

# Swansea's Tackling Poverty Strategy

## The Challenge

Swansea Council is committed to reducing poverty and the impacts of poverty. Poverty limits aspirations, damages relationships and ensures a loss of life chances. The City cannot afford to continue to work in the same way and allow this to continue. We need everyone to be living and achieving to their full potential. Swansea faces particular challenges in relation to educational achievement, employment rates, debt and early mortality. Swansea has an above average share of its neighbourhoods featuring in the top 10% most deprived in Wales. The Poverty Profile at the end of this document provides more information on how Swansea compares with Wales and the rest of the UK in these key areas. More detailed profiles are available in the Swansea Needs Assessment.

Tackling poverty is one of the Council's top priorities. By 'poverty' we mean this both in terms of populations of people – children, families, people with disabilities, asylum seekers and refugees and black and minority ethnic groups, for example, as well as geographical areas. The Council has previously categorised its work in the key geographical areas as follows:

**Tier 1** – represents the two most deprived areas namely Townhill (including parts of Castle) and Penderry. These are virtually synonymous with the Communities First Clusters. The population in the Townhill cluster is 11,731. The population in the Penderry cluster is 13,622. These two Target Areas therefore contain around 10% of the city's population.

**Tier 2** – represents the other three Communities First clusters. The South Cluster (the remainder of Castle ward, Landore and Sketty Park) which has a population of 11,700. The East Cluster (Bonymaen, Llansamlet and St Thomas) has a population of 11,621. The North East Cluster (Morrison, Mynyddbach and Clydach) has a population of 10,496. Together Tier 1 and 2 represent around a quarter of the city's population.

This strategy outlines what action will be taken to fulfil the promise to tackle poverty and prioritise services where they are most needed. In essence, it means that we will prioritise investment and transformational change in these geographical areas and with these communities of interest, over and above other investment in other areas. However, a significant proportion of the resources that the Council has are spent in these areas due to the population presenting with higher levels of need. Budgets in areas such as children's social care, housing, early intervention and others are already disproportionately allocated in these geographical areas, because they are based on need, and the people who need these services are more likely to live in a concentrated area. For other services that are available to all, we will continue to provide these universally, although this may be at a reduced level.

We recognise that poverty is not confined to those living in particular neighbourhoods, and indeed there are pockets of poverty in a very small neighbourhood within relatively more affluent areas. Indeed many people experience poverty in their later life, with assets in property, but not ready cash. In addition, in-work poverty is now a more significant challenge with more people in Wales in in-work poverty than out of work poverty. This tackling poverty strategy recognises that poverty can exist in any geographical location, and its actions are focused on targeting resources where there is the most need – whether this is with communities of interest or those living in a particular area.

### **Generational Change**

We recognise that in many neighbourhoods the poverty is multi-generational and has existed for many years. The impacts of poverty can last a lifetime, and some interventions can take a lifetime to manifest themselves in changed situations. For example, the difference in healthy life expectancy in Swansea between the poorest and most affluent areas is 23 years for men and 15 years for women. The actions to address this – getting people into employment, reducing smoking, lowering obesity rates can impact immediately, but the full impacts are not necessarily felt for many years, particularly the impact on one or more generations of children. Evidence tells us that experience in the first three years of a child's life sets the pattern for the rest of their life – whether in education, behaviour or health. If the Council directs its investment in those three years, impacts on education might be seen within five years, impacts on employment might be seen in 15 years and impacts on health may not be fully seen for forty years or more. There is recognition that tackling poverty takes time.

### **Early Intervention and Prevention**

Some might say that given the reductions in local government budgets, we cannot afford to invest in poverty reduction, and given that many of the actions are not required by law, it may be more financially prudent to maintain investment only where legally required to do so. We believe this is a false economy and that investment in early intervention is the best option to ensure a more sustainable future. Much of the Council's spend is in activities to provide support once things have gone wrong and many of our legal requirements are not in relation to early intervention or prevention. For example, many Councils are seeking to reduce their preventative services in relation to children and families, as there are fewer legal requirements to provide these services. Most of our legal requirements are in relation to children who are at risk or in need. But what if we turned investment on its head and put resource into putting things right before they go wrong instead? This is not only cheaper, but also provides better outcomes for individuals, families and communities. For example, through the Flying Start scheme, we supported 2149 families in 2013/14 with childcare, health advice and support for children with additional needs. The scheme is only a few years old, but already schools are telling us that they can tell which children have taken part in the

scheme – they are better prepared for school, better behaved and more ready to learn. The impact of this in future years has yet to manifest, but the idea of early intervention is clear.

