



Update on the Council's response to the Audit Wales 2023 Report on Community Reliance and Self Reliance

Governance & Audit Committee

4 September 2024

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 23 January 2023, Audit Wales published the report **'Together We Can' – Community resilience and self-reliance**. The report looked 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 update on the Council's progress in responding to the findings of this report and our wider work around community resilience and self-reliance.

2. Context

Audit Wales published this report relating to tackling poverty in Wales, 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 resilient 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.

The report broadly uses "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 remains an opportunity to restate the role of local authorities within "resilient" communities.

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.

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 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

The report from Audit Wales highlighted opportunities for the Council to do more to achieve a clear vision for community resilience and self-reliance in Swansea. The findings of the report recognised 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.

Following publication of the Audit Wales report, the Council completed the following actions:

- Completing the Evaluation Tool provided by Audit Wales to assess the findings and recommendations of their review against our local needs and plans;
- Creating a Together We Can Action Plan for monitoring and controlling actions to improve community resilience and self-reliance;
- Established governance arrangements to provide programme management and control of the work defined by the action plan;
- Identified funding opportunities to deliver some of the recommendations and actions.

A list of the key actions identified following the completion of the Evaluation Tool is included in Annex A of this report.

4. Current position

The following sections highlight our current position in taking action to address some of the key challenges we have identified following the Audit Wales report:

Consistent Understanding

We have developed a common internal understanding of what community resilience and self-reliance means, as these terms were not fully defined and having inconsistency in our basic definitions could lead to complications during this process.

Through our programme and in collaboration with colleagues across the Council, we have developed this set of definitions for the programme:

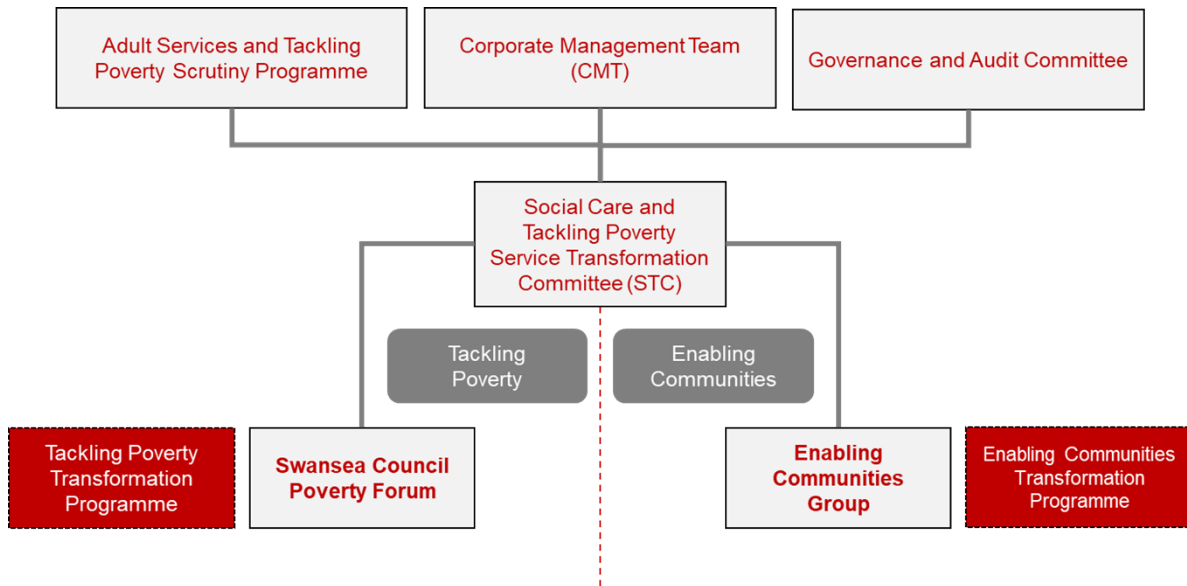


As the programme progresses, we are planning to revisit these definitions with communities themselves, in line with the principles of co-production, to ensure that we create a set of clear and understandable definitions to which everyone is committed. This will inform a more detailed programme of engagement and communications with local communities of Swansea.

Clear governance

While the Audit Wales report and self-evaluation tool identified a number of potential actions, it became clear that there are many teams and individuals across the Council responsible for different aspects of enabling communities. With different actions being undertaken by different roles in different areas, we needed a clear governance route for coordinating this work.

In line with the Council's Corporate Priority 'Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities', we have established the following governance routes for the two aspects of this priority:



This governance route allows us to ensure oversight of operational performance through the Enabling Communities Group as well as oversight of transformational activities under the governance of the Enabling Communities Transformation Programme. This programme is one of 12 corporate programmes under the governance of the Transformation Delivery Board.



We have developed a Programme Brief for the Enabling Communities Transformation Programme which establishes the scope, objectives, outcomes and benefits for the whole programme.

Engagement with communities

A clear first challenge for this work is to ensure that we have a positive, two-way connection with communities across Swansea. Engagement is key to building effective, trusting relationships with people in the communities and there is good evidence of the Council's ability to achieve those relationships.

We appointed a Community Engagement Transformation Lead Officer to review and develop improvements to the way that we engage with communities. This has led to a number of new initiatives and projects including the Collaboration Station in the National Waterfront Museum which hosts monthly One Stop Service events open to the public.

Embedding co-production principles

With good connections and relationships between the Council and our communities, the next logical step is to embed the principles of co-production through our community-facing services and programmes.

- Value people and build on their strengths;
- Develop networks that operate across silos;
- Focus on what matters for the people involved;
- Build relationships of trust and shared power;
- Enable people to be change makers.

We appointed a Community Co-production and Social Value Development Officer to plan a programme of change – working collaboratively with partners in the third sector – that would improve the awareness and involvement of community representatives with co-production. This work will open an important door to embedding these principles and empowering community representatives to be more actively involved in decision making and service development.

We have worked with the Co-production Network for Wales on planning this work and we recently appointed a member of the programme team to be a Co-production Champion with this network, to share knowledge and insight that will inform the delivery of this work.

Creating new approaches and improvements

As we continue to implement the steps above, we create a solid foundation for co-producing new approaches to improving community resilience and self-reliance. Underpinned by clear definitions, scope, governance, engagement and co-production, the next phase of this work will be to identify and develop new solutions that will impact on people and communities in ways that matter to them.

We have created a Lessons Learned Log to capture important learning from our previous interactions with communities, starting with a review of our role in the Morriston Gas Explosion incident in 2023. These lessons learned will inform our new approaches and allow us to reflect on improvements for the future.

5. Way Forward

Overview of the current position

In summary, we have taken the findings of the Audit Wales report and the evaluation tool to create a clear direction for the Council to play an important role in the development of community resilience and self-reliance. We recognise that this is a challenge that we need to “do with” communities rather than “do to” communities so our early efforts are focused on establishing a foundation for this, including the right definitions, principles, engagement and relationships.

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

We will continue to deliver the actions, monitor our performance and report our progress towards improving community resilience and self-reliance. In line with the recommendations of the Audit Wales report, we are embedding this work within our transformation programmes to ensure that it is delivered in line with best practice and council policy.

Work is ongoing 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. One of the eight key themes we have identified in the draft strategy is ‘Community-enabled Support’ and this work will contribute to our strategic goals for enabling communities.

Annex A – Actions arising from Audit Wales Recommendations

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.