

Action, partnership, participation

*How can the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy
be improved?*

The Tackling Poverty Scrutiny Inquiry Panel
City and County of Swansea - Dinas a Sir Abertawe



February 2017

Why This Matters

Foreword by **Councillor Sybil Crouch** (Convener)

Tackling Poverty is key to delivering the health and wellbeing of our citizens and of our city. The Council is to be congratulated for being the only local authority in Wales to have developed and published a strategy to address poverty.

We spoke to a number of people working in the authority and in the public and voluntary sectors who are passionate about this issue. Their commitment is valued and provides optimism that together we can make progress.

We heard powerful testimony from people experiencing poverty and I am especially grateful to them for taking time to tell us what they face on a daily basis. I was moved by their testimony and by their courage in the face of complex problems.

The Tackling Poverty Strategy lays considerable emphasis on the need to involve people experiencing poverty, without whom “there is no delivery”. The evidence we heard from the Leeds Poverty Truth Commission persuades us that this is a model which Swansea should follow and it is one of our principle recommendations that this should be actioned at the earliest opportunity.

Whilst we found good practice in some areas we were very concerned to find that many of the actions necessary to deliver the strategy had stalled. We found a lack of coherence and focus as well as a failure to develop a robust evidence base or a coherent and clear performance monitoring regime.

I hope that our recommendations will be accepted in the positive spirit in which they are made and that this important work will gain a renewed focus and impetus.

The panel met ten times and there were also six other evidence gathering sessions over a period of nine months. I would like to thank the members of the Inquiry Panel who gave their time and commitment, all of those who gave evidence and provided information and the Scrutiny officers for their excellent support, advice and patience.



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1 WHY WE PRODUCED THIS REPORT

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 This report looks at the following question:

How can the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy be improved?

Main Lines of Inquiry

a) Action Plan: How well has the action plan been delivered? How should it be updated and improved?

b) Target Areas: This policy is central to the strategy. Is the target areas policy being consistently delivered and understood?

c) Partnership Working: The Council cannot tackle poverty in isolation. What has been the role of the Local Service Board in developing and delivering the strategy? What should be the role of Swansea Public Services Board in future?

Additional Lines of Inquiry

d) Outcomes: While the strategy is long term it is still important to know what outcomes are expected and what has been achieved in the short term. Can these be outcomes be identified and are the long term outcomes the right ones going forward? This needs to be more explicit in the report and recommendations

e) Resources: The strategy seeks a fundamental shift in the way that the Council operates. To what extent has the strategy influenced the council budget and attracted resources?

f) Councillors: Councillors play an important and active role in their communities and yet may not be fully involved in the strategy. How can this be improved? This is currently not referred to in the report or in recommendations

g) Cross Cutting: To be effective the strategy needs to influence how every department operates. Has this happened? How could the strategy be more cross cutting?

h) Awareness: To have impact the strategy needs to be widely understood. Do people outside those directly involved understand the strategy and what it means for them?

i) What Works and what doesn't Work: What has the strategy done well? How can the Council do more of what works? This is currently not referred to in the report

1.2 *Selecting the topic*

- 1.2.1 The Inquiry into Tackling Poverty was proposed at the Annual Scrutiny Work Planning Conference in May 2015 and was subsequently included in the scrutiny work programme by the Scrutiny Programme Committee.
- 1.2.2 This topic was chosen because Tackling Poverty is one of the Council's top five priorities – a Peer Review of Swansea Council, conducted by the Welsh Local Government Association in 2014, recommended that scrutiny should focus more on these priorities. It is also an issue that many scrutiny councillors feel passionately about not least because they see the effects of poverty day to day in their communities.
- 1.2.3 At our pre inquiry meeting we heard from the Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty and Communities and the Head of Poverty and Prevention. We are grateful for this input that was particularly helpful to us as we shaped the terms of reference for the inquiry.

1.3 *Intended contribution*

- 1.3.1 As a Panel we believe that we can make a valuable contribution to this topic. We recognise that, while there are no easy answers, success will only come from a conversation to which everyone is able to contribute. It is in this spirit that our conclusions and recommendations are offered.
- 1.3.2 Specifically this report aims to contribute to this vital debate by providing:
- Evidenced proposals that will lead to the strategy being more effective
 - The views of people experiencing poverty
 - The views of key stakeholders
 - Consideration of the conclusions and recommendations from national reports and an assessment of the implications for Swansea
 - Identification of good practice/research elsewhere and whether there is any learning for Swansea's approach
 - Increased councillor understanding about the Tackling Poverty Strategy
 - Greater public awareness of the work of the Tackling Poverty Strategy
- 1.3.3 We are happy to recognise the limitations of the inquiry. Given the complexity of the topic and the time that we had this report necessarily provides a broad view.
- 1.3.4 We were informed that many of our conclusions and recommendations are in line with what is being planned by the Cabinet Member and officers. During the course of the inquiry a number of debates have been generated and the new Head of Poverty and Prevention has been appointed. Where our suggestions overlap with what is planned these offer reassurance. Other proposals will provide challenge and stimulate debate.