Another example is the support we give to those experiencing domestic abuse. Not only does domestic abuse have a devastating impact on the individuals involved and their emotional wellbeing, in extreme cases it can also lead to children being taken into care, a generation of children accepting violence within relationships that leads to further problems in the future. Our investment in support for victims of domestic abuse is relatively small, but we know that the costs of supporting a child in residential care are between £156,000 – £260,000 per year, and if our support prevents even two children being taken into care, then it may pay for itself.

We know that this investment in early intervention and prevention works, because we have seen improvement in some key areas where we have seen it adopted – such as work with young people not engaged in employment or training, youth offending and unemployment rates in parts of the city and county. A strong example is how some schools have made use of pastoral programmes to provide additional support to young people with behaviour issues, which in one case have improved attendance from 83.4% to 90.9%. There is a strong evidence base for the early intervention approach, which has been popularised in public health through the work of the Marmot Review. This evidence base has been adopted in the development of the One Swansea Plan, as quoted below.

#### **A. Children Have a Good Start in Life**

*“The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, emotional – are laid in early childhood.”* **The Marmot Review (Fair Society Healthy Lives, 2010)**

#### **B. People Learn Successfully**

*“Inequalities in education outcomes affect physical and mental health as well as income, employment and quality of life.”* **The Marmot Review**

#### **C. Young People and Adults Have Good Jobs**

*“Being in good employment is protective of health. Conversely, unemployment contributes to poor health. Getting people into work is therefore of critical importance for reducing health inequalities. However, jobs need to be sustainable and offer a minimum level of quality, to include not only a decent living wage, but also opportunities for in-work development, the flexibility to enable people to balance work and family life, and protection from adverse working conditions that can damage health.”* **The Marmot Review**

#### **D: People have a decent standard of living**

*“Income inequalities affect the way that people live their lives. Having a healthy standard of living will contribute to people having more control over their lives and will have a positive influence on their health and wellbeing.”* **The Marmot Review**

## **E. People are healthy, safe and independent**

*“Many of the key health behaviours significant to the development of chronic disease follow the social gradient: smoking, obesity, lack of physical activity, unhealthy nutrition.”* **The Marmot Review**

## **F. People have good places to live and work**

*“Communities are important for physical and mental health and well-being. The physical and social characteristics of communities, and the degree to which they enable and promote healthy behaviours, all make a contribution to social inequalities in health.”* **The Marmot Review**

In some cases, the evidence base is not yet strong enough, and as a part of our work to develop the approach outlined in this strategy, we will seek to develop such evidence.

This approach is outlined in our forward strategy, Sustainable Swansea – Fit for the Future, which recognises that balancing the Council’s budget is not solely a question of balancing it in one year, but ensuring that budget decisions taken each year are delivering a sustainable approach for the Council in future years. In this way, the anti-poverty work outlined here is an issue not just for those in poverty, but by addressing poverty now, the Council can over time reduce its spend in areas of remedial action, therefore creating a more sustainable financial position for the Council in the longer term.

## **Involvement and Participation**

Poverty is a multi-faceted concept, and our definition of poverty is not one relating solely to income, but to poverty of opportunity, aspiration and access to services. As such, addressing the issue of poverty is not solely an issue for the Council, but a matter of concern for all agencies, whether they be private sector, public sector or voluntary sector. The impact of poor health, for example, also impacts on people’s ability to work and to learn, and if they are involved in crime they are more likely to be involved with drugs and abuse alcohol. These issues are not for one organisation to address alone.

