

PIW 01

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Poverty in Wales Strand 4

Response from: Clwyd Alyn Housing Association

This Response includes comments/suggestions about:

- **The geographical consistency of anti-poverty initiatives;**
- **the effectiveness of area-based anti-poverty programmes such as Communities First;**
- **the progress on the recommendations of the Assembly's former Rural Development Committee's 2008 report into 'Poverty and deprivation in rural Wales'.**

1.1 More needs to be done to address digital exclusion (including the geographical inconsistency with regards to internet connectivity) in Wales. As over the last couple of years Communities 2.0 were successfully working with local CVCs – enabling Housing Associations (and other agencies) to respond to identified needs of residents (i.e. organising Beginners ICT courses to develop ICT skills). However the funding for this valuable project ended in Dec 2014 and although Communities 2.0 officers are currently continuing to run some courses (despite resource limitations, since the funding for the dedicated CVC post-holders disappeared) they envisage that even these courses will end in April 2015 owing to lack of funding. This needs to be addressed as enhancing digital inclusion is a key approach to tackling poverty (as residents are then able to save monies through shopping on line; apply for jobs, check Turn 2 Us, and other relevant websites, that they are accessing all the benefits they are entitled to, etc)

1.2 The lack of internet connectivity in some parts (i.e. especially rural locations) of Wales, means that even when agencies do organise/deliver ICT training for residents, attendees are then not always able to deploy the skills they have learned when within their own homes and benefit from the many savings the internet can bring (i.e. skype, e-mail, online shopping). So I'd suggest, from speaking to many grass roots groups, that this is something that needs to be urgently addressed if social housing residents are not to be left behind in this digital age. Also, I'd argue that this is especially necessary with the

imminent arrival of universal credit – where residents will be expected to apply for benefits online, etc. Increasingly, not having internet access is leading to families having their benefits cut because they can't search for jobs demanded by changes to welfare reforms. This all contributes to Wales' families being in poverty and so needs to be tackled...

2. More needs to be done to address food poverty within our communities; it's appalling that some families in Wales are having to walk miles to food banks to feed their children. Please visit <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/debt-food-banks-gloomy-snapshot-7591994> for more detail. So this needs to be urgently addressed and, as well as W.G providing more financial support to food banks in this time of crisis, in terms of sustainability, I'd suggest the Welsh Government do more to explore/tackle the root causes, so these will be less needed in future (i.e. through funding courses within communities/schools teaching people on how to handle money/ budget better).
3. Childcare in Wales is a real barrier to effectively addressing poverty in Wales – barriers include both the high cost of childcare within communities and the fact that this is typically only available 8am – 6pm yet many families have to work outside these hours in order to support their families. So there is a real need for W.G to improve access to more affordable and flexible childcare in Welsh communities if poverty is to be effectively addressed

In terms of geographical consistency, all of the above issues are likely to be amplified in rural areas – where families also face compound barriers such as lack of access to transport, etc

4. With regards to some of the current community-based approaches to tackling poverty in Wales:
 - I understand that there is a cost to access the promotional materials of CiH's 'Your Benefits are Changing' campaign, for residents, which is a real barrier to some Housing Associations that are already stretched (because of recent Welfare Reform changes, Supported People cuts, etc) so there is also likely to be some geographical inconsistency here, depending on what a Housing Association can afford to purchase to support their residents (or not) in these difficult times
 - I'd suggest time banking has had only limited success in North Wales to date

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