

CF 08

Ymchwiliad i dlodi yng Nghymru: Cymunedau yn Gyntaf – yr hyn a ddysgwyd

Inquiry into poverty in Wales: Communities First – lessons learnt

Ymateb gan: Comisiynydd Pobl Hyn Cymru

Response from: Older People's Commissioner for Wales

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 for Wales:

- 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.

As the Older People's Commissioner for Wales I welcome the opportunity to comment on the 'Communities First – lessons learnt' Inquiry¹. It builds on previous responses to the Poverty in Wales Inquiry in the Fourth Assembly. Misconceptions remain that older people in Wales have not been affected by the impact of austerity and welfare reform in recent years. The reality is very different: an estimated 112,500 older people live in poverty in Wales, with 50,000 living in severe poverty²³. An estimated 140,000 older households are living in fuel poverty in Wales⁴. Whilst poverty amongst older people has declined overall in recent years, research in 2016 suggests that there is an increase in the number of older people living in poverty in Wales, up to 17%⁵.

1. In general, there is a lack of evidence and research into how poverty affects older people in Wales and elsewhere, and how different causes and a combination of factors place older people in poverty. Within the older age group, further research is required to understand how poverty affects different groups of older people: older women for example are more likely to be in poverty than older men, and older people from BME groups are also more likely to live in poverty⁶.
2. There is a similar dearth of evidence on how Communities First has helped improve the lives of older people across Wales since its implementation in 2001. The Communities First evaluation refers to 'Add to Your Life'⁷, and how the programme has helped to promote and roll out health checks for people aged 50+ in Communities First Cluster areas, however there is little detail on how the programme has engaged with the older demographic, considered the challenges and wealth of opportunities that come with an ageing population, and provided targeted interventions to

¹ <http://senedd.assembly.wales/mgConsultationDisplay.aspx?id=260&RPID=1008740594&cp=yes>

² <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/latest-news/one-in-three-older-people-in-wales-struggling-financially/>

³ <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/policy/age-cymru-policy-publications-1/life-on-a-low-income-1-/>

⁴ <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s28592/EEFP%2016%20Older%20Peoples%20Commissioner%20for%20Wales.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/news/2016/07/wales-poverty-progress-disappointing-says-bevan-foundation/>

⁶ <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/professional-resources-home/policy/money-matters/poverty-and-inequality/>

⁷ <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2015/150226-communities-first-process-evaluation-en.pdf>

lift older people out of poverty, similar to schemes such as Flying Start for children and young people.

3. From the evidence available, the impact of Communities First in lifting older people out of poverty and improving their quality of life is varied across Wales. In urban, rural and coastal areas, there are older people living in poverty across Wales, including within the 52 Communities First Cluster areas and also in Local Authorities without any Clusters⁸. With the programme coming to an end by March 2018, my priority is to ensure that future tackling poverty schemes, interventions, policies and approaches help reduce the number of older people living in poverty, and improve the health, wellbeing and financial resilience of older people across Wales.
4. There is some evidence to suggest that removing Communities First will have a detrimental impact, for example the impact on older people living with dementia in Flintshire, the provision of free 'Add to your Life' health assessments by Age Cymru in Cardiff, and work undertaken by WCVA to reduce isolation amongst older people⁹¹⁰¹¹. The removal of these activities and interventions for older people would be regrettable and alternative delivery models, for example community asset transfer and transferring delivery to social enterprises beyond Communities First should be considered. However, the lack of evidence and absence of older people in key supporting documents and strategies, for example the Welsh Government Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012-16¹², suggests that more work and a much more nuanced understanding is needed to tackle the specific causes of poverty amongst older people in Communities First areas and elsewhere.

⁸ Ceredigion, Monmouthshire, Powys

⁹ <http://www.leaderlive.co.uk/news/172590/communities-first-closure-will-see-families-suffer-in-wrexham-and-flintshire.aspx>

¹⁰ <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/latest-news/archive/free-add-to-your-life-health-assessments-in-cardiff/>

¹¹ <http://www.wcva.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-latest/2016/10/cabinet-secretary-minded-to-phase-out-communities-first>

¹² <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s30402/PIW%2020%20S1%20-%20Older%20Peoples%20Commissioner%20for%20Wales.pdf>