But more importantly, poverty is an issue for the people of Swansea themselves to take to heart. The Council can arrange an early intervention initiative, but unless and until individuals make changes in their own lives, there will be no wide-scale or long-term change. That is why in the strategy outlined here, the involvement and participation of people who themselves are affected by poverty is crucial. Without them, there is no delivery.

## **Building on Experience**

It is important to recognise that there is already much good work taking place to tackle poverty and we are not starting with a blank sheet of paper. At a Wales-wide level tackling poverty has been a key priority for Welsh Government, with a focus on three areas: preventing poverty, helping people out of poverty and action to mitigate the impact of poverty. Welsh Government has invested locally in key programmes such as Communities First, Families First, Pupil Deprivation Grant and Flying Start, which have constituted a

significant set of programmes to support this agenda. The Welsh Government strategy is available on

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dsjlg/publications/socialjustice/120625tackpovplanen.pdf>

The Council continues to deliver a programme of activities with these resources, delivering the priorities of the Welsh Government at local level.

In 2011, the Council's Chief Executive established a monthly Poverty Forum, through which efforts to tackle poverty are coordinated, through addressing five themes:

1. Income & debt
2. Employment
3. Health
4. Education
5. Family support

This Forum has enabled the Council to be more coordinated in its work in this area, and to reduce duplication and identify new opportunities for action. This Forum has also undertaken to produce the Poverty Profile included at the end of this document. The key actions from each of the work stream action plans are identified in the Performance Framework Key Actions section.

The Council recognises that the best way to address poverty is to ensure that there are jobs for local people to access. The work the Council does with other partners to ensure that Swansea plays the lead role in developing the City Region is underway, and a Regional Economic Strategy has already been agreed.

In addition, the Council already has a number of services and partnerships that are primarily targeted at tackling poverty, such as

- Digital inclusion project
- Customer services strategy, with a focus on community access in Target Areas
- Beyond Bricks and Mortar
- Preparations for the introduction of Universal Credit through the Welfare Reform Working Group
- Workways – employment support
- Passport to Leisure
- Introduction of the Living Wage for Council employees
- Provision of housing support for vulnerable people
- Delivery of the Welsh Quality Homes Standard for Council housing
- Delivery of adult basic skills programmes
- Operating a 're-use' shop
- Keeping in Touch (KIT) schemes for young people, supporting those at risk of becoming NEETs
- Welfare Rights and benefits training programme for staff and partners
- Expansion of community transport schemes

Hence, the Council is building on strong experience of delivering programmes that tackle poverty, which will help to inform the next stages of action in this area.

## **The Swansea Approach**

Our vision is that Swansea citizens will be aspirational and have the confidence and resources to make their aspirations a reality. We want everyone, regardless of who they are or where they live, to live in a vibrant, supportive place, where they feel proud to belong to their community. We want people to have aspirations for their communities and families that are challenging, rewarding and uplifting. We want to have communities of ambition, where young people strive for a better future, and get the help and support they need to make it a reality. We want to provide strong role models for children and adults, from whom they can learn and with whom they can try out new options for themselves, which may have been beyond their wildest dreams. We want people to see that richness comes in many forms – family relationships, intelligence, community feeling – and not just in monetary terms. Most of all, we want people to be proud to be a part of the place that is Swansea.

This is a long term ambition and will take time to realise. To reflect this long-term vision, the work will be categorised into phases, to enable us to show progress towards the ultimate vision. One of the first tasks, for example, is to organise our services more effectively to meet local needs in Target Areas; in the longer term a multi-agency Area Board may be useful, but until we have a better understanding of how we might organise this, we will develop a Public Sector Board to coordinate services more effectively, whilst we work towards a model of community involvement that can provide a more sustainable approach.

## **Shared Leadership**

Given this focus on longer term change, we also recognise that communities and neighbourhoods are in different stages of development – some have strong community involvement and in some areas it is less strong. In areas where there is little involvement or sense of belonging, we will start small, recognising that these small steps can build on one another in a continuum of activity. For example, a community clean up may involve a relatively small number of people from a neighbourhood, but once it is clean, more people will want to keep it looking nice, and will be less accepting of those who litter or dump waste or paint graffiti. Over time, this raising of aspirations makes people prouder of the area in which they live. Each area will be analysed to identify what might work best in that neighbourhood.

