oversight of the strategic approach to that element of the Corporate Priority 'Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities' as well as a focal point for collaboration and alignment of plans. More insight from communities directly could inform the perspective of what gaps need to be addressed as a priority for the people of those communities.	March 2024
	We have agreed the actions required to help improve community resilience and self-reliance in our area.	Started	Some action plans exist aligned to various corporate and partnership services and initiatives such as the Safer Swansea Partnership. Governance is in place to provide oversight of these actions through the Enabling Communities Group though decision-making in relation to implementing these actions are subject to different departmental structures and approvals.	March 2024
	We have set SMART objectives and actions on how we will improve community resilience and self-reliance	Started	As above, work on refining the objectives and actions to improve community resilience and self-reliance where required. Existing strategies, action plans and initiatives follow the corporate approach to setting SMART objectives and actions.	March 2024
	We are clear on the benefits and risks of our work on community resilience and self-reliance for citizens, local communities and the local authority.	Not started	As above, a co-production approach involving more insight and shared responsibilities with citizens and local communities is part of the way forward that requires further development.	March 2024
Knowing your communities	We know who our key community activists and leaders are.	Started	Good relationships exist with communities through Elected Members, partnerships and approaches like Local Area Coordination. In many cases, key community activists and leaders are known and actively engaged with Elected Members and Council staff.	Ongoing

Heading		Status	Current position	Target
	We have good working relationships and work effectively with our key community activists and leaders.	Started	Relationships with those community activists and leaders known to the Council are generally positive and effective. There are opportunities to explore more joined-up cross-departmental processes to connect community activists and leaders to the relevant services and support across the Council.	Ongoing
	We provide help, support and training to ensure our key community activists and leaders are as effective as they can be	Started	At present, support provided to community activists and leaders is provided in partnership and targeted at helping them to become more organised (e.g. help to run community centres and sports clubs) or to raise awareness of things they need to know (e.g. when small grants are available or information about safeguarding).	TBC
	We effectively encourage local community activists and leaders to improve community resilience and self-reliance	Not started	As above, more work on the definitions, mapping and increased coproduction will help us to understand if further activity is required for this.	TBC
Skills and knowledge to build community resilience	We are good at encouraging people to help out and do more in their community.	Started	Taking an active approach to encouraging people to do more in their community is linked to a number of drivers including our relationships with Third Sector partners and investment in community initiatives. Local Area Coordinators walk alongside people who are often looking to contribute to their community through volunteering. The Council actively endorses and promotes National Volunteering Week and other similar campaigns. There are many events and activities delivered in communities with the support of volunteers including grass roots community sports, managing assets transferred to local communities and engagement events coordinated with local community groups.	Ongoing

Heading		Status	Current position	Target
	We have the right staff in the right place to help improve community resilience and self-reliance.	Started	Services like Libraries and roles like Local Area Coordinators (which are based within local community settings) enable those sorts of activity in partnership with community activists and leaders. Adopting a strength-based approach to community development ensures that we can identify what resources are needed to meet the needs of local people. The recent development of the Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities Corporate Priority provides a catalyst for us to continue improving and responding to the needs of local communities.	TBC
	We have revised job descriptions and person specifications to strengthen their focus on involvement, to help improve community resilience and self-reliance	Not started	In Social Services, both Child and Family and Adult Services have revised roles ensuring Early Help and Prevention functions across teams, focusing on strength-based approaches, local solutions and services and supporting people to be self-reliant. In addition, ways of working and cross-departmental organisation of resources could enhance help to improve community resilience and self-reliance.	March 2025
	We give staff the opportunity to take well-managed risks and explore innovative practices with communities	Started	Some of our community-facing roles have the ability to work in partnership with communities to try new ways of working and take risk-based approaches to solutions that meet the needs of the community. More work is required to analyse the extent of this risk-based approach and embed innovative thinking into our enabling communities plans and actions.	Ongoing
	Our staff are good at influencing people to do more for themselves where they can	Started	Community-focused roles are important for encouraging and enabling people to take actions for the benefit of themselves, their families and their communities. Person-centred strength-based approaches are part of the delivery model of Social Services and evidence from service user stories demonstrates the effect of this approach and achieving positive outcomes is part of our performance measurement model. Removing barriers to enable people to be more independent (such as tackling digital exclusion) is also a part of this work. This is included in the Council's Digital Strategy 2023-28 which includes goals around people-focused digital services and accessible data that supports communities.	Ongoing