1.4 The Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy

- 1.4.1 The Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy is one of the mechanisms for delivery of the Council's corporate priority of tackling poverty. It was agreed by Council in November 2014. It has four elements; the main strategy, a performance framework, action plan and poverty profile. Consultation with council officers, partners, voluntary and community sector organisations and residents took place between August and September 2014.
- 1.4.2 The Tackling Poverty Action Plan was not intended to be a full list of everything the Council was doing to address poverty. The Action Plan was focused on additional actions related to three themes:
1. Empowering local people
 2. Changing Cultures
 3. Targeting resources.
- 1.4.3 The Tackling Poverty Strategy and all associated documents can be found in the evidence pack that accompanies this report.
- 1.4.4 The Tackling Poverty Action Plan sits alongside the Council's five workstreams:
- Income & debt
 - Employment
 - Health
 - Education
 - Family support
- 1.4.5 Swansea Local Service Board previously produced a Swansea Single Needs Assessment that covered many relevant poverty issues.

1.5 The Target Area Policy

- 1.5.1 The Policy Commitments Statement adopted by Council on 26th July 2012 identified the intention to take *'a fresh and coherent approach to community regeneration and to tackling poverty in Swansea'* and to *'develop a "Target Area" approach, bringing together council departments, the NHS and other agencies, pooling resources and finance, to work together, across boundaries to tackle the trans-generational causes of poverty and deprivation'*. The Target Area policy and principles for implementation were formally agreed by Cabinet on 28 February 2013.
- 1.5.2 The Target Area approach is integral to the Tackling Poverty Strategy. It is described as *'one of the first tasks'*, the desire *'to organise our services more effectively to meet needs in Target Areas; in the longer term a multi-agency Area Board may be useful, but until we have a better understanding or how we might organise this, we will develop a Public Sector Board to coordinate service more effectively, whilst we work toward a model of community involvement that can provide a more sustainable approach'*.

1.5.3 The Poverty Forum ‘was established in 2012 and is chaired by the Chief Executive. The Leader of the Council is a member given his lead role in Poverty. The forum is cross departmental and inclusive. The work of the forum is to focus on our poverty efforts. The work of the forum is City & County wide but given the dominance of poverty related issues much of the activity will inevitably focus on the Target Areas. The role of the Poverty Forum is to promote an understanding of poverty issues and maintain a focus on the broadest definition of poverty’

- Identify and implement best practice
- Develop and deliver action plans
- Promote innovation and change
- Develop outcome measures and, over the longer term, improve outcomes.”

(From Report of Corporate Management Team – Corporate Briefing 9 January 2013)

1.6 Integrated Impact Assessment

1.6.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment was carried out on the strategy in February 2016. This assessment, commissioned as part of the strategy review process, was facilitated by the Sustainable Development Unit and involved a panel of relevant professionals.

1.6.2 The recommendations made by the panel have been considered as part of this inquiry.

2 EVIDENCE

2.1 Evidence collected

2.1.1 Evidence was collected between April and December 2016. The main evidence gathering activities were as follows:

- a. Pre-inquiry Working Group that discussed a policy overview report with Councillor Will Evans, Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty & Communities and Sarah Crawley, Head of Poverty and Prevention
- b. Site Visits to Topic House and the Eastside Food Bank
- c. Session with Dr Victoria Winckler of the Bevan Foundation and Emyr Williams from the Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW) to discuss ‘what works’ and how evidence can be used to support anti-poverty strategies
- d. A session to hear from Swansea YMCA, Swansea Neath & Port Talbot Citizens Bureau and Age Cymru Swansea Bay - third sector organisations working directly with people experiencing poverty
- e. Session with members of the Panel who conducted the Integrated Impact Assessment on the Tackling Poverty Strategy

- f. Session with Eastside Foodbank/South Wales Baptist Association, Community Bank Wales (Credit Union) and Swansea Fair Debt Campaign - community organisations working directly with people experiencing poverty
- g. Briefing note on Neath Port Talbot Credit Union Produced for this Inquiry
- h. Skype call with Leeds Poverty Truth Commission
- i. Session with representatives of Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board, South Wales Police and Mid and West Wales Fire Service to discuss the perspective of partner organisations
- j. Session with Mike Hedges AM, and Councillor Peter Black, who were members of the National Assembly for Wales Committee that produced a report on Poverty in 2015.
- k. Session with officers from the Tackling Poverty Unit
- l. Survey of practitioners involved with tackling poverty work
- m. Focus groups with people experiencing poverty facilitated by Dynamix
- n. Additional informal session with some of those who took part in the focus groups
- o. Session with officers from across the Council to consider how the strategy is being delivered across different departments
- p. Session with the Head of Poverty and Prevention to discuss the delivery of the Tackling Poverty Strategy Action Plan.
- q. Paper submitted by the Tackling Poverty Unit
- r. Paper submitted by the Financial Inclusion Steering Group

2.1.2 For full details of the evidence gathered including details of all of the findings from each session please see the evidence pack for this inquiry. This can be downloaded at www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutinypublications

3 CONCLUSIONS

This report considers how the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy can be improved. The sections reflect the lines of inquiry agreed at the start of the inquiry. Specific proposals are identified throughout and listed separately in the Recommendations section that follows.