We are approaching our anti-poverty work in the spirit of shared leadership. That has a number of implications, which are outlined below.

***A belief that resources exist in communities and families*** – The Council and other agencies are only one part of the picture. Individuals have many resources

themselves, and communities are full of them – we will support people to develop these further.

***Social networks are crucial*** – Within any community, there are networks of people who make things happen. It might be based around a community centre, or a school, or a mosque or church, or the rugby club. Evidence tells us that these networks have a value; where social networks are strong, people are more likely to be employed, they are better educated, have better health and are happier. We will recognise these networks and support their development.

***Together we know best*** – Top-down approaches to support often don't provide effective support. Professionals know things, but so do communities themselves. We will work collaboratively with our communities to tailor support, recognising that sometimes, the best support we can give is to get out of the way and let people develop their own solutions. A dependency culture does not help anyone.

***Work with existing leaders*** – We will work with existing leaders in communities. In every community there are a number of people who make everything happen. They may not be 'official' leaders in the sense of having a position of authority, but they have the ability to get people together. Instead of imposing solutions from the outside, we will work with these leaders to make sure our actions are appropriate, and to get greater involvement.

***Engagement with what?*** – We will work with leaders and others in communities to devise a model of involvement that is appropriate for each area. Many Local Authorities throughout the UK have trialled neighbourhood management approaches that have had mixed results in terms of involvement in local decision making. We are not seeking to involve only the traditional leaders in local decision making, but a wider group of people and will take the time to work in localities to make this a reality.

***A cadre of champions*** – The actions outlined here represent a real change for Swansea Council. In order to make these changes happen, we will work with staff at different levels of the organisation to champion this agenda, and to act as agents of change. We will provide them with support and training to carry out their role.

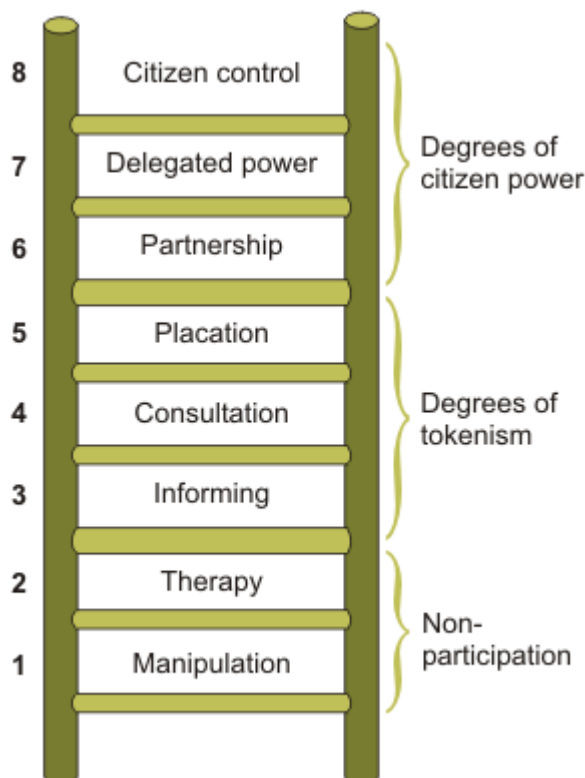
***Change starts with us*** – As Ghandi once said, 'Be the change that you want to see in the world.' We will need to change the culture of the Council to meet these actions, providing a more flexible approach to decision making, with involvement of a wide range of staff. All of our employees will have a role, whether it is directly, or through release to volunteer or simply encouraging flexibility within their team.

***Cede power*** – Empowerment explicitly means that others become more powerful – in this case, those who are affected by poverty. In order to provide space for opportunity, Council staff and councillors will need to recognise that they do not always know best, or that they are not always in the best position to make a decision, and that others will take a different a view about their future.

