

PIW 08

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Poverty in Wales Strand 4

Response from: Older People's Commissioner for Wales



**Older People's Commissioner for Wales**  
**Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru**

# **Response from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales**

**to the**

## **National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee Inquiry into Poverty in Wales: Strand 4**

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For more information regarding this response please contact:

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## **About the Commissioner**

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people across Wales, standing up and speaking out on their behalf. She works to ensure that those who are vulnerable and at risk are kept safe and ensures that all older people have a voice that is heard, that they have choice and control, that they don't feel isolated or discriminated against and that they receive the support and services they need. The Commissioner's work is driven by what older people say matters most to them and their voices are at the heart of all that she does. The Commissioner works to make Wales a good place to grow older - not just for some but for everyone.

The Older People's Commissioner:

- Promotes awareness of the rights and interests of older people in Wales.
- Challenges discrimination against older people in Wales.
- Encourages best practice in the treatment of older people in Wales.
- Reviews the law affecting the interests of older people in Wales.

## **Inquiry into Poverty in Wales: Strand 4 – Community-based approaches to tackling poverty**

1. As the Older People's Commissioner for Wales I welcome the opportunity to respond again to the National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee Inquiry into Poverty in Wales<sup>1</sup>.
2. I have already submitted written and oral evidence to the Committee's Inquiry under Strand 1: Poverty and Inequality<sup>2</sup>. Regarding community-based approaches to tackling poverty, I would like to add some additional comments based on the terms of reference.

### **The geographical consistency of anti-poverty initiatives**

3. In order to address the estimated 84,000 older people living in poverty in Wales<sup>3</sup>, a balance must be struck between achieving a consistent, pan-Wales approach and flexibility to react to local needs and characteristics e.g. addressing specific needs in urban/rural areas, whether areas with high levels of deprivation require specific or targeted interventions.
4. I emphasise once again that addressing the take-up of financial entitlements amongst older people is a key issue for the Welsh Government to take forward. Full take-up of income related benefits could reduce poverty among older people by a third, around 28,000 people in Wales<sup>4</sup>. I am aware of some excellent income maximisation schemes at the local level that have helped to lift older people out of poverty, for example the 2004 'Welfare Rights' project in Rhondda Cynon Taf that helped to generate an

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s29421/Consultation%20letter.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s33498/CELG4-30-14%20Paper%204.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/PageFiles/41168/Life%20on%20a%20low%20income%20-%20FINAL%20-%20E.pdf?dtrk=true>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bevanfoundation.org/publications/poverty-and-social-exclusion-in-wales-2/>

additional £10m of income for older people<sup>5</sup>, and the 2009/10 Maximising Income Group within the Caerphilly 50+ Positive Action Partnership that helped older people to claim an additional £5.5m of entitlements in one year<sup>6</sup>.

5. The establishment of similar schemes across Wales would significantly improve the incomes of older people. With a broad and extensive network across Wales, Citizens Advice' 'Better Advice, Better Lives' scheme is well placed to address the issue of entitlements take-up amongst older people and therefore I warmly welcome the recent announcement by the Welsh Government to extend the scheme with funding support of £2.2m<sup>7</sup>. Over the coming months I will continue to support Citizens Advice' efforts to improve income maximisation amongst older people along with other schemes that operate across Wales, such as Community Housing Cymru's 'Your Benefits are Changing' and Age Cymru's 'Let's Talk Money' campaign<sup>8 9</sup>.

### **The effectiveness of area-based anti-poverty programmes such as Communities First**

6. Since 2001, and particularly since its re-launch as a community-focused tackling poverty programme in 2012 (acknowledging weaknesses with the programme's delivery before then<sup>10</sup>), the Communities First programme has helped to improve the lives of older people living in some of Wales' most deprived communities. I am aware of some excellent Communities First schemes across Wales that have helped maintain the health, independence and wellbeing of older people, including IT classes and healthy eating initiatives<sup>11 12</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/a-showcase-of-local-authority-implementation-of-the-strategy-for-older-people-in-wales2/rhondda-cynon-taf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/application.aspx?s=Be1HHT9Zwb+DymrPRL/0lo/GCiRqPsZWQ8IUU4IPbACVKX/ATqNy7olv/LYVtW%7B%7BSSWgNFKmGcs=>

<sup>7</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/people-and-communities/2014/141217-citizens-advice-cymru/?lang=en>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.yourbenefitsarechanging.co.uk/default.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/money-matters/lets-talk-money2/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.assembly.wales/Laid%20Documents/CR-LD7923%20-%20Public%20Accounts%20Committee%20Report%20on%20Communities%20First-22022010-168311/cr-ld7923-English.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.barryanddistrictnews.co.uk/news/11691503.Commissioner\\_praises\\_support\\_for\\_older\\_people\\_in\\_the\\_Vale\\_of\\_Glamorgan/](http://www.barryanddistrictnews.co.uk/news/11691503.Commissioner_praises_support_for_older_people_in_the_Vale_of_Glamorgan/)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/commissioner-praises-healthy-eating-initiative-7870859>

7. The programme objectives of achieving Prosperous, Learning and Healthier Communities are all relevant to older people and complement the goals of the Welsh Government Strategy for Older People 2013-23 and the Ageing Well in Wales Programme<sup>13 14</sup>.
8. With over 12% of Wales' two most deprived areas aged 65 and older<sup>15</sup>, I am keen to ensure that these areas and indeed the 52 Communities First Clusters across Wales fully address poverty amongst older people and look forward to working further with the Welsh Government on the programme.