3.1 General

- 3.1.1 The Council should be proud that it has been committed to tackling poverty for over 20 years. As a Panel we wholeheartedly support the fact that, today, tackling poverty is the Council's main overarching policy – the policy to which all other policies have to contribute. The Council has a dedicated Cabinet Member, a Head of Poverty and Prevention and a Tackling Poverty Unit. All of this underlines the importance attached to this issue – and rightly so. For the challenge of poverty is as great today as it was 20 years ago.
- 3.1.2 The fact that the Council has a strategy demonstrates that Swansea is a progressive council when it comes to this issue. When we asked Dr Victoria Winckler about good practice in Wales she said that 'Swansea is ahead of the curve in Wales even talking about a strategy'. However it is not sufficient just to have a strategy or talk about it, there must also be clearly demonstrable progress to implement and deliver the strategy. Targets and objectives should be set for managers, Heads of Service and Directors as part of the Performance Management framework. The Chief Executive should take overall responsibility for delivery.
- 3.1.3 We were also struck by the dedication and commitment of all those we spoke to who are working to tackle poverty in Swansea. We heard about many excellent examples of work in this area and have no doubt that lives are being changed for the better on a daily basis. Examples include the staff training and take up campaigns organised by the Council's Welfare Rights Advisors, the advice being provided day-to-day by third sector organisations and the direct support provided by Communities First that we heard about from the focus group participants. Whilst it is certainly the case that the council and other partners have taken numerous initiatives to tackle poverty these actions are not clearly articulated or measured and the benefits are not captured.
- 3.1.4 We were impressed by the evidence we heard from Jane Storer about the work that the Welfare Rights Team does with benefits claimants. We believe that this work deserves particular attention in the revised strategy.
- 3.1.5 While the right foundations are in place for the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy we believe that there is, nevertheless, a compelling case for a renewal of the strategy and a reinvigorated commitment to delivery.
- 3.1.6 It is not just a commitment that is needed but also an evidence base and robust framework for monitoring progress.

Vision

3.1.7 A renewed commitment would also be an opportunity to rethink the vision for the strategy. We think a good starting point would be that the vision suggested to us by the Tackling Poverty Unit becomes the basis for the Council's vision.

3.1.8 The Tackling Poverty Unit has the following vision:

“Our vision for Swansea

- ***Income poverty*** is not a barrier to doing well at school, having a healthy and vibrant life, developing skills and qualifications and having a fulfilling occupation.
- ***Service poverty*** is addressed by targeting resources where they may have the most useful impacts, and decisions about that are made in collaboration with service users.
- ***Participation*** is enjoyed by all our residents, who access a wide variety of cultural, social and leisure experiences which broaden horizons and develop aspirations and who are constructively involved in decisions about our community and our environment”.

3.1.9 Since the original strategy was agreed a major change has taken place in the Welsh Policy environment - the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act has been introduced which, on its own, provides reason enough for reviewing the strategy.

Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

3.1.10 The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act sets the framework for policy making in Wales and the Tackling Poverty Strategy contributes directly to one of the national wellbeing goals namely: *‘A more equal Wales - a society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances.*

3.1.11 At the heart of this Act is the sustainable development principle and the Tackling Poverty Strategy, along with all other policies, needs to pay attention to the five ways of working that set out how the sustainable development principle needs to be delivered, namely:

- *Long Term - The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.*
- *Prevention - How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.*
- *Integration - Considering how the public body’s well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.*

- *Collaboration* - Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.
- *Involvement* - The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

3.1.12 As would be expected the current strategy is strong in terms of some of the ways of working but less so in terms of others.

3.1.13 However, and as argued below, a new vision should be confirmed only after involving those affected by poverty and collaborating with partners.

3.1.14 We also agree with the recommendation of the Integrated Impact Assessment that a definition of poverty should be stated as part of the strategy. While we recognise that there is no widely accepted definition, it would be helpful to have a point of reference given that the question ‘what is poverty?’ is often being asked.

3.1.15 The briefing note we received from the Tackling Poverty Unit pointed to the Welsh Government definition used in their first child poverty strategy. This definition, still being used by the Unit, focuses on income, services and participation. For example, in 2012:

- Benefits provided a single parent with two children with almost enough to meet the poverty line, but having half as much again would still not have given them an adequate minimum income.
- Benefits for a couple with two children provided nearly £60 per week less than the poverty line, and nearly £200 per week less than a minimum adequate income.
- A childless couple received not even half of a poverty-line income from benefits. Their income would have to be almost 3 times that of benefits to be adequate.

Swansea Poverty Profile 2014

3.1.16 To give a sense of what the income measures refer to, here are the figures for 60% of 2014/15 Median weekly income, after housing costs (followed by the Minimum Income Standard for 2016, excluding Council Tax and childcare). These figures should be treated with care and used in context:

- Single working-age person: £141 (£178)
- Pensioner couple: £243 (£240)
- Couple with 2 children: £340 (£422)
- Lone parent with 1 child: £190 (£270)

