



## **Report of the Chair of the Poverty Reduction Policy Development Committee**

**Poverty Reduction Policy Development Committee – 28 February 2022**

### **Swansea Poverty Truth Commission**

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| <b>Purpose:</b>                    | To provide an update to the Poverty Reduction PDC on the Swansea Poverty Truth Commission. |
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#### **1. Introduction**

##### **1.1 Poverty Truth Commissions are about:**

- Bringing change; changing communities, organisations, behaviours and attitudes towards poverty and taking action to tackle it.
- Bringing together key decision makers with people who have direct lived experience of poverty to form a group of Commissioners, Community Commissioners and Civic / Business Commissioners.
- Creating a safe space for Commissioners to meet together, build relationships, trust and confidence in each other.
- Identify key issues they will work on together, over a limited timescale, guided by the experiences of the Community Commissioners.
- Ensure that those affected by decisions are central to decision making.

##### **1.2 Poverty Truth Commissions are not owned nor directed by any organisation. They are hosted by an organisation that is responsible for managing the financial resources and facilitation team.**

### 1.3 Poverty Truth Commissions have a life cycle:

- Community Commissioners come together, build relationships and trust and share their stories with each other.
- Emerging themes and priorities for the Commission are then established by the Commissioners.
- Civic and Business Commissioners are invited to join the Commission.
- A public launch then marks the start of the Commissions work.
- The Commission works on its priority issues for a period of approximately 18 months.
- A public closing event marks the end of the Commission. Experiences are shared along with achievements and successes.
- A final report and evaluation are compiled.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 A 'Start-Up' group was formed in 2019 to plan and manage the early development phase and securing of resources. The Start-Up Group's primary objectives were to:
- Secure sufficient financial resources to progress with the development of the Commission.
  - Select a hosting organisation.
  - Recruit the Facilitation Team.
- 2.2 The Start-Up Group selected Swansea Council for Voluntary Service as the hosting organisation.
- 2.3 Funding to date has been sourced from Swansea Council, Coastal Housing, Public Health Wales, City and Penderri GP Cluster Networks, Austin Bailey Foundation and the Welsh Church Act Fund. Sufficient funding has been secured at this time to support the next stages of development and it is expected that any predicted shortfall throughout the life span of the Commission can be met by further contributions.
- 2.4 The Facilitation Team were in place from April 2020 comprising of 2 members of staff totalling 1.5 full time equivalents.
- 2.5 The initial role of the Facilitation Team is to identify and establish a group of Community Commissioners, support them to build relationships and share their stories of lived experience.
- 2.6 The Facilitation Team are also members of the Poverty Truth Commission Network which comprises Commissions from across the UK, providing support and guidance on good practice and networking opportunities.

### **3. Progress to date**

- 3.1 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Facilitation Team have been unable to meet people face-to-face but have adapted to use alternative ways to connect with potential Commissioners. Consequently, the recruitment stage has required extensive groundwork and has taken more time than anticipated pre-Covid (this has been a general experience shared by new and emerging PTCs elsewhere).
- 3.2 From the outset, introductions and relationship building had to be conducted online which required a new approach that took into account the diverse digital needs that individuals presented with. Digital tools such as Zoom have been utilised but for some individuals, support had to be tailored to develop the digital skills. In addition, the Facilitation Team had to overcome challenges with participants such as a lack of digital equipment and unreliable or no connectivity whilst also supporting participants to become confident in engaging in an online forum.
- 3.3 Part of the task of the Facilitation Team has been optimising Community Commissioners' ability to engage in the Poverty Truth Commission; this has taken various forms from 1-1 well-being sessions, training, signposting to agencies and ongoing provision of information. A trauma informed approach has been embedded from the outset, which is person centred and needs led, ensuring that participating in the commission would not have a detrimental effect on participants in any way. Where trauma had been experienced, or was still presenting as an ongoing risk, resources and support is provided to minimise the risk of re-traumatisation when sharing lived experience.
- 3.4 The Facilitation Team are now working with a group of twelve Commissioners who have been meeting together regularly online to build relationships and trust while beginning to share their stories with each other.
- 3.5 The group of Community Commissioners is diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, cultural background, experiences of poverty and geography within Swansea.
- 3.6 The emerging themes that the Commission might focus on include: Mental Health, Housing and Homelessness, Stigma, Family Justice, Policing, consistency of Person Centred Approaches and advice and guidance, Education, Class and Social Mobility, Caring responsibilities, rural and hidden poverty.
- 3.7 The outcomes for the Swansea Poverty Truth Commissions are unknown at this stage. Learning from the Poverty Truth Commission Network indicates that Poverty Truth Commission outcomes can occur at a number of levels:

**Individuals:** Testifying Commissioners from other commissions have spoken about how they have grown in confidence and how the strength of the relationships and strength of purpose of the commission has supported them in hard times. Some commissioners have been able to gain qualifications or go onto further education, find employment or start their own businesses.

**Organisational:** Poverty Truth Commissions can positively impact the informal and formal cultures of organisations. In Scotland the commission instigated a mentoring programme for Civil servants through which those who have direct experience of poverty coach senior policy leaders. This programme is now being developed more widely.

**Policy:** Salford PTC inspired the council to:

- stop using enforcement agents when recovering debts from the most vulnerable residents who receive a council tax reduction (adopting the LGA and Citizens Advice's Collection of Council Tax Good Practice Protocol);
- waive the £11 charges for copies of birth certificates for homeless people, enabling them to more easily obtain the official identification they need to access benefits.

**Wider Society:** Leeds Poverty Truth Commissioners were invited to advise scriptwriters on major national TV soap on storylines and portrayals of people living in poverty. Leeds Poverty Truth Commission also worked with Church Action on Poverty to create videos for [www.realbenefits-street.com](http://www.realbenefits-street.com) as an alternative narrative to the TV series.

#### **4. Integrated Assessment Implications**

4.1 The Council is subject to the public sector duties relating to equality and socio-economic inequalities as prescribed by the Equality Act 2010, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

- 4.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.
- 4.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, it may lead to decisions being taken at a later date that may have costs attached. Any such costs will need to be managed within departmental resources at that time with due regard to the Council's medium term financial plan.

## **6. Legal Implications**

- 6.1 The Council must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty under s149 of the Equality Act 2010 as well as its duties under the Equality Act (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 .

**Background Papers:** None.

**Appendices:** None.