

PIW 06

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into Poverty in Wales: Strand 1

Response from: Conwy County Borough Council

2014

# Conwy County Borough Council's response to the National Assembly for Wales' Inquiry into Poverty in Wales

Conwy Building Resilient Communities &

Tackling Poverty Board

Conwy County Borough Council

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## 1.0) Background

- 1.1) The National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee is undertaking an inquiry into poverty in Wales. The inquiry has been divided into four self-contained strands. Each strand will focus on one particular issue and have its own terms of reference, but taken together will form an overarching piece of work.
- 1.2) The committee is not consulting on all the strands at present, but they are available for your information through the following link:  
<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Ild=8469>
- 1.3) Initially, the Committee would welcome our views on the terms of reference for Strand 1:

## 1.4) **Strand 1: poverty and inequality**

To consider:

- a) - How effectively the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and other government strategies work together;
  - b) - The impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people;
  - c) - How legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality are co-ordinated and prioritised across the Welsh Government.
- 2.0) Conwy County Borough Council will take each of the three considerations in turn and the feedback is given as such.
  - 2.1) Firstly, Conwy County Borough Council welcomes the investigation as tackling poverty is a priority for the local authority.
- ### 3.0) **a) - How effectively the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and other government strategies work together**
- 3.1) The Tackling Poverty Action Plan is a missed opportunity to allow local authorities to target priorities within their area based on local needs assessments. Local authorities are being directed to target specific areas such as NEET's and Low Birth Weight and these are not the main areas of concern in Conwy.
  - 3.2) In terms of specific equalities issues, Conwy would like to highlight that the national programmes are very much targeted towards Children Young People and Families. We feel that Older People are not considered. Conwy have increasing numbers of older people and therefore, it is a concern that the Tackling Poverty Action Plan does not highlight Older People significantly enough.

- 3.3) In terms of what mechanisms are in place in Conwy, partnerships and partnership working is evolving in Conwy and a programme to establish a Building Resilient Communities & Tackling Poverty Board has already taken place. The board provides a single vision and direction to maximise the benefits of projects and funding streams to Conwy and ensure all partnerships are co-ordinated in tackling poverty. The boards focus is on three overarching priorities based on having Prosperous, Learning and Healthier Communities in Conwy.
- 3.4) The contributory actions identified nationally and locally to deliver the Tackling Poverty Action Plan are overseen by the board and they support the prevention of poverty, helping people into work and mitigate the impact of poverty.
- 3.5) The programme board continues to deliver the family support elements (Not necessarily poverty related). For example a focus on Children in Need and preventative work and includes statutory services such as Children's Services, Youth Justice Service and established partnership projects as appropriate. The programme is focusing on specific areas that add value to these existing structures.
- 3.6) The SEP in Conwy focuses on key areas highlighted through information such as 'How Fair Is Wales?', local and North Wales data. Consultation took place which led to six key equality objectives for North Wales focusing around people of different protected characteristics in regard to improving the Health, Education, Employment, Representation and Access to information for these groups.
- 3.7) The following six Equality Objectives, which are subscribed to by all partners in North Wales, have been adopted for Conwy:
- Reduce Health inequalities
  - Reduce unequal outcomes in Education to maximise individual potential
  - Reduce inequalities in Employment and Pay
  - Reduce inequalities in personal Safety
  - Reduce inequalities in Representation and Voice
  - Reduce inequalities in Access to information, services, buildings and the environment
- 3.8) These objectives were developed in 2011 prior to the Tackling Poverty Agenda being launched and therefore, consequently, there is no specific reference to tackling poverty in our Strategic Equality Plan. However, poverty is very often one of the reasons behind inequality in certain sectors across all protected groups. Many of our actions in the Strategic Equality Plan will indirectly impact upon those groups also affected by poverty and as a result should improve outcomes for those groups and will now be reported to the Building Resilient Communities & Tackling Poverty Board along with other programmes and projects.
- 3.9) How Fair Is Wales (p4) states that, 'people from lower socio-economic groups do not on average enjoy the same quality of life as people from higher socio-economic groups, whether it is lower life expectancy, lower educational attainment, or lower incomes and wealth', hence, our Equality Objectives above.
- 3.10) We know that inequalities exist alongside and are interwoven with socio-economic disadvantage, for example, in our SEP we have acknowledged that those in poverty may have may have less healthy life styles and we have relevant data to support this.

3.11) Those in poverty may not experience the same educational outcome as those not in poverty. The UK statistics show boys, black, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and disabled pupils underperform and that schools fail to meet needs of disabled and BME parents due to communication needs. In Conwy, however, the statistics show a more promising picture:

- In 2010, 95% of BME pupils achieved Level 1 (A\* - G GCSE) and 69% achieved Level 2 (A\* - C GCSE) compared to 91% and 68% respectively for all pupils
- 82% of children on Free School Meals achieved Level 1 (A\* - G GCSE) and 44% achieved Level 2 (A\* - C GCSE)
- 86% of pupils undertaking English as an Additional Language achieved level 1, 50% level 2

This legislation has given great emphasis to the equality agenda, however, more recent initiatives such as, Tackling Poverty will feature within the revised Strategic Equality Plan and there will be opportunity to make clearer links with this initiative and those such as Human Trafficking Initiatives.

