

Audit Wales - [Time for Change Poverty in Wales](#)

November 2022

<p>What are we trying to achieve, the outcome</p>	<p>People do not choose to live in poverty, many of our residents and families have access to fewer choices and opportunities about how they live their lives. Poverty and its effects can impact on mental and physical well-being and create a wide range of challenges for individuals and families. The Council wants to break down the organisational barriers that get in the way of residents of all ages getting the help they need and having opportunities to improve their life chances and thrive but that as a minimum, they have the resources they need to meet their basic needs and to positively contribute to the wider economic, cultural and environmental well-being of communities.</p>
<p>Why we need to do it:</p>	<p>The Council’s strong commitment and steps to tackle Poverty are woven throughout the Corporate Plan – Making a Difference. This was referenced in the report of findings emerging from the recent Estyn Report considered by the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee on 20 June 2023. These steps include: working in partnership with Welsh Government, strive to reduce child poverty, providing services that encourage and build resilience of children and their families; supporting children to have the best start in life and be ready for learning through an improved early years’ system and childcare offer; and developing community hubs where residents have the opportunity to meet, socialise and access a range of Council and other services. We also know there is more to do as a Council and in partnership.</p> <p>We can point to a number of measures, a snapshot of which can be seen below, that together paint a picture of deprivation across RCT and which affect all ages. The effects of the circumstances described by many of the measures are being exacerbated by the current ‘Cost of Living Crisis’. Poverty, and its causes, is complex and affects a significant proportion of the population of RCT. The solutions are equally complex and cannot be delivered or managed by Local Government alone, but we can play our part in helping people of all ages to access the services that will most benefit them and in some circumstances provide direct assistance. We are continuing to strengthen our understanding of the population of RCT, many of whom will experience negative legacy of the impact of the Covid pandemic, with RCT (Merthyr Tydfil) having the highest mortality rates in Wales over the course of the pandemic.</p> <p>A snap shot of Poverty related measures for RCT is below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23% of children aged 0-19 are in relative low-income families compared with 21% across Wales (June 2023). • 12,108 (8.1%) incapacity claimants compared with a Wales average of 6% (November 2022). • 109 of 154 areas in RCT are in the 50% most deprived areas in Wales (2019 WIMD). • 28 RCT areas in top 10% most deprived.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24.2 % of people of working age without qualifications compared to a Wales average of 29.9% (census 2021). • 28.3% working age benefit claimants compared to a Wales average of 25.5%. • 11.3% working age workless claimants compared to a Wales average of 9.4%. • At the beginning of the Autumn term 2022 take up of universal free school meals by reception pupils was 61%. <p>Our work to reduce inequalities within our communities will also be informed and strengthened by the Socio-economic Impact Assessments of our Council strategies, policies and programmes.</p>
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<p>National strategy and targets for tackling and alleviating poverty</p> <p>R1 In Paragraphs 2.8 – 2.12 we note that there is currently no specific target for reducing poverty in Wales and the current Child Poverty strategy needs to be refreshed. We recommend that in updating its strategy the Welsh Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set SMART national actions; • establish a suite of performance measures to judge delivery and impact; • sets target for alleviating and tackling poverty; and • undertake regular evaluation of performance and public reporting. 	<p>Agree. Recommendation (s) for Welsh Government</p>	<p>Council Officers will take every opportunity, through existing networks, to lobby and influence Welsh Government in the shape and content of any new national targets and/or strategies to maximise alignment with relevant existing strategies, plans and reporting mechanisms.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>All relevant services</p>
<p>Local strategies, targets and performance reporting for tackling and alleviating poverty</p> <p>R2 In Paragraphs 2.13 – 2.23 and Paragraphs 3.33 – 3.35 we highlight that Councils and partners have prioritised work on poverty, but the mix of approaches and a complicated delivery landscape mean that ambitions, focus, actions and prioritisation vary widely. We highlight that evaluating</p>	<p>Agree. The Council is starting to consider its new Well-being (Corporate) Plan which will be in place from 2024. The content of the Plan, its aims,</p>	<p>We will continue to implement local actions with a focus on prevention and support as we continue develop our longer term corporate approach and</p>		