Financial Inclusion & Uptake of Financial Entitlements

5. My focus on addressing poverty amongst older people is improving the take-up of financial entitlements and employment opportunities for older people. Encouraging older people to claim their financial entitlements is a priority of mine, and ensuring that older people receive an additional £50/60 every week could make a real difference in their lives. Studies suggest that increasing pensioner income is still the most effective route out of poverty¹³. An estimated £168m of Pension Credit alone is returned to the Treasury from Wales every year¹⁴: this is money that should be claimed by older people, helping them to pay energy bills, deal with daily living costs, and being able to purchase goods and access key amenities and services.
6. The Welsh Government Strategy for Older People 2013-23¹⁵ refers to Communities First as a mechanism to address older people's financial inclusion and improve their ability to access appropriate financial advice and services. The continued poor take-up of financial entitlements suggests that the programme has not achieved the desired effect. Further work is needed to ensure that older people are aware of their entitlements, know how to apply with targeted help and support, and have the confidence to claim without fear of certain stereotypes i.e. being seen as 'scroungers'.
7. For example, I have called for the Welsh Government, in partnership with key partners e.g. Local Authorities, information and advice services, to introduce a targeted awareness raising campaign on financial entitlements, similar to the successful 'Make the Call' scheme in Northern Ireland¹⁶. Ensuring that older people know about their entitlements and providing them with the support to claim Pension Credit, Attendance and Carers Allowance etc. is crucial in improving take-up, and could make a real difference in Communities First areas amongst adults of all ages.

¹³ <http://www.futureyears.org.uk/uploads/files/Age%20UK%20on%20poverty%20in%20old%20age.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/policy/age-cymru-policy-publications-1/life-on-a-low-income-1/>

¹⁵ <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/130521olderpeoplestrategyen.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/unclaimed-benefits>

Opportunities for Learning and Employment

8. Improving learning and employment opportunities for older people is another important route out of poverty. The traditional retirement model is no longer relevant and an increasing number of older people want, or need, to work for longer in order to support themselves and others and supplement incomes in later life. Older people however face a number of barriers in terms of remaining in or returning to the workplace, including ageism, inflexible working patterns that do not consider e.g. caring responsibilities and skillsets that are outdated or no longer relevant.
9. An estimated 205,000 people between 50 years old and State Pension age are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) in Wales. This is a large potential workforce that require the right skills, training and confidence to improve their employment prospects, but often find it difficult to access help and support due to the focus on younger people. As I emphasised in the 2015 National Assembly Inquiry report on Employment Opportunities for People Over 50, older NEETs is a group that is undervalued, underappreciated and an afterthought when it comes to schemes and initiatives that target people getting back in to the workplace¹⁷.
10. In Communities First areas, ensuring that older people have the right skillsets, and being able to connect them with relevant employment opportunities locally through, for example, public or community transport, are crucial factors. Strengthening the social care workforce demonstrates the challenges facing some older jobseekers. Funding for people aged 25 years and older has been removed, meaning that older people involved in the workforce do not receive equal training or employment opportunities¹⁸. Many older people would like to take up social care opportunities as it can be personally rewarding and delivering person-centred care can help boost confidence and self-fulfilment, however the lack of relevant skillsets, gaps in transport provision and the emphasis on self-funding for the older demographic means that older

¹⁷ <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10305/cr-ld10305-e.pdf>

¹⁸ http://www.ccwales.org.uk/uploads/Council_Members/29.01.15/N_Item_14_Co-investmenmt_Framework.pdf

jobseekers are missing out on much needed employment opportunities, and other older people do not receive care and support as a result.

11. Through Communities First, programmes such as Digital Communities Wales¹⁹ have been helpful in terms of improving older people's digital skillsets and addressing digital inclusion via free training. A better understanding however is required to gauge whether digital classes and training have helped secure employment for older workers/jobseekers, in turn improving their financial resilience. Some qualitative evidence suggests that older jobseekers have not benefited from the provision of digital classes²⁰.
12. Communities for Work has worked with Communities First to provide support for unemployed people over the age of 25 to return to work, as well as support younger NEETs²¹. The programme looks to support those who are furthest away from the employment market, and the inclusion of those over 54 years of age and economically inactive is welcomed. Whilst including and prioritising older people who are economically inactive and with work limiting health conditions is welcomed, again there is little evidence to date on how Communities for Work has helped improve employment prospects for older jobseekers in Communities First areas. The Communities for Work evaluation refers to the percentage of people aged 50-64 years who were not in work in 2014 (36%), and also the specific barriers that older jobseekers face, for example low skills, ageism and ill health, but does not expand on how the programme has helped address the situation to date²².
13. Looking ahead, it is crucial that Welsh Government commitments and schemes, such as the all-age apprenticeships and employability programme, engage fully with older people in Communities First areas and elsewhere. Older people in Wales'

¹⁹ <https://digitalcommunities.gov.wales/>

²⁰ <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/BG-CF-North-Report-Final.pdf>

²¹ <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/communities-for-work/?lang=en>

²² <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2017/170412-evaluation-communities-work-stage-1-en.pdf>

most deprived areas need targeted help and support to lift themselves out of poverty, and for those older people who want and need to work, employment schemes and interventions that are truly all-age in practice are a necessity.

