

PIW 06

Communities, Equality and Local Government
Committee

Inquiry into: Poverty in Wales Strand 4

Response from: Conwy County Borough Council

2015

Conwy County Borough Council's response to the National Assembly for Wales' Inquiry into Poverty in Wales

Conwy Building Resilient Communities &
Tackling Poverty Board

Conwy County Borough Council

1/30/2015

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1.0) Background

- 1.1) The National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee is undertaking an inquiry into poverty in Wales. The inquiry has been divided into four self-contained strands. Each strand will focus on one particular issue and have its own terms of reference, but taken together will form an overarching piece of work.
- 1.2) The committee is not consulting on all the strands at present, but they are available for your information through the following link:
<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Ild=8469>
- 1.3) This is the second strand the Committee would welcome our views on and is Strand 4:
- 1.4) **Strand 4: Community-based approaches to tackling poverty**

To consider:

- a) - The geographical consistency of anti-poverty initiatives;
 - b) - The effectiveness of area-based anti-poverty programmes such as Communities First;
 - c) - The progress on the recommendations of the Assembly's former Rural Development Committee's 2008 report into 'Poverty and deprivation in rural Wales'
- 2.0) Conwy County Borough Council will take each of the three considerations in turn and the feedback is given as such.
 - 2.1) Firstly, Conwy County Borough Council welcomes the investigation as tackling poverty is a priority for the local authority.
 - 3.0) **a) - The geographical consistency of anti-poverty initiatives;**
 - 3.1) In terms of the geographical consistency of anti-poverty initiatives in Conwy we have a real issue with Rural Poverty and this is difficult to measure accurately. In Conwy, we do have the Rural Partnership which delivers the Rural Development Plan and other projects and programmes such as Rural Families First that work with families and communities to tackle poverty and the impact of poverty.
 - 3.2) The issues faced in our rural communities include:
 - Low pay economy
 - Housing affordability
 - Under-employment and in-work poverty
 - Rising fuel and food prices
 - Transport poverty & physical inaccessibility of services
 - Fuel poverty
 - Impact of welfare reform on benefits claimants

- Ageing population
- 3.3) Welsh Government is trying to ensure that every citizen can choose to access the service of his/her choice, however, it is very expensive to provide quality services to households in rural areas and funding for services and posts is often given on a per capita of the county's population hence they miss out on funding.
 - 3.4) Policy makers often use the WIMD measure, which favours the more densely populated areas when allocating resources.
 - 3.5) There are three main challenges in providing and accessing services in rural areas: the scarcity of the population, lack of private transport and public transport services and the costs associated in delivering services. It is widely accepted that providing services in rural areas costs five times as much to deliver as compared to urban areas.
 - 3.6) Other deprivation issues for rural Wales include poor telecoms infrastructure, pressures on upland hill-farm economy, decline of traditional community and family support networks and social isolation. Responding to these difficulties over a large geographical area with a small, dispersed population is difficult.
 - 3.7) Poverty in rural areas will not be successfully addressed because Welsh Government initiatives are mainly concerned at tackling poverty in more populated and designated areas. As rural poverty cannot be identified in clusters, service providers find it particularly difficult to provide services to rural communities.
 - 3.8) Rural issues demand a rural solution. Inevitably this will require funding and the political will to make the funding available. Generally, it costs at least 20% more to provide a service to a rural community compared to an urban community. However, rural areas are disadvantaged by funding formulae and national programmes that focus exclusively on concentrations of need and area based approaches. The Rural Development Plan must not be Wales' only response to rural poverty.
 - 3.9) The nature of the rural context also means that the best solutions will be locally determined and locally managed. Co-production should be most effective in these areas. What works for one village or cluster, may not work for another community. This means that community capacity building is an essential element to tackling poverty and these ideas should be nurtured, fostered and supported.
 - 3.10) What does not work in rural areas is a macro-programme that seeks to impose pre-determined solutions on very different and varied contexts.
 - 3.11) In terms of specific equalities issues, Conwy would like to highlight that the national programmes are very much targeted towards Children Young People and Families. We feel that Older People are not considered, for example one of the largest density of older people is in our ward of Llandrillo and Rhos. Conwy have increasing numbers of older people and therefore, it is a concern that the Tackling Poverty programmes do not target Older People significantly enough.
 - 3.12) Centrally and departmentally from within the Welsh Government the effectiveness of these interlinked strategies and appropriate communication strategies need to be better re-enforced on a consistent basis with a clear message of the importance of tackling poverty and inequality in partnership. Welsh Government needs to ensure national programmes

and projects link in with each other to help us in Conwy to support our communities improve and achieve better outcomes, thus building resilient communities and tackling poverty where it will make a real difference to the people of Conwy which it does not do currently.