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<p>activity and reporting performance are also variable with many gaps. We recommend that the Councils use their Well-being Plans to provide a comprehensive focus on tackling poverty to co-ordinate their efforts, meet local needs and support the revised national plan targets and actions. This should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include SMART local actions with a greater emphasis on prevention; • include a detailed resourcing plan for the length of the strategy; • be developed with involvement from other public sector partners, the third sector, and those with experience of poverty; • include a robust set of consistent outcome indicators and measures to increase understanding of poverty locally; and • be subject to annual public reporting to enable a whole system view of poverty locally to help improve delivery and support. 	<p>actions, measures and targets will be developed over the next few months. Among other things, the Plan will be shaped by the CTM Well-being Assessment, conversations with our residents and stakeholders and an analysis of data as well as national strategies targets etc. Once agreed, reporting will continue to be integrated through the Quarterly Reports to Cabinet and thereafter scrutiny and so will be publicly available.</p> <p>The Audit Wales Poverty Data portal is a helpful source of comparative/data.</p>	<p>seek to integrate our response to Poverty into our new Corporate Plan and associated measures. The work to develop the plans and measures will also be informed by a new data library repository, an early version of which was piloted in July as reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2023. The aim of the repository is to provide a single source of County Borough wide data to inform a greater understanding of the communities which we serve and also to be the single source of data for Officers completing Socio Economic and Welsh Language Impact Assessments.</p>	<p>April 2024 (as part of developing and agreeing a new Corporate Plan)</p>	<p>All relevant services</p>
<p>Leadership on the poverty agenda R3 In Paragraph 2.23 we note that just over a third of Councils have lead members and lead officers for addressing poverty. Given the importance of effective leadership in driving the poverty agenda forward and breaking silos within councils and between public bodies, we recommend that each Council designate a Cabinet Member as the council's poverty champion and designate a senior officer to lead and be</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>Work is already in hand to widen the visibility and response to tackling the cycle of poverty - this includes:</p>	<p>This recommendation will be progressed as part of the work undertaken for R2 above.</p> <p>Other detailed updates of related actions can be found</p>	<p>December 2023</p>	<p>Paul Mee</p>

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<p>accountable for the anti-poverty agenda. Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of grant-funded programmes.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. support to children and families and individuals living in poverty see 2021 Annual Self Assessment report and 2. response to a Notice of Motion (NOM) in respect of Child Poverty arising from Council in March 2023 	<p>in the People and Prosperity priority sections and associated summary sections of the Quarter 4 Performance Report to Cabinet July 2023.</p> <p>In response to the NOM (Council / March 2023), the Council requested that a report is presented to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee proposing options to develop a Child Poverty Strategy, to be implemented across all relevant services including education.</p> <p>Given the extensive cross directorate approaches to effectively tackling child poverty, the Corporate Plan will continue to integrate and capture the strategic approaches adopted across the Council. Nevertheless, a scrutiny report on child poverty is planned for the Education and Inclusion</p>	<p>Oct 23</p>	<p>Daniel Williams</p>

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		Services Scrutiny Committee for October 2023.		
<p>Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of grant-funded programmes</p> <p>R4 In Paragraphs 2.31 – 2.38 we note that all councils are dependent on grants but weaknesses in programmes mean that funding is not making the impact it could. To ensure councils are able to maximise the impact of funding and tackle the more difficult and longstanding problems, we recommend that the Welsh Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide longer timescales for announcing and receiving bids to enable better resource planning; • move away from annual bidding cycles to multi-year allocations; • enable funding to be more flexibly spent to avoid an emphasis on quicker projects, rather than more impactful interventions that take longer to establish; • allow Councils to consolidate funding to reduce bureaucracy; • streamline and simplify processes and grant conditions to reduce the administrative burden; and • keep requests for information and supporting materials from Councils to a minimum. 	<p>Agree. Recommendation (s) for Welsh Government</p>	<p>The Council welcomes more flexibility in Welsh Government grant funding arrangements. If implemented, the recommendations will allow Councils to implement more timely and sustainable programmes that will provide more opportunity to maximise the impact of the funding available and more proportionate administration in respect of grants.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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<p>Experience mapping to create inclusive services for people in poverty R5 In Paragraphs 3.2 – 3.6 we highlight that people in poverty are often in crisis, dealing with extremely personal and stressful issues, but they often find it difficult to access help from councils because of the way services are designed and delivered. We recommend that Councils improve their understanding of their residents' 'lived experience' through meaningful involvement in decision-making using 'experience mapping' and/or 'Poverty Truth Commissions' to review and improve accessibility to and use of council services.</p>	<p>Agree. Some mapping is already undertaken across the Council including the Housing Support Grant Team, who commission Housing related support service provision to help alleviate crisis and help people deal with stressful issues through the provision of a new early intervention and prevention support model. In this example, we have also completed a review of our Homelessness service which aims to provide an intervention prior to our Statutory duty of 56 days. The new model will be piloted, offering advice and assistance at an early stage, to help alleviate tenancy and financial difficulties, with the aim of minimising loss of accommodation due to rent arrears or affordability.</p>	<p>Further work plans will be developed in line with the strategic approach set out in response to recommendations 2 and 3 above. In the meantime, we will use data sources including the new Data Library/Repository, Community Insights and reports at ward level to supplement direct feedback emerging from the residents through the Community Development Team and associated Networks.</p> <p>Our work to develop ways to improve service accessibility for Housing Support Grant (HSG) funded services will be integral to experience mapping.</p>	<p>To be confirmed as part of the approach above for recommendations 2 and 3</p> <p>September 2023</p>	<p>To be confirmed as part of the approach above for recommendations 2 and 3</p> <p>Cheryl Emery</p>
<p>Single web landing page for people seeking help R6 In Paragraph 3.14 we highlight the difficulties people in poverty face accessing online and digital services. To ensure</p>	<p>Agree.</p>			

