

**National Assembly for Wales
Bethan Jenkins AM - Financial Education and Inclusion (Wales) Bill
FEI 26 – Denbighshire County Council**

**Financial Inclusion Together
Consultation Response for:**

Financial Education and Inclusion Bill for
Wales 2014 Consultation
28.04.14



Introduction

This Denbighshire County Council consultation response has been written to provide an overview of a joint Conwy and Denbighshire project ‘Financial Inclusion Together’ that may be of interest within the development of the Bill and provide a response to some of the questions laid out in the Bill’s consultation paper.

Overview of project

Financial Inclusion Together is supported by the European Social Fund through the Welsh Government. The project aims to tackle poverty by developing, coordinating and promoting financial inclusion services within Local Service Board organisations across Conwy and Denbighshire.

Denbighshire County Council is the nominated lead organisation for the project. The project commenced in April 2013 and will close in December 2014. It is working to the five key themes of financial inclusion identified in ‘Taking Everyone into Account’ Welsh Government’s Financial Inclusion Strategy for Wales:

- Access to mainstream Financial Services
- Financial capability (to include digital inclusion)
- Accessible financial and debt advice
- Income maximisation
- Access to affordable credit and loans

The project has two core aims and five objectives:

Aims	Objectives
<p>1. To improve the strategic co-ordination and collaboration of services across Conwy and Denbighshire to ensure that financial inclusion is integrated and embedded into the normal service delivery of relevant public, private and third sector organisations.</p> <p>2. To improve access to quality financial inclusion information and advice services which will ensure that people in Conwy and Denbighshire are empowered to manage a challenging economic future</p>	<p>1. Identify existing provision of financial inclusion services within Conwy and Denbighshire. Ensure that this information is available so that staff across all sectors are fully aware of where to direct people for effective financial information and advice.</p> <p>2. Produce a cross county financial inclusion strategy and action plan which will result in effective, consistent and co-ordinated services across all relevant partner organisations.</p> <p>3. Influence LSB Partner Organisations and funding bodies to support and prioritise resources, services and projects linked to financial inclusion</p> <p>4. Provide at least 1000 front line staff in LSB partner organisations with the financial inclusion knowledge and resources necessary to empower people they have contact with to be financially included. Staff will provide information on, or make quality referrals for in depth advice around financial inclusion.</p> <p>5. Ensure a sustainable legacy of quality joint working processes and services which are embedded into the strategic and operational plans and procedures of all relevant organisations</p>

National Assembly for Wales

Bethan Jenkins AM - Financial Education and Inclusion (Wales) Bill

FEI 26 – Denbighshire County Council

Key project achievements to date include:

- Range of tools and resources developed for frontline workers and managers. These include a Financial Inclusion Awareness Raising Pack with information on over 70 financial inclusion service providers available in Conwy and Denbighshire and a FIT Ideas LAB Toolkit – a resource for managers to embed financial inclusion practices in their service area
- Development of a 3 hour Financial Inclusion Awareness Raising Session with delivery to over 360 frontline workers (from across LSB partner organisations) to date. Feedback from frontline workers highlights:
 - 73% workers report increased knowledge, confidence and ability to recognise financial inclusion
 - 66% worker feel increased confidence to make referrals
 - 74% of workers feel they / their family will be more financially included as a result of attending our session
- Financial inclusion being strengthened within organisational service planning – CCBC Corporate Service Plan template; Financial Inclusion responsibilities built in to Supporting People Commissioning Contract.
- ‘Train the Trainer’ sessions delivered so that LSB partner organisations can continue to deliver Financial Inclusion Awareness Raising Sessions past project closure.
- Project Task & Finish group established to develop a Financial Inclusion Awareness Raising e-Learning module that can be accessed for at least three years across LSB Partner Organisations and has the potential for use across Wales.
- In the process of developing a new multi-agency web-based secure referral system for frontline workers to refer to 8 financial inclusion agencies including CAB, local authority services, Shelter, Benefits Advice Shop and North Wales Credit Union.

For more information about this project please contact Sarah Lamberton, Project Manager for Financial Inclusion Together via email: sarah.lamberton@tiscali.co.uk or telephone 01824 712373

Response to consultation questions

Question 13. What are your views on requiring each local authority to have a strategy outlining how it intends to promote financial inclusion and the financial literacy of its residents?

Working with both Conwy and Denbighshire Council's the Financial Inclusion Together project has experienced has some excellent examples of work being undertaken to address Financial Inclusion and financial literacy for residents. Equally some service areas could be doing more to support the financial inclusion agenda in order to deliver against all 5 themes of financial inclusion identified within the Welsh Government's own strategy.

As an LSB Project and from working with a range of public and third sector organisations it is evident that the majority of these organisation can make a valuable contribution towards promoting financial inclusion and financial literacy for residents. As large employers in the area, these organisations can equally make a significant contribution by supporting the financial inclusion of their own workforce.

Work has previously been undertaken by government and councils to streamline and reduce the number of plans and strategic documents they operate to and are governed by. New legislation requiring the

National Assembly for Wales
Bethan Jenkins AM - Financial Education and Inclusion (Wales) Bill
FEI 26 – Denbighshire County Council

production of Financial Inclusion Strategies may not be the most effective nor compatible solution for councils to ensure delivery of financial inclusion / literacy outcomes for residents.

The Financial Inclusion Together project supports the overarching principle of a Financial Education and Inclusion Bill for Wales, however would want any legislation to focus on how best to deliver outcomes for citizens. The Project could see a greater role for Welsh Government in guiding and ensuring local authorities (and potentially other partner organisations) take a common and consistent approach to addressing financial inclusion and financial literacy.

Instead of imposing the burden of developing more strategic documentation within councils there could be alternative options to consider for improving practice and achieving outcomes. For example the establishment of Corporate Financial Inclusion Standards for Wales. This could include a legislated requirement for councils to meet a minimum standard and in doing so being required to meet certain regulations such as those suggested around street trading; prohibiting cold calling; engaging with credit unions; buying goods and services. Such an approach could have the potential to provide a continuous improvement framework for many public, third and private sector organisations in Wales to engage with, ensuring the role is not just left to councils.