



City and County of Swansea

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

Committee Room 5, Guildhall, Swansea

Monday, 30 September 2019 at 3.30 pm

Present: Councillor M Sherwood (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

C R Doyle
K M Roberts

Councillor(s)

P K Jones

Councillor(s)

C Richards

Co-opted Member(s)

Professor Andrew Davies

Officer(s)

Adrian Chard

Amy Hawkins

Jeremy Parkhouse

Joanne Portwood

Lyndsay Thomas

Strategic Human Resources and Organisational
Development Manager

Tackling Poverty Service Manager

Democratic Services Officer

Strategy and Policy Officer

Principal Lawyer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): E T Kirchner

17 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

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

18 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the Poverty Reduction Policy Development Committee held on 18 July, 2019, be approved and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments: -

Add Councillors C Richards and K Roberts to the list of apologies.

Minute No.12 – Poverty Truth Commission – replace reference to ‘task and finish group’ with ‘start up group’ and replace Mr A Gravell with Mr Grinnell.

19 Presentation - Family Housing: "Involved Tenants" Scheme Work on Letters.

Jo Ashford and Paul Burge of Family Housing informed the Committee regarding the scrutiny process undertaken in respect of amending the content of letters issued by their organisation. Useful examples of their letters were circulated to the Committee.

The following points were outlined: -

- Scrutiny had identified that letters being sent were sharp / aggressive in tone and recommended a gentler approach;
- Some letters had been written years previously, were aggressive and contained errors but had just been copied by staff for many years;
- Family Housing examined 134 letters. 35 required tweaking and individual departments were presented with the proposed changes, accepting that change was necessary;
- Letters being previously issued did not recognise the disabilities of some individuals, e.g. those on the autistic spectrum cannot read red ink / fully capitalised sentences;
- Letters being produced following the scrutiny were in plain language and clearly explained to the tenant why the letter had been sent.

Some examples of letters produced by the Authority were circulated. The Committee discussed the following: -

- The importance of consulting properly with citizens and involving them in any proposed changes, embedding a citizen central policy;
- Recognising the fact that many individuals do not open official looking letters and identifying alternative methods of communicating with citizens;
- Ensuring that the content of letters could be understood by citizens;
- Using the good example of how Family Housing had changed their letters / how they approach tenants;
- Recognising the huge task faced by the Authority in reviewing letters being issued by all departments;
- The need for letters to be in plain language, to explain why they had been sent / not be just a financial statement and to include a glossary of terms;
- How the levels of arrears with Family Housing had lowered as a consequence of the amended letters / creating a specific post to deal with the issue;
- Recognising the importance of consistency throughout the Authority;
- Establishing legislative requirements for letters.

The Chair thanked the Family Housing representatives for attending the meeting.

Resolved that: -

- 1) A Working Group be established to examine letters issued by the Authority;
- 2) The Working Group meets with the Revenues and Benefits Manager to discuss the 5 most issued letters by the Service.

20 Presentation - Living Wage Accreditation.

Adrian Chard, Strategic Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager provided the Committee with a presentation on Living Wage Accreditation.

Details provided included UK Wage Rates, which outlined details of the minimum wage, national living wage and the real living wage. How employees and agency workers were affected in Swansea Council.

The Committee discussed: -

- The number of Welsh / UK Councils that were Living Wage employers;
- The Council achieving accreditation if it paid its own employees;
- The possibility of stipulating that contractors must pay the Living Wage to their employees being contained in contract documents;
- Ethical employment in supply chains, rewarding companies who do pay the Living Wage and clarification upon the accreditation if sub-contractors do not pay their own employees the Living Wage;
- Rules around back dating / not back dating Living Wage payments;
- The gap between the Real Living Wage and bottom of the NJC Pay Scales;
- How Local Authorities who had not signed up to accreditation were members of other bodies;
- How the Authority had previously discarded lower rates of pay;
- The Government announcement that the Living Wage would increase to £10.50 per hour for all workers over 21, how this compared to the Real Living Wage, how it would be funded by Government and how NJC rates would keep pace with the changes;
- The cost implication of £5m if the Authority paid the Living Wage;
- The possibility of asking PSB partner organisations to sign up to the Living Wage.

The Strategic Human Resources and Organisational Development was requested to update the Committee on the issues discussed.

Resolved that: -

- 1) The content of the presentation be noted;
- 2) The Strategic Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager provides an update report at the next scheduled meeting.

21 Food Poverty: Update on Third Sector Work. (Verbal)

The Chair reported that Fareshare had been in discussion with the Authority to use Council car parks as collections as part of their new model. She explained the purpose and aim of Fareshare, who were sourcing surplus food from producers, including fresh produce.

The Tackling Poverty Service Manager stated that there were companies who were interested and colleague in Car Parks and Leisure were very positive regarding the proposals.

The Committee discussed the following: -

- The loss of major grant funding by Swansea Asylum Seekers and their lack of storage space for food;
- The difference between Fareshare and Food Banks, i.e. Fareshare also providing fresh produce;
- Developments involving Poverty Food Alliance.

Resolved that the Tackling Poverty Service Manager provides an update regarding Fareshare and the Poverty Food Alliance at the next scheduled meeting.

22 Presentation - Corporate Debt Policy.

Jo Portwood, Strategy and Policy Officer provided a presentation on developing a Corporate Debt Policy and helping households with high levels of debt.

Details provided included: -

- The Rationale;
- Good practice – Supporting lower income households with high levels of debt;
- What is a Corporate Debt Policy;
- The scope of a Corporate Debt Policy;
- The application of a Corporate Debt Policy;
- The benefits of a Corporate Debt Policy.

The Chair commented that there were lots of working examples in the UK and proposed that the Committee examines the Council's former Fair Debt Strategy 1999-2007. She added that the purpose was about collecting debt in a different way, making people feel engaged and involved to work with the Authority constructively.

The Committee discussed the following: -

- Developing a Corporate Debt Policy in conjunction with citizens would be a clear message of commitment from the Authority;
- The wider manner in which the Authority communicates regarding debt is important;
- Working with Credit Unions / Citizens Advice Bureau;
- Focussing upon personal debt and collecting it in a fair and respectful way.

Resolved that: -

- 1) The contents of the presentation be noted;
- 2) The Committee proceeds with developing a Corporate Debt Policy;
- 3) The Council's former Fair Debt Strategy 1999-2007 be located if possible to assist with discussions.

23 Poverty Truth Commission. (Verbal)

Amy Hawkins, Tackling Poverty Service Manager reported that Swansea SCVS would host the Poverty Truth Commission and 2 Sub-Groups would be formed to cover funding and communication. Details would be circulated to the Committee.

Resolved that the contents of the report be noted.

24 Feedback from the Internal Poverty Forum. (Verbal)

The Tackling Poverty Service Manager reported progress from the Internal Poverty Forum. She added that the Forum was looking at employability, schools, training, employment, maximising benefits, how people join the Authority, use of data, childcare offer, lone parents and pension credit.

The Committee commented on the need to include citizens to be fully included and consulted with properly in order to get the correct perspective.

The Chair added that the Poverty Forum were investigating developing a Poverty Action Plan and Officers who work closely with the public, would be examining how the Poverty Truth Commission progresses to inform the actions of the Forum.

Resolved that the contents of the update be noted.

25 Work Plan 2019-2020.

The Chair presented the updated Work Plan 'for information'.

The meeting ended at 5.00 pm

Chair