Involve people experiencing poverty

- 3.1.17 A consistent thread in the evidence was that in developing (and delivering) a strategy it was vital that people experiencing poverty were not only involved, but involved in a powerful and meaningful way. Discussing what makes a good tackling poverty strategy, Emyr Williams (PPIW) quoted from the MacInnes report, which states that *“Solutions to poverty cannot be imposed from above. We do not have all the answers!!!”* Adding, that any strategy hoping to succeed *“requires bottom up engagement from those experiencing poverty to find out what their issues are”*. This view was supported by Dr Victoria Winckler, from The Bevan Foundation (if she hasn’t been mentioned before) who argued that a strategy could only be credible when it demonstrates that people are being listened to. The evidence of community groups was that the strategy needs to *“get nearer to people in poverty and listen to their experiences”*.
- 3.1.18 This view was tested and supported by the outcome of focus groups comprising people experiencing poverty. Impressive in adversity, their accounts of personal experience of poverty were both eloquent and powerful. The Panel considers that even this small exercise demonstrates the potential difference that people themselves are able to make, given the opportunity.
- 3.1.19 We note that involving people experiencing poverty was an important element of the original strategy: *“...the involvement and participation of people who themselves are affected by poverty is crucial. Without them there is no delivery.”* It is particularly regrettable therefore that the ‘poverty challenge’ identified in the action plan was not delivered. We also believe that involving people experiencing poverty should be more than a project and must be integral to the strategy. As Emyr Williams suggested it should be *‘an ongoing conversation not just a one off exercise’*.
- 3.1.20 Our proposal is that the Poverty Truth Commission model is placed at the heart of the new strategy. In her evidence to us, Dr Victoria Winckler suggested that the Leeds Poverty Truth Commission was an example of good practice and we subsequently spoke to Andrew Grinnell, one of the organisers of the Leeds Commission, about how it operates.
- 3.1.21 In summary, the Leeds Poverty Truth Commission is an independent structure that trains both people experiencing poverty and people in public life and supports them to work together on joint projects around key themes based on issues raised by those experiencing poverty. This model is both powerful and effective because its focus is on relationships, rather than simply reacting to the evidence presented. The Leeds experience has shown that whilst there are personal benefits for the ‘community commissioners’ (for example increased confidence to get into college or start a business), the public life commissioners have also been inspired to make changes in their own organisations.
- 3.1.22 We believe that this model, adapted to fit Swansea’s circumstances, could not only provide a challenge and culture change but also be a flagship for the strategy – demonstrating the commitment to involve people experiencing

poverty. We also believe that a 'Swansea Poverty Truth Commission' needs to be embedded in the work of Swansea Public Services Board as a collaborative project.

- 3.1.23 We support the idea that the unused £20,000 budget for the Poverty Challenge should be used to set up a Poverty Truth Commission in Swansea. Further to that the Public Services Board partners should be asked to contribute funds to enable the Commission to be established on a long term and sustainable basis. We do not agree that the £5k for the poverty scrutiny consultation should be deducted from the budget allocated for the Poverty Challenge, particularly as the Poverty & Prevention budget has underspent in other areas. We have collected some information about the Leeds Poverty Truth Commission (included in the Evidence Pack) that we hope will be useful for this purpose.
- 3.1.24 Alongside the poverty challenge we believe that the strategy could do more to encourage a coproductive approach across as many services as possible. This was one of the recommendations of the Integrated Impact Assessment.
- 3.1.25 One way to clearly signal that people experiencing poverty will be at the heart of the process is to involve them in the development of the strategy. Specifically we suggest that the consultation for the revised strategy engages people experiencing poverty.
- 3.1.26 Relevant, although not directly within the purview of this Panel, concerning anecdotal evidence was nevertheless received from focus group participants about some schools not meeting the needs of children with disabilities. We will be recommending that the Scrutiny Programme Board adopt this issue for future enquiry.

Swansea's Wellbeing Plan

- 3.1.27 As stated below, integration is one of the five ways of working enshrined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the Panel believes that the strategy can be better integrated if it is aligned directly with the Wellbeing Plan being developed by Swansea Public Services Board. Indeed, the Integrated Impact Assessment carried out on the Swansea Poverty Strategy recommended that it was necessary to link other/all strategies concerned with poverty to gain maximum effectiveness.
- 3.1.28 Additionally, it was also suggested that the strategy should be more closely integrated with the Wellbeing Plan by both the Tackling Poverty Unit and the Financial Inclusion Steering Group.
- 3.1.29 Swansea's Wellbeing Plan is in the first stages of being developed and needs to be completed by March 2018. It will be informed by the Wellbeing Assessment, which is being consulted on during January and February 2017 and due to be published in March of this year.

- 3.1.30 This suggestion that the strategy should be more closely integrated with the Wellbeing Plan was made to us both by the Tackling Poverty Unit and the Financial Inclusion Steering Group.
- 3.1.31 The six population outcomes that the Wellbeing Plan will be built around fit well with the actions to tackle poverty identified in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report. In their evidence the Tackling Poverty Unit suggested that if the six population outcomes are achieved then there would not be poverty in Swansea. It makes sense to us that the Tackling Poverty Strategy should principally focus on Outcome D (people having a decent standard of living) while *also* ensuring that the other five outcomes have sufficient resources and commitment to be effective in tackling poverty work.

