

PIW 13

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
Inquiry into: Poverty in Wales Strand 4
Response from: Diverse Cymru



Response to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee Inquiry into
Poverty in Wales: Strand 4: community-based approaches to tackling poverty

Respondent's name: Ele Hicks

Respondent's Role: Social Policy Officer

Organisation: Diverse Cymru

Organisation Background

Diverse Cymru is an innovative organisation in the Welsh Third Sector, created in recognition of the realities faced by people experiencing inequality in Wales.

Diverse Cymru promotes equality for all. We believe that we can work together to challenge discrimination in all its forms and create an equitable future for the people of Wales.

Diverse Cymru aims to make a real difference to people's lives through delivering services that reduce inequality and increase independence; supporting people to speak for themselves and to connect with decision makers; creating opportunities for participation and development; raising awareness of equality issues; and inspiring people to take action against inequality.

Our current services include direct payment, self directed and independent living support for both adults and children, including managed banking and software framework development in Cardiff; a BME mental health befriending service in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan; Health and Social Care Advocacy for BME people with mental health issues throughout Wales; family support, welfare benefit, income maximisation, tribunal, and general advocacy for people in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

We produce information resources on a wide-range of equality issues, including for people affected by inequality across all protected characteristic groups and information for organisations and service providers; provide a conduit for service user voices to decision-makers throughout Wales through our consultation and engagement work; run citizen involvement projects for people from protected characteristic groups and for carers; and co-ordinate volunteer placements both with Diverse Cymru and supporting external organisations to recruit, involve and support volunteers from under-represented groups.

We provide consultancy services on integrating equality in organisations, diversity champions, and equality impact assessments and deliver a range of training courses on a wide-range of equality related topics, including the only accredited Personal Assistant training in Wales; accredited Challenging Extremism and Hate Crime Awareness training, and training on BME mental health; Equality legislation; disability; stress; LGBT issues and more. We facilitate forums and groups that work on various issues, from improving disability access and carrying out disability access observations to equality impact assessments.

This response focuses specifically impacts on people from protected characteristic (equality) groups. We would welcome any opportunity to assist with the development of specific work programmes and actions, and with engaging service users in future. We are happy for our response to this consultation to be published and would welcome an opportunity to present evidence to the committee orally.

Inquiry submission

The geographical consistency of anti-poverty initiatives and the effectiveness of area-based anti-poverty programmes such as Communities First

1. Our experience indicates that, whilst area-based anti-poverty programmes can be extremely effective in reaching and supporting some of the most economically disadvantaged areas and families in Wales, many other people living in poverty miss out on vital support due to geographic targeting.
2. One example of this is one of our service users who has 4 children under five two of which are twins where she lives in Gabalfa she is outside the geographical area for Flying Start and Home start. She has very little money and cannot afford to pay for childcare herself. Due to where she lives she cannot access support intended to tackle poverty. If she had these services this would have a positive impact on both her life, allowing her to pursue employment, education, training or have a break from looking after her children and support her children's social development.

3. As a result of situations like these, whilst we recognise the difficulties of doing so, we feel that there is a need to develop and implement guidance for flexibility of anti-poverty programmes to deliver support to people who are experiencing poverty who live close to, but outside of the intended geographic area. This should be at the discretion of local experts to account for individual circumstances, but could include eligibility criteria relating to number of children, receipt of certain benefits, length of time not in work and similar proxies for poverty, deprivation, and a need for support.
4. Our experience indicates that the various anti-poverty programmes, such as Communities First, Flying Start and Families First do not work collaboratively at a strategic level. Whilst these schemes identify and refer individuals who are eligible for and would benefit from the other schemes and do meet together to discuss developments to services, these services are developed in isolation from each other.
5. In order to tackle poverty it is vital to develop and implement support which is tailored to the barriers and circumstances facing a particular individual or family, including barriers related to protected characteristics, and to bring services and schemes together to provide a single point of contact and service delivery which can be more flexible and responsive to the individual family.
6. Research carried out by a range of organisations, including recent research by Scope and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, have indicated that even in some of the more affluent areas of Wales significant poverty, social exclusion and disadvantage are faced by disabled and BME people in particular, in addition to other protected characteristic groups.
7. Such research suggests that, if cycles of poverty and disadvantage are to be tackled and the most disadvantaged people in Welsh society are to have their needs met, there is a need to ensure that pockets of disadvantaged people from protected characteristic groups are identified and appropriate programmes put in place.
8. In order to meet the strategic aims of anti-poverty programmes, including reducing the gap between the most disadvantaged and the most affluent in society, measurements of disadvantage must include break-downs by each protected characteristic group, initially, leading to targeted initiatives within programmes.
9. One method of achieving this is to ensure that local needs assessments not only measure numbers of people in each protected characteristic group, but can identify differences in the main indicators of poverty, such as educational attainment; access to training opportunities; employment status; income status; health and wellbeing; access to services; and lifestyle indicators for each protected characteristic group.

10. Currently local needs assessments do not routinely disaggregate data by protected characteristic group, where they do it is in relation to age and gender only. This approach does not gather any evidence of differences, barriers, and initiatives needed to address poverty and disadvantage faced by disabled, LGBT, or BME people, or people of different faiths, and therefore precludes targeted actions or initiatives to tackle poverty and disadvantage faced by protected characteristic groups, due to a lack of statistical evidence.
11. Targeted involvement of protected characteristic groups and subsequently activities and programmes that tackle the specific aspects of disadvantage, poverty and social exclusion facing a community of interest locally, are more viable in larger areas. Often the issues faced by disabled, BME, LGB, older, younger people, women, people from religious groups, and transgender people (protected characteristic groups) are different from those of other people in addition to requiring tailored approaches sensitive to the needs of that group of individuals. However in smaller areas, particularly in the cases of BME, disabled and LGB people, there may be barriers to providing specific programmes for small numbers of individuals, which can be addressed by linking with other programmes and organisations locally and by tailoring individual support.
12. The recognition of this need for a different approach for protected characteristic groups led to the invention of Communities First of Interest, under the original programme. This national approach also did not work particularly well, given the regional and local variations in circumstances and issues for each protected characteristic group. However we feel that the approach of stating that each local Communities First Partnership should be working on the issues facing these groups through mainstream programmes and without targeted or tailored approaches has also been unsuccessful in many areas, other than those areas where there are high concentrations of BME people in particular, such as Ethnic Minority Communities First in Cardiff.
13. In order to address this balance we feel that it is important to go beyond merely ensuring that programmes for the whole community are accessible to everyone. Such mainstream approaches fail to account for differences in needs and therefore do not tailor programmes, activities or interventions in the ways that allow communities to benefit from these programmes. This approach to 'mainstreaming' equality has led to many programmes not tackling poverty and disadvantage facing protected characteristic groups and could lead to ever increasing inequalities.