3.12) Centrally and departmentally from within the Welsh Government the effectiveness of these interlinked strategies and appropriate communication strategies need to be better re-enforced on a consistent basis with a clear message of the importance of tackling poverty and inequality in partnership. Welsh Government needs to ensure national programmes and projects link in with each other to help us in Conwy to support our communities improve and achieve better outcomes, thus building resilient communities and tackling poverty where it will make a real difference to the people of Conwy which it does not do currently.

#### **4.0) b) - The impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people;**

4.1) When we consider *Extreme Poverty* in Conwy we define it as when people lack the basic necessities for survival. For instance they may be starving, lack clean water, proper housing, sufficient clothing or medicines and be struggling to stay alive. This maybe the case in some instances such as homeless people and travelers, however, the figures for people in Conwy would be low.

4.2) Similarly in the context of destitution, we have small numbers of migrants that seek asylum in Conwy County Borough.

4.3) In terms of the impact of poverty in Conwy we have a real issue with Rural Poverty and this is difficult to measure accurately. In Conwy, we do have the Rural Partnership which delivers the Rural Development Plan and other projects and programmes such as Rural Families First that work with families and communities to tackle poverty and the impact of poverty.

4.4) The issues faced in our rural communities include:

- Low pay economy
- Housing affordability
- Under-employment and in-work poverty
- Rising fuel and food prices

- Transport poverty & physical inaccessibility of services
  - Fuel poverty
  - Impact of welfare reform on benefits claimants
  - Ageing population
- 4.5) Other deprivation issues for rural Wales include poor telecoms infrastructure, pressures on upland hill-farm economy, decline of traditional community and family support networks and social isolation. Responding to these difficulties over a large geographical area with a small, dispersed population is not easy.
- 4.6) Rural issues demand a rural solution. Inevitably this will require funding and the political will to make the funding available. Generally, it costs at least 20% more to provide a service to a rural community compared to an urban community. However, rural areas are disadvantaged by funding formulae and national programmes that focus exclusively on concentrations of need and area based approaches. The Rural Development Plan must not be Wales' only response to rural poverty.
- 4.7) The nature of the rural context also means that the best solutions will be locally determined and locally managed. Co-production should be most effective in these areas. What works for one village or cluster, may not work for another community. This means that community capacity building is an essential element to tackling poverty and these ideas should be nurtured, fostered and supported.
- 4.8) What does not work in rural areas is a macro-programme that seeks to impose pre-determined solutions on very different and varied contexts.
- 5.0) c) - How legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality are co-ordinated and prioritised across the Welsh Government.**
- 5.1) As with the feedback given to the first two considerations, we feel that we have mechanisms and systems in place within Conwy that will support the co-ordination and prioritisation of legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality.
- 5.2) We do recognise that Welsh Government are looking at rationalising and co-ordinating elements of Families First, Communities First and Flying Start programmes outcomes, however, they remain overly prescriptive and inflexible and therefore appear disparate. We do feel that this is an area that Welsh Government could and should look to improve. Welsh Government should build in some flexibility within each programme to encourage innovation. This would also support us in our co-ordination and improve outcomes in all our communities based on their needs.
- 5.3) Again, we would like to emphasise the point regarding the Welsh Government's lack of consistency in terms of communicative policy with local authorities. Legislation, policy and programmes do not appear to be aligned or consistent and mixed or conflicting messages are received from different departments within Welsh Government. This is an opportunity for Welsh Government to review and re-align its communication plan to support local authorities in delivering this complex agenda.
- 5.4) We recognise the importance of targeting funds at the most deprived communities however this does mean that because rural poverty is less concentrated in specific areas

it can be missed. We have tried to tackle this in Conwy by using Families First funding to target rural poverty, among other priorities.

- 5.5) The coordination of tackling poverty initiatives could be improved although this will be most effective at the start of a new programme or initiative and it can create additional difficulties to 'add-on' coordination once a programme is already approved and established. The increasing focus on co-ordination is also often interpreted as needing increased joint working between programmes when better alignment could be achieved by focussing on different priorities and geographic areas in order to avoid duplication. Much of this coordination already happens locally and it is government programme guidelines and grant terms and conditions that tend to prevent more of this work taking place.
- 5.6) We welcome the importance Welsh Government have placed on tackling poverty and fully support this priority. Many local authority services and projects impact this agenda and it is important that this is recognised in Welsh Government legislation, policies and budgets to avoid duplication. Consultation and joint planning with local authorities can help to ensure that the activities led by each complement each other. For example, developing the Family Information Service as a single source of information for families and delivering the new play duties are priorities for the local authority, but there was not an opportunity to raise this when the criteria for the Children and Families Delivery Grant was being developed.
- 5.7) There is regional sign up to the Equality Objectives and therefore we feel it is co-ordinated, these are implemented and monitored at a local level through the appropriate Council systems and they should be reviewed by Welsh Government to ensure effective delivery.
- 6.0) We would also like to raise the issue of rapidly increasing Welsh Government and EU funded grants that could be targeted better and that they could be managed and be more accountable through Local Government. The other issue with this funding is the short term (3yrs) time scales for these projects and programmes.