



City and County of Swansea

## Minutes of the **Poverty Reduction Policy Development Committee**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 22 February 2021 at 3.30 pm

**Present:** Councillor M Sherwood (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**

C R Doyle  
C Richards

**Councillor(s)**

P K Jones  
L V Walton

**Councillor(s)**

D Phillips

**Officer(s)**

Craig Davies  
Jeremy Parkhouse  
Joanne Portwood  
Jane Storer

Lawyer  
Democratic Services Officer  
Strategy and Policy Officer  
Senior Welfare Rights Advisor

**Also Present**

Kat Watkins  
Ange Bettany  
Joyce Veheary

Co-production Network  
Room to Grow Project  
Lend and Tend Project

**Apologies for Absence**

Councillor(s): E T Kirchner and K M Roberts  
Independent Member(s): Andrew Davies

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**19 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

**20 Minutes.**

**Resolved** that the Minutes of the previous meeting of the Poverty Reduction Policy Development Committee were approved as a correct record.

**21 Benefits Take Up.**

Jane Storer, Senior Welfare Rights Advisor presented a report which provided the Committee with information about the problems with claiming benefits, the reasons for under-claiming, example of work undertaken in the past to increase benefit take up, current campaigns, the identification of future priorities in terms of increasing benefit take up and how the Committee could support this work in the future.

It was outlined that the Committee had identified the need to increase the take-up of benefits in Swansea. The maximization of benefit entitlement aimed to ensure that people claimed their entitlements and maximized their household income.

The report identified the problems with claiming benefits including: -

- People lacking the knowledge and understanding of the benefits system;
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff only being trained in the areas in which they work and their lack of overall knowledge;
- People contacting the DWP call centre and often being provided with the wrong advice, believing that they are not entitled to any benefits when the opposite is the case;
- Entitlement was dependent upon an individual's circumstances and was often complicated;
- Organisations offering access to free and impartial advice being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of requests;
- The constant changes being made to the benefit system, claimants moving in and out of entitlement and changing circumstances affecting entitlement, which benefit claimants do not realise would have an impact.

In addition, the number of reasons why people under claimed benefits was highlighted and these included a lack of resources to help claimants through the process; a lack of knowledge about the benefits that are available; claimant's not thinking that they were entitled to benefits; poor past experience; continual reassessments; fear; and stigma.

The extent of under claiming was discussed and it was stated that it was a widespread problem amongst certain groups of people and figures released in 2016-2017 showed that over £16 billion went unclaimed in means tested benefits.

The report highlighted the actions that had worked to increase the benefit take up, including raising awareness of people's entitlement to benefits, challenging people's perceptions of benefit claimants including negative stereo-typing and providing additional tailored support to the individuals when needed.

Details of what was happening at present were outlined, including the pension credit take up campaign and information was provided regarding the groups assisted by previous take-up campaigns.

The Committee discussed the following: -

- How the press were quick to report negative stories but slow to report legitimate claims and the stigma they create regarding claimants and the negative language used;
- The very small amounts of money compared to the amount of business fraud;
- The impact of poor / wrong advice provided by DWP;
- The DWP appeal process;
- The difficult process individuals face to obtain the benefits they are entitled to, the practical help the Council can offer and the assistance Councillors can offer;

- Changing perceptions surrounding benefits with the general public and ensuring that individuals were claiming the benefits to which they were entitled;
- The misconception that the majority of benefits claimants were out of work when in reality the majority were either employed or pensioners;
- How the Covid 19 Pandemic had started to change perceptions as more people realised the difficulties faced living on £94 per week;
- The potential for the Council to include information with for example, Council Tax annual bills, producing a leaflet to be distributed throughout communities or circulating information via social media;
- Include all M P's / MS's in any publicising to enable to information to be more widely distributed;
- Using local food banks to distribute leaflets with food parcels.

The Chair thanked the Officer for providing the report and stated that additional discussions would take place at a working group regarding supporting future benefit take-up campaigns. She added that the leaflets supporting the current pension credit take-up campaign would also be circulated by foodbanks and would also be discussed at a working group meeting.

**Resolved** that the contents of the report be noted.

## **22 Garden Sharing.**

The Chair introduced Ange Bethany, Room to Grow Project in Uplands and Joyce Veheary, founder member of Lend and Tend as part of the investigations of the Committee into garden sharing.

Ange Bethany outlined the details of the Room to Grow Project in Uplands. She highlighted that the project had utilised and transformed 6 unloved front garden spaces from concrete jungle to edible oasis aka mini allotments and wanted to create a "green corridor" from Brynymor Road all the way to the heart of the Uplands.

She added that the project had received an amazing response from the community and now had a steady crop of produce from the 6 participating houses. The project had learnt a lot in a short time and had enjoyed seeing people stopping to enjoy the garden spaces and ask questions. She also highlighted the numerous benefits of the project to the community.

In the next phase, the project wanted to see how many additional houses could be signed up and the visual impact of having large numbers of front gardens transformed would have, being a catalyst for positive change in the area. Raised bed planters would help to mitigate flash flooding whilst the plants would increase air quality, improve biodiversity and provide food and enjoyment for the community.

Joyce Veheary, founder member of Lend and Tend, a UK wide based project, outlined the details of the project. It was noted that Councillors had been provided with a short film highlighting the project and how it was organised.

It was explained that the project was based around saving un-loved gardens with garden sharing. Garden owners who were unable to tend to their gardens could lend their gardens to the project and allow those who had no garden or who were waiting for an allotment, to utilise the space.

She added that there were a number of participating cities throughout the UK and the project was based upon some very simplistic principles which also aimed at bringing people closer together.

The Committee discussed the various aspects of both projects including: -

- Widening the areas of availability of both projects;
- How both projects could work together;
- How Room to Grow encouraged a variety of produce including vegetables, flowers and plants to attract pollinators;
- How Room to Grow was focussed upon front gardens;
- The positive community engagement of both projects;
- The procedures followed by both projects, particularly protecting residents by ensuring safe garden access without entering any properties;
- The ongoing difficulties encountered by both projects throughout the Covid 19 Pandemic and ensuring everyone involved in the projects adhered to the current restrictions;
- How Room to Grow had been advised by the local Police regarding continuing the project within the current restrictions;
- The huge potential to expand both projects and the huge benefits to the community / environment offered by both;
- The positive use of volunteers from within communities which would be a huge benefit;
- How the Council / Committee could assist and promote both projects.

The Chair thanked both project representatives for their attendance and outlining their projects. She added that further discussions would take place at a working group meeting and progress would be reported to the Committee.

**Resolved** that the contents of the discussions be noted.

## **23 Work Plan 2020-2021.**

The Chair provided an updated Work Plan 2020-2021.

**Resolved** that the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 5.10 pm

**Chair**