**‘No you can’t’** – Councils on the whole are extremely risk averse and we recognise that this will need to change. We need to move from a culture of explaining why we cannot do things to one of ‘Yes, we can’, where we take a more balanced approach to risk. This means that sometimes staff or communities will make mistakes, or things won’t work out the way originally intended, but the important point is that we learn from the experience, and that we share that learning with others.

**Ward councillors** – Local elected Members have an absolutely critical role to play in this strategy. We are moving away from a Council focused on the Civic Centre/County Hall to one that is focused on local areas and creating action in those areas. Local councillors are often the best connected in their areas, and in many cases are some of the strongest community activists in the city and county. We will do more to recognise and facilitate this role, as they are both a source of intelligence, but also of action.

As a Council we are interested in exploring how we can move towards greater participation of local people in our decision making. We recognise that there are different types of participation and engagement, and that **how** we engage with people is often as important as the **what** we engage with them about. As we become more sophisticated with our engagement work, we will seek to increasingly involve local people in decision making, rather than simply asking them to comment on our plans. This type of progressive engagement is sometimes referred to as a Ladder of Participation (*A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, S Arnstein, 1969) in order to identify the degree of power that resides with both the ‘engager’ and the ‘engagee’. An example of such a model is provided below.





In some cases, we recognise that there is latent capacity that we will need to connect with before we are able to fully engage in this way, and we are committed to taking the time needed to build that capacity for full engagement.

We will provide opportunities to work with communities and move towards greater involvement in decision making, particularly with communities with greater needs.

### **Tackling Poverty Action Plan**

These ideas will run throughout the actions that we take to tackle poverty, as outlined in the attached action plan. The Action Plan is not intended to be a full list of everything the Council is doing to address poverty. The Action Plan is focused on what action we will take additionally to that we are already doing. The Action Plan will focus on three themes:

1. Empowering local people
2. Changing Cultures
3. Targeting resources.

As a Council, we will be making some significant changes to our business to ensure this is not simply another strategy that does not lead to action. We will:

- Seek to re-direct resources to support this change agenda
- Allocate a Director to each of the Target Areas to ensure oversight and action
- Seek to relocate more of our workforce into disadvantaged areas
- Introduce partnerships to better coordinate services at local level
- Introduce high profile opportunities for people who experience poverty to challenge faith, business and civic leaders
- Devise more opportunities for local people to have greater say on what happens in their area.

The Council has a critical community leadership role in developing Swansea, and it will provide a lead on tackling poverty, as outlined in this strategy. However, we recognise that it will require the efforts of a wide range of organisations and agencies delivering services in the City and County, and therefore we will be seeking to influence other agencies to develop their own action plans to mirror this Council Plan. We will work with the Local Services Board to ensure that organisations accord sufficient priority to this area, and to hold them to account for delivery on their plans.

### **Resourcing**

There is already much work taking place to address poverty in Swansea. Indeed, most of the strategies of the Council reflect this priority and some have specific programmes for key communities. Communities First and Families First, for example, provide the Council with resource from Welsh Government that we can align to this strategy to have greater impact. In addition, the Council will be seeking to redirect resources to this agenda to create additional capacity. This is a challenging ambition, given the high level of reductions in

spending that will need to be made to the Council's budget, and reflect the degree of importance attached to this strategy.

The Council has already restructured its staffing arrangements to align some key services under a new Poverty and Prevention Service, and this service will have a crucial role in delivering the strategy. The Director of People will have overall responsibility for delivery, working with the Officer Poverty Champion, the Chief Executive, and the Cabinet Member Poverty Champion, the Leader of the Council. The effective delivery of the strategy, however, will involve every employee and every Council Member; together this represents a significant resource for change.

A risk of any strategy is that it consists of nice words, but nothing that will actually change anything. All of the partner organisations at the Local Service Board have confirmed poverty as a priority, and this strategy is a step in embedding that commitment into action. The Swansea Partnership Poverty Forum will produce an action plan that will accompany this strategy. The Council's Action Plan is attached at the end of this document. The Forum will review these actions on an annual basis, with a full review of the strategy after three years.