“The problem of poverty never seems to go away...older people are more reliant on their capital as additional income from interest is now non-existent...it's high time we tried another way of tackling poverty” (Denbighshire resident)

9. With the programme benefiting from £75m until March 2015, now is an opportune time to ensure that the next phase of Communities First fully involves older people as well as building on the actions taken in 2012 to better measure and understand poverty amongst older people e.g. supporting older people's Health Checks initiatives and include targeted indicators such as fuel poverty, low quality housing, transport barriers and social isolation, as well as the take-up of Pension Credit<sup>16</sup>. This approach complements my work on the Well-being of Future Generations Bill, ensuring that the indicators that support the six national wellbeing goals fully capture the needs and circumstances of older people across Wales<sup>17</sup>.

### **Progress on the recommendations of the Assembly's 2008 report 'Poverty and deprivation in rural Wales'<sup>18</sup>**

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<sup>13</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/publications/socialcare/strategies/older/?lang=en>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/home>

<sup>15</sup> [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2014](#): St James 3 (Caerphilly, 13.6% aged 65+) & Rhyl West 2 (Denbighshire, 12.3% aged 65+) most deprived areas in Wales. Population estimates based on [ONS Lower Super Output Area Mid-Year Population Estimates \(Oct 2014\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/docs//equality-impact-assessments/141106-EIA-Changes-to-Communities-First-Prog.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?lId=010103>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/Poverty%20and%20Deprivation%20in%20Rural%20Wales.pdf%20-%20202072008/Poverty%20and%20Deprivation%20in%20Rural%20Wales-English.pdf#search=poverty%20in%20rural%20wales>

10. As the report states, older people make up a higher proportion of the population in rural areas than in other areas of Wales, and many of the people in this age group live alone. This is largely due to the outward migration of young people and the inward migration of older people, placing particular challenges on local health and social care services. Older people continue to disproportionately make up the majority of low income households in rural areas, and 'rurality' is a key issue that exacerbates the causes of poverty for older people living in such areas<sup>19</sup>. For example, fuel poverty affects a higher percentage of older people (42%) in rural areas compared with urban areas (22%)<sup>20</sup>, and access to key services, amenities and lifelong learning and skills is more expensive with a greater reliance on private transport due to reduced public transport options in large, sparsely populated areas. Furthermore, whilst older people in rural areas are more likely to be homeowners they tend to live in older properties, thus accelerating the need for home improvement agencies to adapt housing to their particular needs as they age<sup>21</sup>.
11. As identified in the Welsh Government's Rural Health Plan<sup>22</sup>, as the general age increases older people tend to become more susceptible to bereavement, loss of independent transport, lack of mobility and loneliness, factors that accelerate due to poor public transport infrastructure and isolation. Lower levels of car ownership amongst older people can lead to them becoming marginalised and unable to access key services, provide child/family care and participate in volunteering and leisure activities, leading to devastating impacts on their health, independence and wellbeing.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.walesruralobservatory.org.uk/sites/default/files/Older%20People%20and%20Place%20in%20Wales%20Demography,%20policy%20and%20community%202013.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ebico.org.uk/images/EbicoTrust/NEAfuelpovmon/nea%20fuel%20poverty%20monitor-2011-small.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Factsheets\\_E/Equality\\_and\\_Rurality\\_Factsheet.sflb.ashx](http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Factsheets_E/Equality_and_Rurality_Factsheet.sflb.ashx)

<sup>22</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/100118ruralhealthplanen.pdf>

12. As I emphasise in my 'The Importance and Impact of Community Services within Wales' report<sup>23</sup>, the need for effective rural connectivity has been heightened by the closure of local banks, shops and other services, whilst the concentration of specialist units into fewer hospitals means additional challenges and greater challenges for older people with hospital admissions. Whilst the Welsh Government concessionary bus travel scheme has made a huge difference to the lives of older people, a free bus pass is worth little if there are no public buses to access.
13. I am concerned about the progress of some of the recommendations from the 2008 report, and indeed some areas have regressed. As previously mentioned, I am keen to ensure that older people maximise their incomes from their financial entitlements, and with fewer older people claiming entitlements in rural areas, it is crucial that the Welsh Government's continued financial support for Citizens Advice' 'Better Advice, Better Lives' programme increases benefit take-up in these areas, working with key partners such as Local Authorities and the voluntary sector (Recommendation 4).
14. Regarding the key issue of public transport, the report mentions that older people in rural areas are not able to make the most of their concessionary bus passes and that take-up is lower in rural authorities (65%) compared with urban authorities (90%). More recently, with huge budgetary reductions impacting on the provision of public buses across Wales<sup>24</sup>, this situation is worsening, and is having a particular impact on older people living in rural areas.
15. The Committee urged the then Welsh Assembly Government to broaden the free bus pass scheme to allow concessionary travel for older people on other forms of transport (Recommendation 5).

