

Digwyddiad Costau Byw ar y Cyd – adroddiad

Cost of Living Collaboration Event – report



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On the 26 October 2022 a Cost of Living Collaboration event was held at Y Ffwrnes Theatre, Llanelli. The aim of the event, hosted by the County Council, was to engage with local partners and stakeholders working in the advice and support sector to share information, understanding and best practice so that there could be greater collaboration in our efforts to support Carmarthenshire residents through the current cost of living crisis and to target our most vulnerable residents where ever possible.

The event was attended by just under 100 people ranging from Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet members, Tackling Poverty Advisory Panel members, chairs and vice-chairs of scrutiny, Council officers, Public Services Board (PSB) members, town and community councils, third sector organisations working in the information and advice sector.

Cllr. Darren Price, Leader of Carmarthenshire County Council gave an overview of the purpose and reason for the event and encouraged all partners to engage as much as possible. The event is key to ensuring we better understand the challenges, improve our understanding of the support available and identify opportunities for collaboration across organisations in order to improve and increase our capacity to be able to respond to the needs of our residents.

Cllr. Linda Evans, Deputy Leader of Carmarthenshire County Council and Cabinet member with responsibility for Tackling Poverty provided an overview of the approach to date and highlighted the reason why we need to work together to respond to the challenges ahead. As well as outlining some of the interventions and support available through the Council's Hwbs and 'Claim What's Yours' campaign, reference was also made to the launch of the Council's libraries as warm places over coming months and the Poverty Grant available for community and third sector organisations to apply for to run similar facilities in their own communities. Cllr Linda Evans also launched the Christmas Toy Box appeal and asked partners to support in any way possible.

Rachel Clegg, Data Insight Manager gave an overview of the Carmarthenshire Perspective based on an analysis of the data and information available. A summary report of the findings is available with the presentation focusing on:

- Overall poverty rates
- Child poverty rates
- In-work poverty
- Pensioners in poverty
- Contributory factors: pay; childcare costs; complex benefits system.

The remainder of the event focused on discussion groups with attendees split into 10 tables and asked to undertake an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) based on a series of population groups:

- In work but on low income; looking for work / unemployed / losing work
- Pregnancy / expecting a child; families; students / young people
- Older person / pensioner; bereaved; carers; disabled / ill / injured; armed forces
- Other

Following the SWOT, attendees were asked consider the overall discussion and identify areas for possible cross-sector collaboration in the following priority areas:

- Preventing poverty
- Improving the lives of people living in poverty
- Helping people into work
- Better understanding the challenges.

An outline of the main findings from discussions is noted on the following pages with a summary of the key themes, as outlined on the day by Barry Liles, University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

In work but on low income; looking for work/unemployed/loosing work	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare offer – 30 hrs • Programme for Government commitment to 2 yr old childcare – phased • High number of SMEs • Community strength (especially during Covid) • Many opportunities for education/training – colleges • Demand for staff in many sectors • Employability schemes – support available • Hwbs – walk-in opportunities • Supporting our staff • Work provides structure and experience • Hapi App – Health Board. Gives people information for staff in work • Extend opportunities to re-distribute food • Better mental health due to being out working. Self-worth • Higher aspirations if in work. • Stopping the repeat cycle of living on benefits. • Claim what’s yours • Community transport scheme – Dolen Teifi • Volunteering does help give some experience • Concessions in place across Leisure service facilities for individuals in this demographic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not tailoring support between those in work and not in work • Salary levels within caring roles and other sectors • Privatisation of sector – so profits needed • Complication of maximising benefit claims when in part-time roles – working more than 16 hrs means a risk of loosing benefits • Need a better business support system • Important that employers don’t depend on additional benefits • Are we advertising jobs in the right places? Not enough applying for positions • Not everyone aware of opportunities • Very repetitive process for job seekers – can public sector work together to streamline? • CCC job applications are difficult to complete • Having to use food banks rather than receive the living wage • Some people have high responsibilities for lower wages • People being unable to make digital claims • Accessibility to work due to rural nature of county and costs associated with getting to work. • Most information only available digitally • Understanding and knowledge of food preparation – need to re-educate the basics • Lack of cohesion and consistency across organisations • Location of Hwbs – not accessible to all • Capacity of agencies to deal with numbers coming forward, some are becoming overwhelmed • Amount of bureaucracy for individuals to access opportunities • Displaced people and families cost money for the Council and worsen their life chances. Need to consider this in terms of housing etc.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure employers inform staff of possibility of benefits for employees – educating and getting employers on board – enabling them to keep more employees • Programme of on-going professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redistribution of wealth by benefits system • In-work not able to access services 9-5 • People not reaching out for help or not knowing where to go • People who pay rent but can’t afford other essentials going unnoticed

