

PIW 03

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Poverty in Wales Strand 4

Response from: Torfaen Local Service Board

EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES
Councillor/Cynghorwr David Daniels



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29th January 2015

Dear Ms Chapman

**Response to Welsh Government Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
Inquiry into poverty: Strand 4**

In relation to your letter dated 7th November 2014 please find attached the response from Torfaen Local Service Board.

As Chair of the Local Service Board Tactical Group I work closely with the Anti Poverty Champions – my fellow Executive Member, Councillor Richard Clark and Assistant Chief Executive for Communities, David Congreve. Richard and David are Chair and Lead Officer respectively for the Local Service Board Welfare Reform partnership group and are very closely involved with tackling poverty and mitigating the impact of welfare reform in Torfaen.

I hope you find our comments helpful to your inquiry and look forward to the findings and subsequent recommendations.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

David Daniels
EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES
LLANTARNAM WARD COUNCILLOR
CHAIR OF THE TORFAEN LOCAL SERVICE BOARD TACTICAL GROUP

Enc: Torfaen LSB response to Inquiry into poverty: Strand 4

**Response from Torfaen Local Service Board to Welsh Government
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee Inquiry into poverty:
Strand 4**

- 1. Torfaen Local Service Board welcomes this opportunity to respond to the inquiry. Tackling poverty is one of our priorities and we have a robust partnership group that brings together strategists and operational leads to research the local impacts and develop responses. In many cases our work is around mitigation and building resilience.**
- 2. In considering your three headings under Strand 4: community-based approaches to tackling poverty, we provide the following comments.**
- 3. The geographical consistency of anti-poverty initiatives:**
- 4. Torfaen is a fairly small borough and has a population of around 92,000. There are areas of deprivation across the borough with Community First clusters covering the most deprived wards, mostly covering the north of Torfaen but also a small part of the south of the borough. There are differences between the north and south of Torfaen, with higher numbers of people renting property (social and private) in the north yet the south is unmistakably the more popular area for social housing when it comes to applications and bidding. There are higher numbers of people in the north who are economically inactive, claiming benefits and who have no qualifications.**
- 5. The cost of living is higher in the north of Torfaen, with around £3 extra to fill a vehicle with fuel and £7 extra for a standard basket of food from the local shop. Public transport costs are also higher with an additional fare of £2 or £3 per return journey to travel down the valley. There are less employment opportunities in the north and travelling for work is expensive, meaning wages need to be sufficient to cover all living and travel costs.**
- 6. The impact of welfare reform is greatest in the north too; 7 out of 10 of the worst affected wards are in the north with impact varying from £650 to £850 per year on average for working age households compared to a varying impact of £360 to £550 on average for working age households in the south. (Source: Strategic Housing Review 2014)**
- 7. Our welfare reform partnership group is using ward profiling to identify those areas with the highest demand for mitigating services. By using indicators where data is collected every month by ward, we**

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have 20 months of records and are seeing that those wards where anti poverty programmes are directed are showing a lesser rate of demand for services. Taking the pay cheque data as a base and using the number of JSA claimants, food bank customers, rent arrears, discretionary housing applications and referrals to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) alongside levels of crime, we can monitor the rate of demand in each ward and the rate of increase in demand. Those areas in the north of the borough that receive programmes of support to help people into employment, provide crisis support services and community based advice are showing less rate in demand than those areas outside these programmes.

8. This does cause us concern as, with public service budgets being cut or under severe pressure, it is more difficult to provide support outside of the eligible areas. Often people in the areas where demand is growing have not sought help before and are possibly unfamiliar with services that are available or, are unable to deal with the situation they now find themselves in.
9. Whilst we welcome programmes that provide support and are funded through ESF that apply only to the Heads of the Valley areas – and therefore only the north of Torfaen – and Communities First and Flying Start programmes that apply to specific wards across the borough, we are mindful that areas outside of these programmes are now being affected harder / faster by UK policy and the aftermath of the economic downturn.
10. In some instances help on parenting is required across the borough and the Families First Early Years strand provides enhanced midwifery and health visiting support to families who do not live within a Flying Start area; in addition support is also provided for parenting and early language development. In 2013/14 there were 222 referrals to the Families First Early Years strand, 48 of these referrals were for parenting support and 55 for support where a child's language development had been identified as delayed.
11. We currently fund Assisted Places: Childcare fees, and this funding enables children living outside of the Flying Start areas, whose parents cannot afford pre school provision to access private, independent and voluntary childcare prior to them receiving a funded education place at aged 3. In 2013/14, 45 children were funded for 2 sessions a week. The majority of these children are referred because their Health Visitor has identified developmental delay.