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/14-02-25/The\\_Importance\\_and\\_Impact\\_of\\_Community\\_Services\\_within\\_Wales.aspx](http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/14-02-25/The_Importance_and_Impact_of_Community_Services_within_Wales.aspx)

<sup>24</sup> Welsh Government 2014/15 reductions in the percentage of concessionary fares reimbursement rates to bus operators resulting in up to 30% in reduced services  
[http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdfs/Buses\\_In\\_Crisis\\_Report\\_2014\\_Final.pdf](http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdfs/Buses_In_Crisis_Report_2014_Final.pdf)

Whilst other forms of public transport, such as rail, can be beneficial, older people need frequent, reliable public buses. Community transport is highly praised by older people and can plug gaps in the public transport network, however since the end of the Welsh Government Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative in 2013, community transport is viewed as the ‘neglected link’ and must be better supported and integrated with other modes to fully address the needs of older people in rural areas (Recommendation 6). Furthermore, the need for flexible delivery of services for those located far from mainstream health provision, as acknowledged in the report (Recommendation 11), is essential for older people in rural areas.

“When you’re taken to Hereford in an ambulance...you can be kept all day and thrown out at 3am with no means of getting back to Llandrindod. So you have a choice of £90 for a taxi or try and get a friend to pick you up...We’re afraid that people won’t attend their appointments at these hospitals because they’ve got no way of getting there” (Powys residents)

16. The closure of local services and amenities has led to a greater reliance on online services, and more needs to be done to expand and improve broadband provision in rural areas in order to address connectivity and ‘not spots’, with some parts of rural Wales experiencing broadband speeds nearly two-thirds slower compared with Cardiff<sup>25</sup> (Recommendation 12). That said, it must be recognised that not all older people are online and familiar with IT systems (an estimated 42% of people aged 50+ are digitally excluded<sup>26</sup>) and that other forms of ‘traditional’ services e.g. postal, telephone are continued to be made available. Not being able to participate in digital services means that many older people are paying the price: offline households miss out on savings of up to £560 per year from shopping and paying bills online<sup>27</sup>, whilst digital inclusion can also help reduce the dangers of loneliness and

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/revealed-great-broadband-not-spot-divide-6274754>

<sup>26</sup> Welsh Government Digital Inclusion Delivery Plan 2014

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.housing.org.uk/policy/investing-in-communities/federation-support-for-community-investment/digital-inclusion/>

isolation. Digital exclusion therefore contributes to the causes of poverty for many older people living in rural areas.

17. As I have consistently emphasised, with public buses, toilets, libraries and community/day centres experiencing closures or reduced provision across Wales, we cannot afford to lose these community services, essential to the maintenance of older people's health, independence and wellbeing, and vital to contain costs of statutory health and social care packages. Traditional 'salami-slicing' budgetary reductions are not the answer to modern public service delivery, and I fully support the Committee's recommendation to encourage community and voluntary groups to provide community-owned facilities (Recommendation 13).
  
18. With Local Authorities facing further reductions over the coming years, there has never been a greater need for alternative, innovative approaches to service delivery, and particularly so in rural areas. The NHS Rural Health webpage includes some inspiring examples<sup>28</sup>, and my forthcoming report on innovative public services for older people will highlight good practice across Wales, demonstrating how to deliver more with less via innovation. I encourage the Welsh Government to do more to encourage Local Authorities, agencies and the voluntary sector to develop innovative approaches in rural areas (Recommendation 18).
  
19. It is crucial that Wales maximises opportunities from the new 2014-2020 EU Rural Development Programme to tackle poverty in rural areas<sup>29</sup>. The community-led development approach, through activities such as community-based renewable energy schemes, community transport initiatives and access to financial services can do much to improve the lives of older people living in poverty in rural areas, and I look forward to working with the Welsh Government on the new programme.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/healthtopics/populations/ruralhealth>

<sup>29</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/drah/consultation/140306rdp20142020finalproposalsen.pdf>

20. Finally, whilst the needs of older people in rural areas are the same as those in urban areas, it must be emphasised that those needs are intensified by isolation<sup>30</sup>. The need to integrate services across housing, health and social care, supported by adequate transport and technological provision to ensure access, becomes ever more important to support independent living for older people in rural areas and tackle the root causes of poverty, and I urge the Welsh Government to work with Local Authorities, Local Health Boards, the voluntary sector and other key partners to address this key issue during an increasingly challenging economic climate.

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<sup>30</sup> [http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Factsheets\\_E/Equality\\_and\\_Rurality\\_Factsheet.sflb.ashx](http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Factsheets_E/Equality_and_Rurality_Factsheet.sflb.ashx)