- 4.0) **The effectiveness of area-based anti-poverty programmes such as Communities First;**
- 4.1) Whilst we do recognise that Welsh Government are looking at rationalising and co-ordinating elements of Families First, Communities First and Flying Start programmes outcomes, they remain overly prescriptive and inflexible and therefore appear disparate. We do feel, and have previously made the point, that this is an area that Welsh Government could and should look to radically improve. Welsh Government should build in some flexibility within each programme to encourage innovation. This would also support us in our co-ordination and improve outcomes in all our communities based on their needs.
- 4.2) We would like to emphasise the point regarding the Welsh Government's lack of consistency in terms of communicative policy with local authorities. Legislation, policy and programmes do not appear to be aligned or consistent and mixed or conflicting messages are received from different departments within Welsh Government. This is an opportunity for Welsh Government to review and re-align its communication plan to support local authorities in delivering this complex agenda.
- 4.3) We recognise the importance of targeting funds at the most deprived communities however this does mean that because rural poverty is less concentrated in specific areas it can be missed. We have tried to tackle this in Conwy by using Families First funding to target rural poverty, among other priorities.
- 4.4) The co-ordination of tackling poverty initiatives could be improved although this will be most effective at the start of a new programme or initiative and it can create additional difficulties to 'add-on' coordination once a programme is already approved and established. The increasing focus on co-ordination is also often interpreted as needing increased joint working between programmes when better alignment could be achieved by focussing on different priorities and geographic areas in order to avoid duplication. Much of this coordination already happens locally and it is government programme guidelines and grant terms and conditions that tend to prevent more of this work taking place.
- 4.5) We welcome the importance Welsh Government have placed on tackling poverty and fully support this priority. Many local authority services and projects impact this agenda and it is important that this is recognised in Welsh Government legislation, policies and budgets to avoid duplication. Conwy have made every effort to ensure that each decision we make is asked to consider what impact that decision has on poverty either positively or negatively and each decision must be justified in accordance with that test. We would expect that all ministers should pose the same challenge when they make financial decisions within each of their departments so the government in Wales can demonstrate that Tackling Poverty is indeed a priority. Consultation and joint planning with local authorities can help to ensure that the activities led by each complement each other. For example, developing the Family Information Service as a single source of information for families and delivering the new play duties are priorities for the local authority, but there was not an opportunity to raise this when the criteria for the Children and Families Delivery Grant was being developed.

- 4.6) There is regional sign up to the Equality Objectives and therefore we feel it is co-ordinated, these are implemented and monitored at a local level through the appropriate Council systems and they should be reviewed by Welsh Government to ensure effective delivery.
- 4.7) We would also like to raise the issue of rapidly increasing Welsh Government and EU funded grants that could be targeted better and that they could be managed and be more accountable through Local Government. The other issue with this funding is the short term (3yrs) time scales for these projects and programmes. In affect we lose six months of a project in the setting up stage and 6 months at the end of the project as staff seek other employment and this essentially means a 2year project/programme instead of 3.
- 5.0) **The progress on the recommendations of the Assembly’s former Rural Development Committee’s 2008 report into ‘Poverty and deprivation in rural Wales’**
- 5.1) The key themes emerging from the inquiry were:
- Income and employment;
 - Benefit take-up;
 - Transport;
 - Housing;
 - Access to services;
 - Government policies;
 - Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation;
 - Allocation of resources to rural areas.
- 5.2) Twenty Two wide ranging recommendations were made by the committee and we have identified several that have not been fully implemented including:
- 5.3) **Recommendation 5:** The Committee welcomes the free bus pass scheme for older people but is concerned that older people in rural areas are not able to take sufficient advantage of this scheme. The Committee therefore urges the Welsh Assembly Government to broaden the free bus pass scheme to allow concessionary travel for older people on other forms of transport, such as trains and community transport, where adequate bus provision is not available.
- 5.4) **Recommendation 6:** The Committee also urges the Welsh Assembly Government to encourage and support the development of community transport schemes that meet the needs of those living in rural areas.
- 5.5) **Recommendation 7:** The Committee acknowledges the transport difficulties faced by young people in rural areas and recommends that the Assembly Government assesses the potential of rolling out free transport for children and young people across Wales, as already piloted in Wales.
- 5.6) **Recommendation 19:** The Committee urgently requests that the Welsh Assembly Government provides a definition of what is meant by the term “deep rural areas”, as used in the *One Wales* document, and how this will influence policy development.
- 5.7) **Recommendation 20:** Whilst the Committee welcomes the contribution of the *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation* in identifying concentrations of deprivation, it urges the

Assembly Government to consider additional evidence in its formulation of anti-poverty policies, such as the work of the Wales Rural Observatory.

- 5.8) **Recommendation 21:** The Committee strongly urges the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government to explore with the Welsh Local Government Association Rural Forum how issues of rurality could be better reflected in the Local Government Settlement.
- 5.9) **Recommendation 22:** The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government should undertake the necessary research to plan the long term provision of future services. This should include analysis of demographic and socio-economic trends to help understand how rural communities are changing and the services that they will require in the future.
- 5.10) We feel that WG have not strengthened strategic links made across the different departments with responsibility for rural matters and that the needs of those who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion are given full consideration when developing policy guidance and strategies.
- 5.11) WG Local Transport Plans do not fully include measures to ensure low income households are not disadvantaged when accessing services, leisure, training and work opportunities because of lack of access to transport.