



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 27 September 2021 at 3.30 pm

Present: Councillor P Downing (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

C R Doyle
L R Jones

Councillor(s)

D W Helliwell
C Richards

Councillor(s)

P K Jones

Officer(s)

Craig Davies
Amy Hawkins
Deb Hill
Jeremy Parkhouse
Joanne Portwood
Anthony Richards

Associate Lawyer
Interim Head of Adult Services
Nature Conservation Team Leader
Democratic Services Officer
Strategy and Policy Officer
Poverty and Prevention Strategy and Development
Manager
Senior Welfare Rights Advisor

Jane Storer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): E T Kirchner, K M Roberts and L V Walton

13 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.

14 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the meeting of the Poverty Reduction Policy Development Committee held on 26 July 2021 were approved as correct record.

15 Corporate Personal Debt Recovery Policy Development and Next Steps. (Verbal) (Anthony Richards)

Anthony Richards, Poverty and Prevention Strategy and Development Manager provided a verbal update regarding the development of a Corporate Personal Debt Recovery Policy and the next steps.

It was outlined that a workshop session had occurred in August and services across the Authority were contacted to provide feedback regarding their current debt recovery arrangements. It was added that feedback had been provided by a number

of service areas, including comments from Legal Services on the process of debt recovery.

The next steps would be looking at the specifics provided by each service area and to work on the principles of providing a policy and support across the whole Authority.

The Chair requested that future meetings of the Committee commence at 3 p.m. in order to allow working group meetings to be held immediately following the closure of the Committee meeting. It was added that all Members of the Committee had to agree to the change of time.

He further added that a presentation be made to the next meeting which will look at the service area procedures surrounding all personal debt owed to the Authority. The Committee would also look at best practice examples.

Resolved that: -

- 1) The contents of the update be noted;
- 2) Future Committee meetings commence at 3p.m., subject to absent Councillors also agreeing to the change;
- 3) The Poverty and Prevention Strategy and Development Manager schedules a workshop session immediately following the close of the next scheduled meeting to discuss this topic.

16 Benefits Take-up. (Anthony Richards / Jane Storer)

Jane Storer, Senior Welfare Rights Advisor presented a 'for information' report 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 provided to the Committee in February 2021 was provided at Appendix 1.

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.

The report outlined the reasons and extent of under claiming; what works, including tailored one-to-one support; what was going on right now, including the Pension Credit take up campaign and other take up campaigns.

The Committee discussed the following: -

- Highlighting the issues with local organisations / Town & Community Councils and including details on their websites / newsletters / social media;
- Ensuring people are claiming what they are entitled to and Local Area Co-ordinators (LAC) supporting individuals within communities;
- Revision of current strategy and developing a Council policy;
- The current work of the Welfare Rights Unit, the methods they use and the lack of resources available;
- The possibility of highlighting Pension Credit information with annual Council Tax bills;
- The remit of LAC's – to make people more resourceful;
- Options available to the Committee to progress matters, including getting a scope from the Cabinet Member.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and stated that he would discuss the issue further with the Cabinet Member.

Resolved that the content of the report be noted and the issue be discussed further at future workshop / Committee meetings.

17 **Fairness in Green Health. (Deb Hill)**

Deb Hill, Nature Conservation Team Leader presented a report which sought to consider the options in relation to the next steps of developing a Fairness in Green Health policy.

It was outlined that in September 2019, the Poverty Reduction Policy Development Committee (PDC) resolved to develop a Fairness in Green Health Policy (formerly known as a Green Health Policy). A draft policy was developed by the Committee working group which was informed by research and the wide evidence base about the benefits of the natural environment and its impact in terms of tackling health and wellbeing inequalities, presentations by external speakers such as Natural Resources Wales and ongoing discussions.

It was added that the main aim of the policy was to promote the provision of high quality green infrastructure and natural greenspace in deprived neighbourhoods, in order to improve health and wellbeing inequalities and increase resilience to climate change. The draft policy suggested that the Council could promote fairness in green health in a number of ways and through a wide range of activities e.g. tree planting, managing hedgerows and verges, improving the quality of and access to parks,

wildlife and nature reserves, ensuring sustainable drainage systems existed and taking action to lower air pollution.

How the report fitted in with existing Council policies was highlighted, whether the policy should be adopted as a stand-alone policy, integrated as an objective into existing strategies and plans, or adopted as a short hybrid policy which was delivered and reported through existing plans and strategies, was discussed.

It was highlighted that regardless of which option was agreed, a caveat was that green fairness needed to be one of a series of criteria on which projects / interventions were judged including connectivity, the need for and suitability of Green Infrastructure interventions (i.e. what is the intervention trying to solve, such as flooding or air pollution issues any specific grant conditions etc. Likewise Green Infrastructure intentions should also follow the 5 principles of Green Infrastructure – multifunctional, adapted to climate change, biodiversity, health and wellbeing and smart and sustainable. Appendix A provided the Draft Fairness in Green Health Policy.

The Committee were requested to consider three options in relation to the further development of a Fairness in Green Health policy: -

- A stand-alone policy
- Integrated as an objective into existing strategies and plans
- Hybrid policy

The Committee discussed the following: -

- The marked difference in life expectancy in deprived areas;
- The poverty / deprivation that existed in some Wards where there was also great wealth;
- The manner in which deprived areas were treated compared to affluent areas;
- The need to involve and include local people in any new policies going forward to achieve 'buy-in';
- Resources to proceed with and continue to manage the policy long term;
- Grant funding obtained to support posts;
- Identifying deprived areas;
- Potential consultation process required.

Resolved that: -

- 1) The hybrid policy option be approved but could be expanded to include any appropriate elements from option 2;
- 2) An update on progress be reported to a future meeting.

18 Work Plan 2021-2022.

The Chair presented an updated Work Plan 2021-2022.

He outlined that the Cabinet Member had requested that the Committee discuss the Community Food Growing Policy at the next meeting.

Amy Hawkins, Interim Head of Adult Services highlighted the work of Local Area Co-ordinators and added that it would be useful for the Committee to receive an update on their work, particularly how they are tackling poverty.

Craig Davies, Associate Lawyer stated that further discussions were required outside the meeting regarding the potential public consultation required for the Fairness in Green Health Policy.

Resolved that: -

- 1) The contents of the report be noted;
- 2) Community Food Growing Policy be discussed at the Committee meeting scheduled for 25 October 2021;
- 3) The work of Local Area Co-ordinators be added to the list of topics for discussion.

The meeting ended at 4.38 pm

Chair