Links to economic policy

- 3.1.32 Another consistent thread of evidence was the importance of a committed and effective economic policy in successfully tackling poverty. Emyr Williams from the Public Policy Institute for Wales said that ‘poverty is inextricably linked to economic policy. An anti-poverty policy in isolation is practically useless’. At the same time the JRF report points to the need to boost incomes and to ‘promote long-term economic growth benefiting everyone’.
- 3.1.33 There are undoubtedly positive aspects of the city’s regeneration work that should be highlighted as an example of what can be done; particularly the Workways and Beyond bricks and Mortar initiatives. We note that:
- Between 2009 and 2014, Workways engaged with over 3,200 individuals, generating over 1,060 positive job outcomes (full-time, part-time, temporary jobs – all 16hrs+ per week) with 76 participants gaining qualifications.
 - Since 2009, the Beyond Bricks and Mortar team has secured 116 supplier contracts containing community benefit clauses, 9342 training weeks for the unemployed and disadvantaged, and placed 277 people into employment or training opportunities
- 3.1.34 We are also pleased to note the Council’s work with apprentices and that the Council is establishing an in-house apprenticeship scheme and also a work experience programme with a focus on the long term unemployed.
- 3.1.35 While much of the Economic Regeneration agenda may have a benefit to the Tackling Poverty Strategy this was not explicit in the evidence we received. Notwithstanding that the emphasis in the original strategy of the importance of good jobs, and that one of the work streams was dealing with “worklessness”, the links between the Council’s economic development work and the tackling poverty strategy remain unclear. Indeed, unless the benefits of the economic development agenda are made explicit how will it be possible to celebrate the work and to ensure that the links with the Tackling Poverty Strategy are made?

- 3.1.36 In addition to making the links more explicit there is much more that needs to be done to ensure strong links between the tackling poverty strategy and the Council's Economic Regeneration work going forward. This was the recommendation of the Integrated Impact Assessment conducted on the Tackling Poverty Strategy that also suggested workforce capacity and skills as potential areas of focus.
- 3.1.37 We believe, therefore, that there is an urgent need to review the focus and delivery of Economic Development to ensure its wider effectiveness and its contribution to the tackling poverty agenda. To make these links explicit all economic development plans need to evidence how they address this council priority and ensure that all the people of the city have the opportunity to benefit from future inward investment. Our proposal is that external advice is sought to make sure that this happens. We will also be asking that scrutiny continues to pick up this issue in future conversations with the Leader and other relevant Cabinet Members.
- 3.1.38 Unfortunately, due to the timescale of the inquiry the Panel did not have the opportunity to explore this evidence fully. We are therefore proposing that scrutiny looks at this issue in more detail in future. This will allow councillors to gain a full understanding of the issues.
- 3.1.39 As part of our inquiry we were keen to understand how much the Council's Economic Regeneration work efforts had increased the general GDP of the city since 2012. Information was duly provided which advised that GDP information was not available at the Swansea level, but provided alternative information on GVA (Gross Value Added). For example, that in regards to £s per head, it states, "the GVA in Swansea is rising". However, it is unclear as to whether this represents a real increase in percentage terms (i.e. real money terms). In regards to the Workways scheme, the advice that "1060 positive job outcomes" were delivered over the 5 years of the programme, does not state how many of those jobs were sustained. It was also disappointing to learn that of 3,200 individuals "engaged" over 5 years only 76 had gained qualifications. Again, we hope to receive further information on this issue.

Strategy Review

- 3.1.40 The current strategy has made provision for review and we have welcomed the opportunity to be part of that review.
- 3.1.41 There is a need to ensure that in future all actions agreed to deliver the strategy are delivered and progress monitored. For this reason we recommend that a Tackling Poverty Scrutiny Performance Panel is set up.

3.2 Action Plan

- 3.2.1 At the start of the inquiry we wanted to find out how well the Action Plan had been delivered and how it might be updated and improved.

- 3.2.2 We are concerned that there has been a delivery problem for the strategy over the last few years. The Poverty Strategy Action Plan, which was agreed in November 2014, has 23 actions of which only 3 have been completed or delivered. We also note that the bulk of actions have become the responsibility of the Poverty and Prevention Unit notwithstanding that their delivery requires the co-operation of other service areas and Heads of service. Only around 25% of those responding to our survey were able to agree that the strategy 'has been delivered well'.
- 3.2.3 One key action, the production of a 'Single Action Plan' for the Council, due to be completed in July 2015, has not been completed and this is of particular concern. This indicates to us that there is a lack of impetus from other departments to work with the Poverty and Prevention Unit and that the responsibility for anti-poverty work overall has shifted to this unit. At the same time the corporate momentum has been lost.
- 3.2.4 In the partnership context we are also concerned that the "Swansea Local Service Board Delivery Framework" (2014) was not fit for purpose in the sense that of the 27 "current performance measures" (2014), 14 are still unpopulated with performance measures and remain "tbc" and all 27 of the "by 2017" (targets) remain "tbc" as at February 2017. In the evidence we received we heard plenty of examples of good partnership working to tackle poverty but very little of this seemed to be connected to the work of the strategy or of the Local Service Board. This finding is supported by our survey where fewer than a quarter of respondents were able to confirm that the Local Service Board had made a difference to tackling poverty and yet more than 50% agreed that partnership working in general had made a difference.
- 3.2.5 We understand from the Director of People that there was limited if any appetite from partners to changing the existing Local Service Board targets to be more stretching to show the Council's enhanced focus on tackling poverty. It seems that this was because the main partners believed that the actions they were already taking were the optimum they could do to impact on poverty. The Local Service Board has now been replaced by the Public Services Board and the new organisation is seeking to define its focus and priorities in the coming months, once the Well Being Assessment has been produced. We hope that this opportunity to strengthen the impact of the Public Services Board on poverty can be taken.
- 3.2.6 We believe that a renewed commitment to tackling poverty will provide an opportunity to focus more on delivery. Specifically this would mean agreeing and delivering a simpler set of positive and practical actions and developing a robust evidence base.
- 3.2.7 We also consider that too much focus was placed on the Tackling Poverty Action Plan. During the course of our inquiry we feel it would have been more useful to get updates on the Single Action Plan as not all poverty work is captured in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan.