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<p>people are able to get the information and advice they need, we recommend that councils optimise their digital services by creating a single landing page on their website that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is directly accessible on the home page; • provides links to all services provided by the council that relate to poverty; and • provides information on the work of partners that can assist people in poverty. 	<p>The Council has already put in place a dedicated Cost of Living Support page on the Council's Website. This dedicated page can be accessed through a single visible presence on the Council's Home page.</p> <p>The current Cost of Living Support page contains information including a benefits calculator, Homelessness Advice and Support and Foodbank Support. Additional work is in progress to widen the content, including Free School Meals, Period Dignity products and 'Big Bocs Bwyd'. However, there remains scope to refresh and widen content to provide a more relevant and cohesive approach in respect of the Council's support for individuals and families experiencing poverty.</p>	<p>Potential to engage with people using the advertised Cost of Living services to seek views as to how web presence and content can be widened to provide helpful/relevant local information for people needing help.</p> <p>In the meantime, conduct an internal review and refresh of the Cost of Living site, using best practice to challenge content and ensure local relevance and accessibility to RCT residents.</p>	<p>Complete engagement process – December 2023</p> <p>Completion of revised web presence dependent on the scope of work identified by the above engagement – March 2024</p>	<p>Syd Dennis</p> <p>Cross cutting input including. Web and Digital Improvement Teams</p>

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<p>Streamlining and improving application and information services for people in poverty</p> <p>R7 In Paragraphs 3.15 and 3.16 we note that no council has created a single gateway into services. As a result, people have to complete multiple application forms that often record the same information when applying for similar services. We highlight that whilst it is important that councils comply with relevant data protection legislation, they also need to share data to ensure citizens receive efficient and effective services. We recommend that councils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish corporate data standards and coding that all services use for their core data; • undertake an audit to determine what data is held by services and identify any duplicated records and information requests; • create a central integrated customer account as a gateway to services; • undertake a data audit to provide refresher training to service managers to ensure they know when and what data they can and cannot share; and • review and update data sharing protocols to ensure they support services to deliver their data sharing responsibilities. 	<p>See above</p> <p>The Council's new CRM which is currently being implemented will allow the further development of the citizen portal.</p> <p>The Citizens' Portal is not currently visible to citizens. Plans are in place to develop the functionality to allow a self-service function for people applying for services, together with progress updates as the application moves through the organisation.</p>	<p>There is potential to consider poverty support within the new CRM as part of a wider strategic approach to poverty reduction through the Citizens Portal.</p>	<p>March 2024</p>	<p>Digital Improvement Team</p>
<p>Complying with the socio-economic duty</p> <p>R8 In Paragraphs 3.27 to 3.32 we set out that while all Councils undertake some form of assessment to determine the likely socio-economic impact of policy choices and decisions, approaches vary and are not always effective. We</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>Whilst the Council has put in place a process of Socioeconomic Assessment in</p>	<p>We have already committed to reviewing and strengthening the EQIA</p>		

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<p>recommend that Councils review their integrated impact assessments or equivalent to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that they draw on relevant, comprehensive and current data (nothing over 12 months old) to support analysis; • ensure integrated impact assessments capture information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ involvement activity setting out those the service has engaged with in determining its strategic policy such as partners, service users and those it is co producing with; - ○ the cumulative impact/mitigation to ensure the assessment considers issues in the round and how it links across services provided across the Council; ○ how the council will monitor and evaluate impact and will take corrective action; and – ○ an action plan setting out the activities the Council will take as a result of the Integrated Impact Assessment. 	<p>2022, it is acknowledged that there is more work needed to fully embed the process into the work of the Council.</p> <p>This position was acknowledged in the Council's response to an Audit Wales Report – Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 January 2023.</p> <p>The Data library/repository referenced above will be a feature of making relevant and timely data visible, consistent, quick and easy to access and interpret.</p>	<p>processes, including the Socioeconomic duty requirement. There is also scope to strengthen further as part of the review of the Strategic Equality Plan and the implementation of a comprehensive data set emerging from the data Library/Repository</p>	<p>March 2024</p>	<p>Melanie Warburton / Chris Davies</p>