

Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales.

Pensioners' Forum Wales is a non-political group of retired members of trade union and professional organisations, who work together for the benefit of pensioners throughout Wales. We hold bi-monthly meetings at Ty John Pathy, by courtesy of Age Concern Cymru. We make contact with relevant Ministers on matters of concern to older people, such as Post office/Bank closures, repair of hearing aids and the availability of treatment for wet macular degeneration. Our agenda aims to be Strategy focused and our current priority areas are pensioner poverty, age discrimination and long-term care. We also combine with three other pensioner fora several times a year.

General Questions.

1. Rural and urban areas share some of the problems caused by poverty and deprivation, but rural areas have more intense problems relating to isolated parts where services which are taken for granted (piped gas, mains sewerage, Broadband etc.) are not available. Transport links tend to be poor if provided and communities are often a long distance away from sparse facilities such as shops, hospitals, doctors, dentists, banks and post offices. There is a shortage of training, poorly-paid work, housing and many people suffer from limiting long-term illness. There is also a high cost involved in fuel - oil dependency.
 2. Local authorities deal better with housing and homelessness, as local issues. Co-ordinators and Champions have also engaged with older people. They do not perform well with Council Tax levels or road maintenance. Sometimes WAG intervention with new inexperienced councils is needed if we are to increase anti-poverty measures effectively.
 3. There are currently a number of initiatives containing anti poverty and anti - deprivation elements:
The Strategy for Older People, a Commissioner for Older People. One Wales, Communities First, Care and Repair Cymru, various schemes to insulate and keep homes warm, free prescriptions, free bus passes and swimming, 50+ work and training initiatives, new council tax benefit schemes and LinkAge.
- b) No. In some rural areas it is difficult or impossible to access

help available. LinkAge has not travelled that far and it is made very difficult in some rural areas for reasons already given to maximise income, the inadequate level of which is the prime cause of pensioner poverty.

4 I would like to see negotiations take place between WAG and the current Bridge owners to suspend tolls into Wales between hours of 1.30 am and 4.30 am to allow cheaper delivery of goods, which would reduce living costs and cut daytime heavy congestion and pollution levels throughout Wales.

b) Welsh schools, hospitals, colleges and other institutions should be encouraged to support Welsh farmers by using home-grown produce in their canteens.

c) New Zealand use Oleander plants along main highways as they filter pollution.

d) The Waitakei power station is able to generate 8% of New Zealand's electricity from underground steam, which lasts indefinitely and is recycled underground. The level of sales tax is also 8%

We must remedy Material, Service and Inclusion poverty in Wales, especially in our rural communities. Better roads and re-opened Valley railway lines will create work and training opportunities.

We need serious long-term planning and action with support of the UK government in non-devolved issues. There is urgent need to simplify pension provision and savings. The funding must be found to improve pension levels in line with the EU and to reduce VAT on items such as home repairs, emergency call-out charges and domestic fuel.

These measures would have considerable effect on the quality of life for older people, who would indeed be 'Living longer and living better' without feeling poor and deprived.

Nancy Davies

18.04.08.