3.3 Target Areas

- 3.3.1 As the Target Areas policy is central to the strategy we wanted to understand whether it was being consistently delivered and understood
- 3.3.2 It is clear from the evidence that the Target Areas policy has been neither understood nor implemented. Indeed, we see little to suggest that any of the original policy intentions in regards to resources, increasing aspirations, new models of partnership working (such as 'multi-agency Area Boards', Public Sector Boards) or new models of community involvement, all described in the strategy, have been progressed or are likely to happen soon.
- 3.3.3 It is clear that the policy has not led to fundamental changes. Neither is there any evidence that key tasks associated with the policy have been carried out such as; the mapping exercise; the needs assessment/analysis; the targeting of resources based on these analyses; and the identification of Heads of Service and Directors to lead. No clear definitive actions have taken place therefore there is no way to determine the effectiveness of the policy.
- 3.3.4 The need for a review is urgent now that the future of Communities First have become uncertain. We heard powerful evidence from our focus groups about the essential support Communities First has given to many in our most deprived communities and we are concerned about what will happen to them if schemes are to be withdrawn.
- 3.3.5 In line with our earlier conclusion, we suggest that people in the areas affected are fully involved in any review.

3.4 Partnership Working

- 3.4.1 As it is clear that the Council cannot tackle poverty in isolation we wanted to understand what the role of the Local Service Board has been in developing and delivering the tackling poverty strategy. We also wanted to find out about what the role of Swansea Public Services Board should be in future.
- 3.4.2 While collaboration is one of the ways of working enshrined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act it has been a weakness of the strategy to date. We are unconvinced that Swansea Local Service Board has previously taken more than a cursory interest in this issue. At the same time we heard from partner agencies that there has been a lack of involvement outside of the council, particularly in terms of the development of the strategy.
- 3.4.3 While the panel heard that partners are doing work on the ground to tackle poverty, this is not linking well to the structures set up to support the strategy.
- 3.4.4 The Poverty Forums in particular need to be reviewed in collaboration with partners with a view to linking more directly to the work of Swansea Public Services Board.
- 3.4.5 We note with concern that the Poverty Forum Executive Group had not met since February 2016 and that the Swansea Partnership Poverty Forum had spasmodic attendance by some key partners and appeared to lack focus.

- 3.4.6 We wish to note in particular the expertise that third sector organisations can bring to the strategy particularly in terms of engagement and coproduction. We heard from Citizens Advice Bureau, Age Cymru and YMCA all of whom are keen to contribute, and they are just a small sample of third sector organisations involved in tackling poverty. The strategy should acknowledge this expertise and ensure that the third sector is involved from the earliest stages of strategy development. The recently formed Swansea Public Services Board (which replaced the Local Services Board in May 2016) provides a great opportunity to build a new culture of collaborative working around the strategy.
- 3.4.7 Furthermore we believe that tackling poverty should be one of the commitments set out in the Partnership Manual for Swansea Public Services Board.
- 3.4.8 As argued previously, we believe that a Swansea Poverty Truth Commission should be placed at the heart of the partnership structures for the strategy.

3.5 Outcomes

- 3.5.1 While the strategy is long term it is still important to know what outcomes are expected and what has been achieved in the short term. We wanted to know whether these outcomes could be identified and whether the long term outcomes the right ones going forward.
- 3.5.2 While we found from the survey that many consider that the strategy deals well with the long term we also heard that the high level aspirations of the strategy are not broken down into shorter term actions in a way that is easily understood. The strategy, therefore, needs to have clear, measurable long term outcomes balanced against shorter term achievable objectives. We also heard that, to take a long term view, the strategy needs to take account of future trends and fore sighting – these were also recommendations included in the Integrated Impact Assessment.

3.6 Resources

- 3.6.1 The Tackling Poverty strategy and the Target Areas policy seek a fundamental shift in the way that the Council operates. We wanted to discover the extent to which the strategy has influenced the council budget and the allocation of resources.
- 3.6.2 We received no evidence that resources had been redirected
- 3.6.3 We also regret that the decision to allocate £200k to poverty prevention work in 2015/16 was as a one off sum and is not in the base budget going forward.

3.7 Councillors

- 3.7.1 Councillors play an important and active role in their communities and yet may not be fully involved in the strategy. We wanted to find out how this might be improved.