Heading		Status	Current position	Target
	Elected members support the authority's work on strengthening community resilience and self-reliance.	Started	<p>Engagement from Elected Members on our enabling communities is very positive and our Cabinet Member for Community Support is a champion for our broader programmes of work and approaches including Local Area Coordination.</p> <p>As above, more work on defining and co-producing our definitions and plans for community resilience and self-reliance would focus this work and we will continue to engage Elected Members in our plans and actions as this work progresses. This includes Members involvement and focus on community cohesion and safety including the Safer Swansea Partnership which includes partners such as South Wales Police and Mid & West Wales Fire and Rescue Service.</p>	TBC
	We have put in place the right support to help Elected Members strengthen community resilience and self-reliance in their wards	Not started	As above, further work on definitions, ways of working would be required to ensure we continuously provide the right support and information for Elected Members as well as other supporters and stakeholders.	TBC
	We have a can-do culture and mindset within the local authority to improve community resilience and self-reliance	Started	Evidence from the oversight of the various services and initiatives across the Council is that our work on enabling communities is approached with a broadly positive mindset. Feedback from service users and partners is evidence of this can-do attitude. More work could be done to understand and measure the culture of our community-focused services as well as evidencing the positive impacts of the Council's efforts in this space.	Ongoing
	We are good at encouraging communities to find their own solutions to problems and not rely on us.	Started	There is a range of evidence of how staff have encouraged specific actions for communities to take on for themselves. Grant funding for initiatives like Men's Sheds is one example of solutions that have been successfully delivered with little more than funding from the Council. Evidence includes our response to the COVID-19 pandemic such as supporting hyper-local community actions (e.g. collecting food and medicine for house-bound people). We are connected to a vibrant and active third sector across Swansea with great relationships within communities. Further work could be required to define better data and evidence of how this works, as well as working with our partners, community activists and leaders to celebrate these successes.	Ongoing

Heading		Status	Current position	Target
Making a difference	We have reviewed ways of working across the Council and are changing services to help improve community resilience and self-reliance	Not started	As above, this will be taken forward once we have completed other actions around definitions, ways of working, engagement with communities and clarification of community-focused services across the Council.	
	We have identified how these changes will impact on people.	Not started	As above, this will be taken forward once we have completed other actions around definitions, ways of working, engagement with communities and clarification of community-focused services across the Council.	
	We are communicating to citizens how our services are changing.	Started	There are existing corporate processes in place in relation to service transformation, public communications and service standards across all Council services. The IAA process supports this approach by ensuring Council services consider the needs of the population when making any changes to our services, including their needs in relation to participation, engagement and communication. Elected Members also play a crucial role in communicating with citizens at times of service transformation.	Ongoing
	We have specified the information required to evaluate how our work is improving community resilience and self-reliance	Not started	As above, this will be taken forward once we have completed other actions around definitions, ways of working, engagement with communities and clarification of community-focused services across the Council.	

Heading		Status	Current position	Target
	We use our resources, money and assets to build and retain wealth in our local communities	Started	<p>There are existing programmes and initiatives in place that support community developments. More definition is required around social value and opportunities for communities to build and retain wealth through schemes such as community food growing partnerships. There are existing partnerships and relationships with communities that can be developed to explore these opportunities.</p> <p>For example, Beyond Bricks and Mortar (BB+M) is an important initiative to secure community benefits from all suitable council activities in Swansea for the lasting benefits of our communities. It involves introducing community benefit clauses – such as targeted recruitment and training – into Council contracts to ensure that members of our communities (especially young people and those who have been out of the job market for some time) are given opportunities of meaningful training and employment.</p>	Ongoing
	We use our procurement of services as a means of investing in the local economy.	Started	We are engaged with the Social Value movement to use procurement as a means of investing in local economies. Further work could be done to support communities to take a proactive approach to defining what is of value to them and how procurement practices can achieve their desired outcomes.	Ongoing
	We work with our local anchor institutions to ensure they support community wealth building through their provision of services, use of resources, procurement and assets.	Started	There are existing relationships in place with key local anchor institutions like South Wales Police and DVLA, both within the Council and through our communities. We are also engaged through the Swansea Public Services Board (PSB) as part of collaborative working to improve local services as well as local social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being. The Swansea Poverty Truth Commission is one example of how local anchor institutions are engaged with and listening to the needs of our local communities. Further work could be done around co-design of services, embedding social value principles and collaborative use of resources and assets.	

Heading		Status	Current position	Target
	We encourage suppliers to enhance the social value aspects of their contracts through the inclusion of training and employment opportunities in agreements	Started	Social Value through procurement has been driven by the introduction of national TOMs (Themes, Outcomes and Measures) and work is ongoing within the Council to apply a robust model for maximising the impact of our contracts. As a result of more definition and direction for community resilience and self-reliance, we may be able to better inform the social value aspects of our commissioning and contractual agreements to deliver changes that our communities tell us are of value to them.	Ongoing
	We regularly report on our community resilience and self-reliance work to scrutiny committee(s) against a balanced set of performance information that covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demand for local authority services; • alternative provision within communities and by partners; and • impact of our work on people's wellbeing. 	Not started	As above, this action will be taken forward once we have completed other actions around definitions, ways of working, engagement with communities and clarification of to community-focused services across the Council.	
	Our scrutiny and evaluation processes provide us with assurance that our work is delivering anticipated outcomes.	Not started	As above, any additional action will be taken forward once we have completed other actions around definitions, ways of working, engagement with communities and clarification of community-focused services across the Council. There is a robust approach to scrutiny and evaluation in place across the council..	