14. Such an approach, coupled with improvements in the take-up of financial entitlements, can help shift older people away from the vicious cycle of poverty to a virtuous model i.e. increased incomes through entitlements and employment, being better able to deal with daily living costs and energy bills, more flexibility to purchase healthier foods and access cultural and leisure opportunities, improved financial resilience to deal with changes in later life, and improved physical and mental health and wellbeing as an accumulative effect. This preventative, outcomes-focused approach complements the Ageing Well in Wales programme and also the national wellbeing goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Ageing Well in Wales

15. I am proud to host and chair Ageing Well in Wales, the national partnership programme to improve the health and wellbeing of people aged 50+ in Wales²³. Ageing Well is a social movement, working with strategic partners, volunteers and community groups to help make Wales a good place to grow older for everyone. By taking an asset-based approach i.e. investing in older people, Ageing Well helps to improve the health, independence and wellbeing of older people, improving outcomes for the individual and reducing the need for costly health and social care services as a result.
16. Ageing Well has five priority areas to help make Wales a good place to grow older: developing age-friendly and dementia supportive communities, addressing falls prevention and loneliness and isolation, and improving learning and employment opportunities. Every Local Authority in Wales has published an Ageing Well plan, detailing how they will address the five priority areas with key partners. In the context of implementing these aims

²³ <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/home>

and objectives on the ground and engaging with older people via the local plans, the removal of Communities First is a concern. For example:

- In Bridgend and Anglesey, learning opportunities for older people in the most deprived areas is dovetailed with Communities First provision²⁴²⁵;
- The delivery of jobs clubs to provide older people with advice and support on employment opportunities is coordinated with Communities First in Blaenau Gwent²⁶;
- The development and roll out of Dementia Friends training and Dementia Champions is planned with Communities First teams in Caerphilly²⁷;
- In Cwm Taf, Communities First Clusters have offered exercise programmes to older people that help promote healthy and active lifestyles and reduce the risk of falls through physical activity²⁸;
- The provision of digital inclusion workshops and classes has been coordinated with Communities First services in Carmarthenshire²⁹.

The reliance on some local plans on Communities First is therefore a cause of concern, and I recommend that the Welsh Government provides Local Authorities with every help and support to mitigate the impact of closing Communities First, engage and consult with both providers and beneficiaries to discuss future provision, and ensure that the progress made on Ageing Well actions to improve older people's quality of life is not lost on the ground.

Conclusion

17. There is a broad consensus that whilst Communities First has helped to improve the lives of some individuals, it has not succeeded in addressing some of the most deep-rooted causes of poverty in Wales' communities. An ageing population does present

²⁴ <http://www.bridgend.gov.uk/media/400747/ref13533-ageing-well-in-bridgend-eng-stp.pdf>

²⁵ <http://www.anglesey.gov.uk/Journals/x/d/a/A-Strategy-for-Older-People-final.pdf>

²⁶ http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Resident/Health_and_Social_Care/Blaenau_Gwent_Strategy_for_Older_People_2015_-_2017.pdf

²⁷ http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/CaerphillyDocs/Adults-and-older-people/50-Positive_Action_delivery_plan.aspx

²⁸ <http://www.merthyr.gov.uk/media/2398/cwm-taf-ageing-well-in-wales-plan-v11-en.pdf>

²⁹ <http://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/media/1736172/Annual-Update-15-16.pdf>

certain challenges but also a wealth of opportunities. Older people already contribute over £1 billion to the Welsh economy annually, and new, creative and innovative approaches are required to tackle poverty, develop an asset-based approach for older people, and provide older people with the infrastructure and services they require to contribute even further and maximise use of their skills, knowledge and experience.

18. This shift in service delivery and encouraging community-based solutions to tackle poverty helps to empower older people, promotes age-friendly communities and reduces the likelihood of older people being affected by poverty across Wales. An age-friendly community can tackle poverty by, for example, ensure that older people are able to access information and advice, promote digital inclusion via banks and other partners, and work with local business to encourage them to employ older workers³⁰. Older people in all parts of Wales are affected by poverty, and the focus on Communities First areas has meant that older people living in poverty elsewhere have not received the same levels of help and support, for example older people who live in less deprived areas but are 'asset rich, cash poor'.
19. In the context of improving outcomes for older people via the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, my Guidance to Public Services Boards includes a challenge to reduce the number of older people living in poverty in the Local Authority³¹. Addressing this will require a collaborative approach between key partners and taking into account local needs and circumstances. The national indicators, in particular 'Percentage of people living in households in income poverty', will be useful in measuring progress and whether new approaches are helping to reduce poverty amongst older people and other age groups³².
20. It is clear that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to tackling poverty in Wales' most deprived areas and elsewhere will not work: the

³⁰ http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Politics-and-government/age-friendly-places/age_friendly_places_guide.pdf?dtrk=true

³¹ http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/PSB_Guidance.sflb.ashx

³² <http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/160316-national-indicators-to-be-laid-before-nafw-en.pdf>

solutions to address poverty amongst older people living in St James, Caerphilly, may not be appropriate for older people living in Rhyl West, for example. Further work is needed to identify the root causes of poverty amongst older people and what interventions are most effective in lifting older people out of poverty. This approach requires cross-portfolio and departmental support from the Welsh Government, with tackling poverty amongst all age groups prioritised as a cross-cutting theme across strategies.

21. I hope that the committee finds these comments useful, and please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information.