- 3.7.2 We found no evidence that councillors representing the wards experiencing the highest levels of deprivation and therefore the focus of the TP Strategy and the TA policy were informed or involved in delivery. (As distinct from governance involvement with Communities First cluster management).
- 3.7.3 Given that tackling poverty is a corporate priority all councillors should be kept informed as to how the strategy is being delivered across the Council. However we would expect to see particular effort to involve councillors representing wards with high levels of poverty.
- 3.7.4 The Council's published documents in regards to Tackling Poverty lists a "Tackling Poverty Performance Framework". This document, published in 2014, is in fact the "Swansea Local Service Board Performance Management Framework" and it is with concern that we note that there are no targets in the column "to be delivered by 2017"

3.8 Cross Cutting

- 3.8.1 To be effective the strategy needs to influence how every department operates. We wanted to find out whether this had happened and how the strategy might be more cross cutting.
- 3.8.2 We believe that, like safeguarding, tackling poverty should be everyone's business; a corporate activity, not just the work of one department. Like safeguarding, tackling poverty has been identified as a corporate priority and so demands the same level of action and promotion.
- 3.8.3 The decision to focus the strategy action plan only on additional actions that could be delivered by the Tackling Poverty Unit was mistaken. It was not surprising that the impact of the strategy was limited and difficult to track. We heard from the Public Policy Institute for Wales about the importance of an effective framework for accountability, coordination, monitoring and evaluation. There needs, therefore, to be a simpler framework underpinned by the premise that tackling poverty is everyone's business. The need to put in place an evaluation and reporting process was also raised by the Integrated Impact Assessment. The Single Action Plan including the 5 work streams provides a framework for this and it is of concern therefore that the panel were unable to find evidence of an up to date Plan.
- 3.8.4 The Panel believes that demonstrating the importance of the Authorities anti-poverty commitment by retaining the principal political responsibility for this work with the Leader of Council remains the correct approach and that it is also important to have a Cabinet Member with discrete direct responsibility. Nonetheless, and following the Safeguarding model, it considers that it is the responsibility of all Cabinet Members to ensure that their lines of responsibility have clearly defined portfolio accountabilities in regards to tackling poverty.
- 3.8.5 Similarly senior officers should have clear accountabilities for tackling poverty with the Chief Executive taking overall responsibility.
- 3.8.6 Furthermore, all major new corporate initiatives need to consider their poverty impact. We agree with the recommendation of the Integrated Impact

Assessment, for example, that Tackling Poverty should be an explicit consideration as part of all of the commissioning reviews.

- 3.8.7 Linked to this one of the key messages we took from the focus groups with people experiencing poverty was that the attitudes of public service staff really do matter. We acknowledge that culture change was a significant element of the strategy and this focus needs to be continued and strengthened. Again, as with safeguarding, all staff should have poverty awareness training and all staff should understand the difference that they can make to people's lives – even through relatively small actions.

3.9 Awareness

- 3.9.1 To have impact the strategy needs to be widely understood. We wanted to find out whether people, outside of those directly involved, understand the strategy and what it means for them.
- 3.9.2 More than 50% of respondents to our survey disagreed that the strategy was understood by those who needed to be aware of it. At the same time, better communication was one of the most frequently raised issues when respondents were asked to highlight what has not worked well and what was missing from the strategy.
- 3.9.3 A renewed commitment to tackling poverty could be accompanied by a communications and media campaign. In same way has been done with safeguarding, a communications campaign could underline how tackling poverty is everybody's business. We explore this theme further later in the report. However, in raising public awareness it is important that we also ensure that published information on progress is regularly reviewed and updates on progress in regards to delivery are available.

3.10 What Works and what doesn't work

- 3.10.1 Finally we were keen to find out what the strategy has done well and how can the Council do more of what works.
- 3.10.2 In 2016 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) published their report: "We can solve poverty in the UK". This report is the result of a four year research programme and it sets out a five point plan:
- Boost incomes and reduce costs;
 - Deliver an effective benefit system;
 - Improve education standards and raise skills;
 - Strengthen families and communities; and
 - Promote long-term economic growth benefiting everyone.
- 3.10.3 We believe that these actions should form the foundation of a revised Council strategy. The strategy should incorporate an evidence base, together with specific and measurable targets to be delivered by all service areas of the Council.

3.10.4 Early advice was received from Emyr Williams (PPIW) regarding the necessary features of an effective strategy. He drew on a 2014 report by MacInnes et al – *International and historical anti-poverty strategies: evidence and policy review*. This research suggests that strategies must show:

- Political Leadership
- Accountability and Coordination
- Links to Economic Policy
- External Stakeholder Involvement
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Institutions and Systems
- Originality

3.10.5 Going forward the strategy needs to be flexible and responsive to good practice as it arises – close links with the Bevan Foundation and the Public Policy Institute for Wales will help this.

3.10.6 As well as good practice lessons from elsewhere, the strategy needs to identify, promote and, where appropriate, seek to extend local good practice. We were very pleased to hear about the improved performance of school pupils receiving Free School Meals, for example, and feel more could be done to share these Swansea examples of ‘what works’.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel commends Cabinet to consider all issues and ideas raised by this inquiry and, in particular, the recommendations set out below.

Recommendations for Cabinet:

4.1 Long term challenges (12 months+)

4.1.1 Undertake a further fundamental review of the strategy in no later than two years' time

4.2 Medium term improvements (6-12 months)

4.2.1 Create a Swansea Poverty Truth Commission in order to provide challenge and promote culture change

4.3 Quick wins (within 6 months)

4.3.1 Create a new, comprehensive and simplified Action Plan that:

- Balances and links long term goals and short term actions
- Reflects the five point action plan from the 'Solve Poverty' JRF Report
- Links closely with the emerging Wellbeing Plan
- Is a "whole Council plan"
- Builds the evidence base
- Arises from a revised strategy and which involves partners and people experiencing poverty from the outset.

