

CCWLSIR IIC 24

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau

Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Effaith costau cynyddol / Impact of increasing costs

Ymateb gan ACE / Response from ACE

Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee inquiry into Impact of increasing costs

Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE) is a local community development charity. Our vision is of a happy community, one characterised by co-operation, equality and social justice. We believe that poverty should not be accepted as a fact of life and that social injustice should be challenged and changed.

Rooted in the community of Ely and Caerau in West Cardiff, the largest housing estate in Wales, high levels of unemployment and 'underemployment' mean our community sits in the top 10% of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. Despite these issues, Ely and Caerau is rich in assets and opportunities. People tend to have strong social networks and have extended family close by. There is a sense of pride in the community which supports a willingness to volunteer time formally and informally for the common good, particularly around sport.

We are grateful for the opportunity to submit written evidence to the committee as part of its inquiry into the impact of increasing costs. Our submission draws on the research we have conducted in collaboration with The Bevan Foundation to determine peoples lived experiences of poverty through a series of focus groups with local participants. We thank those who participated for their honest and valuable input.

Our submission is divided into 4 sections to reflect our key arguments:

- Lack of financial resource to afford even the basics
- Impact on grass root clubs
- Impact on health and wellbeing
- Challenges and what would help

Lack of financial resource

Even before the Cost of Living Crisis, The Covid 19 pandemic had placed exceptional pressure on families in the community. Many families report that they have struggles to get back on their feet ever since with many reporting that they are unable to afford the basics, let alone anything beyond that and the increased cost of fuel is already forcing them to make tough decisions. This lack of financial resource available to families is impacting community and grassroots sport.

We invited local community and grassroots sports organisation to a focus group to discuss the impact of this crisis on their organisations, reduced levels of participation and how this is contributing to the sustainability of the clubs.

- The group reported that they are seeing participation levels drop as families are no longer able to afford the “subs” or the replacement cost of equipment such as boots and travel to and from matches.
- They are reporting that no subs means less income generation and that clubs are likely to fold as a result.
- Parents with more than one child are being forced to make decisions about which “activity” the household budget can afford and are considering factors such as the cost, distance (fuel costs), which one is better value for money and which child is likely to benefit more from the activity.
- Families becoming displaced due to homelessness and being relocated to an area and not being able to get to their club.
- Local clubs being unable to afford to train indoors during the winter months, likely to reduce participation levels even more in the winter as parents will be reluctant for their child to train in the cold as they are less able to warm their home sufficiently.
- Increased the gap between those who can afford and those who can't afford.

Impact on grass root clubs

There is a real concern that unless these organisations are better supported, the impacts will be irreversible and that years spent building relationships with young people will at a cost to the community. Being part of a club is so much more than sport. Community and grassroots sport:

- Creates opportunities for young people to develop relationships and helps build intergenerational relationships.

- Inspires young people.
- Enables young people to be part of something.
- Instils respect, structure and discipline.
- Brings about cohesion.
- Reduces likelihood of anti-social behaviour as young people are less likely to be bored.

“Without the existence of clubs, children and young people will seek other opportunities for enjoyment and entertainment. There is a huge drug problem in the community and whilst sport isn’t a diversion from criminal activities and behaviour, it is a distraction. When a child has nothing, they will seek out opportunities to fit in. They may have been excluded from school because the parents can’t afford the correct uniform, they are bored at home as mum is out at work. They go out and meet someone who offers them a few quid to deliver something for them. The money is easy, and by the end of the week they have a new group of friends, money in their pockets and the promise of more money to come and status. That’s how easy is it for a child to find themselves being exploited”. Participant E.

Impact on health and wellbeing

Concerns have been raised about the welfare of some of the children accessing their clubs. Those delivering provision highlighted that during the pandemic the lost contact with many of their young people, especially those from chaotic home lives and likely to have multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE’s).

When clubs regrouped following the pandemic it was clear that many of the young people they knew had been deeply affected by the pandemic. Mental health issues had increased by 50% in their young people and it was clear that the parents had been adversely affected. Confidence was low and that those friendships that were nurtured before, were struggling to get back on track and despite being “glad to be back” it took time to rebuild the clubs and that many had disengaged entirely and they “lost a few along the way” through suicide. The clubs, where possible were reaching out to families as and when they could but as volunteers working themselves, there was only so much they could do to help.

They have worked hard to build up the clubs and ensure that children, young people and their families have opportunities to participate.

The clubs report conducting informal welfare checks, regular check-ins with vulnerable families and ensuring that food and drink are available for everyone participating to prevent stigma for those that they know are struggling with food costs and feeding their families.

This approach is helping rebuild the confidence of these young people post pandemic. They are improving physically and mentally but the concern that the cost of living will see a huge decline in participation and future sustainability of clubs creating opportunities means that many children and young people will go back to feeling isolated and disengaged as they did during the pandemic.

“My son is a different person since the pandemic. He never wants to go out any more, he’s lost all his confidence due to putting on weight during the pandemic, now he feels unfit and unhealthy and now doesn’t have the confidence to re-join. Hes being picked on in school because of his weight. Hes always been prone to putting on weight, but sport used to help him stay fit and, manage his weight. He used to feel part of something, now he’s isolated and lonely”. Participant B.

What would help?

As we recover from the pandemic, opportunities for participation are needed more than ever. Community and grassroots sport are being undervalued and overlooked. The local clubs have nothing other than enthusiasm and goodwill from volunteers and the local community. Provision is delivered outdoors with coaches giving time for free. The local rugby team that sees 150 young people turn up for free training each week in an old shipping container for 11 teams, yet other clubs in more affluent areas have investment and proper facilities.

- Children in the community should be given the same opportunities as their peers.
- Clubs feel inadequate when they have visitors and don’t even have a space they can use.
- The club have reported that historically they have lost players because they can’t give players what they need and talented players move to better established clubs with better facilities.

- Lack of funding is preventing clubs from progressing and developing.
- Funding exists but is difficult to get, despite best efforts.
- Lack of dedicated support for clubs in the community.

Clubs feel forgotten about. They are doing amazing work that isn't being valued or recognised. What would help from Welsh and UK Governments would be:

- A commitment to grass roots sports that actively includes children, young people and local clubs in the design and delivery of provision.
- Acknowledging that those already delivering activities are often the best placed to deliver provision because they know the area and the children in young people.
- Making a funding and resources more accessible for small clubs.
- Ensure that the process of accessing funding is not made difficult.
- Visit clubs, see what they are doing and the impact.
- Means test clubs, is directing financial resources to an already successful established club really going to make any difference? Financial support should be directed at small grass roots club to improve their "offer" for young people and allow them to grow.
- Better resources directed at organisations that exist to community and support grass root sports.
- Community assets such as 3G pitches being accessible for clubs for no charge.

The cost of living crisis is impacting everyone. We have endured a global pandemic that has had devastating consequences for the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Sport has a huge role to play in the lives of disadvantaged children and young people, there is already a huge unmet need. The cost of living crisis should not be placing children and young people at further disadvantage because cost is a barrier. There are so many clubs committed to creating opportunities, role models exist in all communities and have the potential to raise the aspirations of children and young people.

"I was never very good in school. I really struggled. But I was really good at sport. It was my escapism. I don't think I would have coped without it". Participant A.