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12. However, all partners are working closely together to share resources and try and find additional ways to provide support in all areas, to meet demand and reduce the impact of welfare reform and poverty.
13. In addition to specific programmes, we have been able to increase the reach of CAB workers into communities where people are less likely to travel to the main town centres for help. We have supported the setting up of a local food bank and further supported their ability to provide outreach to centres across the borough. One of our social landlords participated in the direct payments demonstration project and found that tenants across the borough needed a lot of support and hand holding to manage their own finances and ensure their rent was paid. This has been a strong example to us that, for any major change to household income, a large number of our residents need substantial support and finding resources to do this can be a difficult balancing act. With Universal Credit about to be rolled out, all partners will have to maximise their knowledge, experience and resources to ensure that unfair or negative impact is minimised.
14. The effectiveness of area-based anti-poverty programmes such as Communities First:
15. The Communities First Team in Torfaen provide a range of services and activities that engage with people and seek to improve their situation – reducing the impact of poverty or preventing them from getting into poverty. By tracking the impact of welfare reform in each of the 24 wards that make up Torfaen – using 6 sets of data that are all available on a monthly basis – we are finding that whilst the overall impact in Communities First areas is still high, the rate of increase is much lower than those wards outside of Community First (CF) designation. Using information from front line staff based in communities and crisis support across the borough, we are finding that CF areas have a number of projects and dedicated staff that can provide local support to avert crisis or respond early on when a crisis is identified. Confidence and trust has been built up between CF staff and residents so they seek early advice and intervention, whereas residents in non CF areas are, perhaps, experiencing hardship for the first time and do not have the skills, resilience or contacts to deal with the situations they are finding themselves in. Partners are using all available resources to increase contact in these areas but public service budgets are under pressure and it is not easy to find the resources to deliver the expertise at the level needed in all areas. The Council and third sector / RSL partners are working together but we are seeing the highest rate of impact in wards which we would normally see as affluent. This leads us to believe that the services in CF areas are effective in limiting the rate of increase and impact of the current welfare reforms.

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16. Communities First services are limited to the designated areas and include the following:

- a. A range of information on simple accounts for families and accounts for teenager aged 14-25 years**
- b. Basic budgeting looking at income and expenditure to ensure families make better financial decisions, income maximisation**
- c. Raise awareness of local low cost and free services by charities and agencies in Torfaen, including assisting households to source furniture and essential items**
- d. Raise awareness and assist households to access grants provided by local charities based on eligibility criteria, Trussell Trust, Cwmbran Trust, Ravens Trust, Christmas hampers / Christmas meals / toys etc**
- e. Promote any national strategies which offer grants to those on low incomes and assist households to access these grants, such as Discretionary Assistance fund / Warm Home discount / Priority Assist / British Gas Trust (utility arrears) / Water Assist / Vicars Relief Fund for rent arrears, etc**
- f. Promote Credit Union services and products, take referrals from Credit Union of clients who have been turned down for a loan and help them source items for low cost / free to avoid high interest lenders**
- g. Deliver budgeting workshops and establish Credit Union collection points in schools and youth clubs**
- h. Promote energy saving tips around the home as a way of reducing fuel costs**
- i. Review voucher / discount codes as a way of making money go further / reduce household expenditure**
- j. Refer clients to CAB for specialist advice and receive referrals from CAB advisors to support clients**
- k. The 'New Horizons Project' has been developed in partnership with Bridges Into Work and Job Centre Plus to address work programme returners of which there are currently 212 people in the North of the Borough alone. The project delivered over 1 week covers 1 day "Personal Effectiveness", 3 days Confidence &**

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Motivation and 1 day Basic Maths and English (introducing interview skills & techniques)

- I. **The ‘Life Coaching/Wellbeing Project’ provides support for those suffering low wellbeing/mental health and builds resilience to cope with crisis situations**
- 16. Overall, we would ask the Committee to consider our comments in relation to the help and supported needed in areas outside of Communities First or programmes with limited geographical boundaries. These limitations hamper efforts to support individuals and families who may not have the knowledge, skills or capacity to deal with the changes and impact they can encounter relating to loss of employment, financial hardship and welfare reform.**
- 17. The progress on the recommendations of the Assembly’s former Rural Development Committee’s 2008 report into ‘Poverty and deprivation in rural Wales’:**
- 18. As the third most densely populated area in Wales, albeit with small pockets of rural poverty, partners have no comment on the progress of the recommendations in relation to our area.**

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