4.3.2 Develop a statement setting out the renewed commitment to tackling poverty, including a clear vision and definition of poverty, with the involvement of people experiencing poverty and in collaboration with partners. Develop a tackling poverty awareness and training programme for staff and councillors along similar lines to the safeguarding programme and make available to partners.

4.3.3 Engage people experiencing poverty as part of the consultation for a revised strategy

4.3.4 Ask Swansea Public Services Board to renew the commitment to tackling poverty as one of the commitments listed in its partnership manual

4.3.5 Consider how the strategy might support frontline staff

4.3.6 Link the strategy more closely to the six population outcomes of Swansea's Wellbeing Plan particularly Outcome D (People have a decent standard of living)

- 4.3.7 Create a new simplified structure to deliver the strategy in collaboration with partners against clear, agreed and measurable outcomes and within a Performance Monitoring Framework. Monitoring to involve those experiencing poverty as well as partners.
- 4.3.8 Ensure that future economic regeneration schemes have the maximum positive impact on tackling poverty by promoting well paid jobs and improving skills
- 4.3.9 Undertake an urgent investigation of the Target Area policy as part of the revised strategy, in collaboration of partners and with the involvement of the people affected
- 4.3.10 Include specific Tackling Poverty responsibilities within each Cabinet portfolio, with the Leader holding overall political responsibility and Chief Executive taking lead role on staff delivery. Ensure that all councillors are informed and involved, and where particular actions are planned in wards the councillors must be fully involved and consulted. All councillors to have poverty awareness training
- 4.3.11 Future evaluation of the poverty strategy should involve ward councillors, partners and people experiencing poverty rather than being solely evaluated by officers.
- 4.3.12 Revise and refocus the Poverty Forum Executive - to be chaired by the Chief Executive and attended by the Leader as Poverty Champion and Public Services Board Chair
- 4.3.13 Revise and refocus the Poverty Partnership Forum against specific actions/priorities

5 FURTHER SCRUTINY NEEDED

As well as our recommendations for the Cabinet we feel there is a need for further scrutiny. We propose to the Scrutiny Programme Committee, therefore, that it examines:

- 5.1.1 How schools respond to the needs of children with disabilities
- 5.1.2 The tackling poverty dimension of future economic regeneration schemes
- 5.1.3 The role of the Swansea Learning Partnership in delivering the Council's tackling Poverty Strategy
- 5.1.4 The delivery of the Tackling Poverty Strategy continues to be scrutinised through a dedicated Scrutiny Performance Panel

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Panel is very grateful to everyone who contributed to the inquiry.

We would like to thank all at Topic House and the Eastside Foodbank for giving up their time and giving us such a friendly welcome.

Special thanks go to everyone who took part in our focus groups and who contributed such valuable evidence for the inquiry – and to Dynamix who facilitated these sessions so expertly.

The Panel would like to record its thanks to the following people who came and gave evidence to us:

- Councillor Will Evans, the Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty
- Sarah Crawley - Head of Poverty and Prevention (to July 2016)
- Rachel Moxey, Head of Poverty and Prevention (from October 2016)
- Mary Sherwood – Tackling Poverty Unit
- Dr Victoria Winckler – Bevan Foundation
- Emyr Williams – Public Policy Institute for Wales
- Anne-Marie Rogan – YMCA
- Jackie Preston – Swansea Bay Citizens Advice Bureau
- Nicola Russell-Brooks – Age Cymru Swansea Bay
- Penny Gruffydd – Sustainable Development Unit
- Amanda Edwards - SCVS
- Reverend Chris Lewis – Eastside Foodbank/South Wales Baptist Association
- Denis Greenall – Community Bank Wales (Credit Union)
- Cllr Lesley Walton – Swansea Fair Debt Campaign
- Andrew Grinnell - Leeds Poverty Truth Commission
- Sara Hayes - Director of Public Health, Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board
- Philip Thomas - Acting Chief Inspector, South Wales Police
- Gail Smith - Head of Response, Swansea Command, Mid and West Wales Fire Service
- Mike Hedges AM
- Councillor Peter Black
- Jane Storer - Senior Welfare Rights Officer
- Lindsay Harvey - Chief Education Officer
- Anthony Richards – Poverty and Prevention
- Steve Phillips - Economic Development
- Sue Woodward – Beyond Bricks and Mortar

7 ABOUT THE INQUIRY PANEL


The **Tackling Poverty Inquiry Panel** is a team of Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet. Their role is to examine a strategic issue of concern and to make recommendations about how policies and services can be improved.

Members of the Panel

- Sybil Crouch (Convener)
- June Burtonshaw
- David Phillips
- Joe Hale
- Yvonne Jardine
- David Cole
- Mike White
- Mike Day
- Jeff Jones
- Chris Holley
- Lynda James
- Susan Jones
- Hazel Morris
- Bev Phillips (co-opted member)

The inquiry was supported by Dave Mckenna and Rosie Jackson from the Council's Scrutiny Unit.

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