

PSB 15

Ddulliau gweithredu lleol ar gyfer lleihau tlodi: Deddf Llesiant Cenedlaethau'r Dyfodol a byrddau gwasanaethau cyhoeddus

Local Approaches to poverty reduction: The Well-Being of Future Generations Act and public service boards

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Blaenau Gwent

Response from: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

1. Targeting public services in deprived communities

As an area with that is home to many communities that continue to experience entrenched deprivation, we have been mindful throughout our well-being planning process that addressing the root causes of poverty and deprivation must go hand in hand with getting public services to respond to the symptoms. As part of our transition as a lead partner on a Local Services Board (LSB) to Public Services Board (PSB) and from single integrated planning to well-being planning, we plan to learn from and develop further the "best" of LSB work developed under the single integrated planning process (2012-present).

- 1.1 Examples of this best practice include leading on the regional Inspire2Achieve and Inspire2Work programmes which form part of our NEET strategy and delivers against the priorities advocated in the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPPF). Blaenau Gwent faced a significant proportion of NEET young people. However, as a result of co-ordinated approaches with partners through the Raising Aspirations Group (RAG) , there has been a steady reduction of numbers of young people becoming NEET, from 8.7% (74 young people) in 2009/10 to 2.49% in 2015/16 (almost sustaining last year's lowest figure yet of 2.4%). This is testament to what can be achieved through meaningful partnership working. Further information on the programme is detailed in the October 2017 scrutiny report project update which is available on the following link to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's website http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/images/att7217.pdf

- 1.2 Under the Single Integrated Plan, our Vulnerable Intelligence project developed enhanced sharing of data between public services in order for them to better respond to and target their services appropriately for some of the most vulnerable people. It also worked on a regional basis, involving our neighbouring local authorities. The project was evaluated by Consultancy.coop and a summary of their findings is available on their website at the following link: <http://www.consultancy.coop/case-studies/vvulnerable-intelligence-project-blaenau-gwent-council-evaluation/> The project was further developed by Atos and their positioning paper on the project is available on their website at the following link: <https://atos.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/supporting-vulnerable-citizens-case-study.pdf>
- 1.3 We have since received international interest in the project and serves as another example of public services coming together to achieve better outcomes through breaking down silos and establishing common norms and protocols.
- 1.4 Blaenau Gwent is also one of the areas hardest hit by a welfare reform agenda that has pushed many people further into poverty. Under occupation (Bedroom tax) and the benefit cap has already had significant impact with many individuals not being able to afford their rental payments to sustain their tenancies. Universal Credit roll out next year will add further pressure to our efforts to tackle poverty.
- 1.5 Through the Universal Support delivered locally approach, personal budgeting support is available to those finding it difficult to manage a monthly budget. This may be through a budget plan, review of their outgoings or additional assistance if needed to help with more complex budgeting issues as outstanding debt. We have received funding for our participation in Universal Support scheme for the last few years. This part funds the Visiting Officer within the Benefits section, who splits their time between benefit visits, cash desk cover and receiving referrals for personal budgeting and support from Department for Works and Pensions.
- 1.6 Referrals for Personal Budgeting Support and Digital Assistance are projected to increase dramatically. Our Personal Budgeting Officer and also our Digital Inclusion Officer (we have a "Get BG Online" digital project already in existence), are currently supporting Universal Credit customers through live service but

when Universal Credit Full Service commences in April 18 this support requirement will increase.

1.7 Other initiatives currently in place with partners to deal with Universal Credit preparation is Wales Co-operative Centre's Your Money Your Home project, which is working primarily in the private rented sector and aims to support people currently having their rental payments paid direct to their Landlords through their Housing Benefit. To date the project has engaged with 118 individuals and impact on mental health issues appear to be of the the highest of concerns for the people being supported and the officers helping them.

2 Evidence Base

In developing our Well-being Assessment and Draft Well-being plan, we have drawn on a wide range of evidence and information. Both documents are public facing and as such we have made them accessible, plain English documents to facilitate better public engagement and inclusion and have therefore avoided comprehensive referencing to the evidence base behind this work.

2.1 However, behind the well-being plans we have produced we have developed a "Well-being library" and drawn on key evidence and information including numerous publications from the What Works Centres (including the Wales Centre for Public Policy), pilot initiatives potentially relevant to our local population and demographics (i.e. the WLGA School Holiday Enrichment Programme), and relevant organisations publications such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, New Economics Foundation, to name just two and locally relevant evidence specific to Blaenau Gwent such as the Centre for Regeneration Wales' 2014 deep place study of Tredegar. Many of the resources we have drawn on are ideas and practices that help us develop new ways of working and facilitate moves away from business as usual. Our well-being library is a growing and rich resource that we continue to draw on as we develop our approach to delivering and putting into action our vision of well-being in Blaenau Gwent.

3 Communities First

The termination of the Communities First Programme, which covers a significant proportion of Blaenau Gwent, is a huge consideration for us as a local authority and PSB member in terms of local service provision and working with deprived communities.

3.1 For example, the impact that a reduction in community based services and activities can have on the wider community has been highlighted to us by our PSB partner, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service. They refer to link between a reduction in youth activities and an increase in anti-social behaviour. They tell us that from April to September 2017, they attended 265 fires in Blaenau Gwent, of which 236 were deliberate. This equates to 88%, the highest percentage of deliberate fires in all 10 authority areas covered by South Wales Fire and Rescue Service. Therefore, any reduction in community engagement activities is of deep concern in its impact on already high rates such as these, which also divert public services time and resources to responding and dealing with the aftermath and clean-up of these fires.

3.2 We refer to you to our legacy report on our planned transition out of the Communities First programme. Further information on the Communities First legacy funding and transition information is available at our website on the following links:

http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/images/att7098.pdf

http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/images/att7099.pdf

http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/images/att7100.pdf

http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/images/att7101.pdf

http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/images/att7102.pdf

http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/images/att7103.pdf

3.3 We are also mindful of the committee's previous report: *Inquiry into Poverty in Wales Communities First: Lessons Learnt* to ensure best practice from the

programme is not lost in the transition to different approaches to tackling poverty and deprivation in Blaenau Gwent and to build on those lessons.

4 Greater regional working

In Blaenau Gwent we benefit from falling within a common regional Gwent footprint i.e. our health board and police service for example work to the same Gwent boundaries.

4.1 Along with the rest of the Gwent authorities, we are member of Gwent Strategic Well-being Assessment Group (GSWAG), which works on the basis of our collective duties as regional partners. GSWAG was initially set up to identify and progress a consistent methodology and strategic approach to enable a regional approach to well-being assessments.

4.2 Following completion of this work, GSWAG continues to build on this work. Gwent wide objectives are currently under development to progress this regional partnership for the next stage of well-being planning.