- Unions briefing to ensure awareness involved in above
- Support SMEs with training costs
- Bid for levelling up for business support?
- Structural change for collecting intelligence from community level
- Lots of work opportunities
- Multiply – grant major
- Confidence building required as starting point of education. Use what learnt in covid to deliver
- Town and community council – accelerate localism
- Peer coaches in hwbs
- Universal assessment and referral
- Expand opening times
- Raise to living Wage – CCC could lead and promote what they're already doing
- Map provision available to understand geographical gaps and support through outreach
- Promote support and opportunities through existing staff
- Overlay data between e.g. health board, Public Health Wales, council; etc to have a much better understanding of need
- Getting the message out and not waiting for crisis situation.
- More positive advertising campaign.
- Get more support / information / training on budgeting.
- Hwb fach y Wlad
- Traditional marketing and communication – need to bring back to targeted communities/population groups
- Job advice surgeries in libraries.
- Community minibus scheme to take people to and from work.
- Transport solutions provided through the employer.
- More joined up offer of advice and signposting i.e. through the Hwbs.
- Utilise town and community councils and their budgets to help people at a local level. Appreciation that people within the local area understand more than anyone who needs support and what support they need.
- Seminars with Local Businesses in how they can engage and support local employment
- Co-ordinate volunteers better

- Gap between rich and poor increasing
- Lack of consistency in pay grades across organisations
- Is it too expensive for people to work i.e. having to pay travel costs up front
- People retire 'down West'
- Impact of Rent Act
- Poverty will kill more people than Covid = crisis – health
- Generation of children who have been affected by Covid.
- Stigma of people accessing support – especially within their local areas.
- Managers and recruiters need to be more flexible with person spec and statements against scoring criteria and give people chances to develop skills within the job
- Fear of technology
- A whole additional cohort of people may find themselves in poverty soon due to rising mortgage rates and rising energy bills.

Pregnancy / expecting a child; families; students/young people	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll-out of free school meals • Flying start & Gwendraeth valley scheme • Affordable uniforms/WG • Foothold – food shop / clothes shop • Covid experience – online - can more employment be found online / employer flexibility • Family Information Service but very small – could be strengthened • Support for 16-25 year olds, especially into work – NEET • Hygiene packs – Period Dignity programmes • Wider opportunities for apprentices • CAVS children and young people forums, Carmarthenshire Food Network • County is seeing investment through large infrastructure projects which will provide opportunities to local people • Free school meals are positive • Youth clubs do offer support, help, advice • Training online has helped with cost of travelling • Signposting on the website • Pre-loved uniform shops and community members are offering this and we need to launch this across the board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of living for employers to take on students • Aspiration of young people • Student debt as they leave university • Affordable homes for young people • Working parents may lose out on benefits if they increase their hours • Poor quality food (e.g. over-processed/sugar content) is often cheaper to buy than fresh food fruit and vegetables • Lose lots of young people who go to university do not return with their skills • Lowest paid due to minimum wage • Opportunities not promoted through appropriate channels – Instagram and Tick Tock for job opportunities for young people • IT systems do not talk to each other, therefore it's hard to offer the correct level of support. An integrated customer data system would help solve these issues. • Rising childcare costs may make it difficult for those expecting a child to plan for their return to employment following the maternity leave period. • Young people don't think the support is for them so don't ask for it • After school clubs vary which impact on family life (times, settings, costs etc) • Housing benefit for young people while in supported accommodation and working. Rent can increase (by doubling) while they start employment. Needs to be a 3 month relief • Too much information out there across a range of platforms • Life experience not prioritised over the requirement for a degree
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return to grants for employers for training – offer incentives for employers and young people • Community clothes banks across the county • Role of schools – commitment to ensure information • Co-ordination – food projects and clothes projects • Foothold – looking to establish 'Alliance' • Local businesses to promote jobs locally • Maximise access to benefit entitlement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition deficiencies – children/pregnancy • Nutrition for elderly • Isolation – all ages • Lack of family support for working mothers with children • Lack of work experience opportunities • School budgets due to the crisis • Youth clubs are closing and opportunities are lost

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have one stop shop – people not passed from pillar to post • Allotments/Grow a row schemes • Teach budgeting in schools • Making flying start universal based on need rather than by postcode • Utilise town and community councils and their budgets to help people at a local area. Work closer with community based sports clubs/young farmers • Ensure that students and young people are provided with life skills and work-readiness skills to ensure that they are able to take advantage of employment opportunities. • Increase wages • GP/pharmacy – good community contacts and can signpost if they have the right information available • Community hubs working together with all organisations so we don't duplicate work • Do the bounty packs in hospital for young mums contain info about nappy schemes and support from local authorities? • More vocational links to Local Businesses 	
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Older person/pensioner; bereaved; carers; disabled/ill/injured; armed forces	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dewis Cymru – potential to access information • Family information service • Strong third sector in county with strong track record of delivery • Intergenerational projects – good examples in Plant Dewi • Pension credit enquiries have increased in last 18 months (influence of Martin Lewis and his information) • Less affected by rising mortgage costs as may have been paid. • Network of pensioners' clubs – need to target • Neighbourhood watch can help to increase community cohesion • Warm HWBS in CCC facilities • Fuel clubs have worked well • Pantry (Garnant) – staff to check and prompt people into charities/clubs – need to use partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of information is online • High percentage on unclaimed benefits in this population group • Need more targeted campaigns rather than doing a blanket approach • Waiting lists to access support from organisations • Some people may not be digitally savvy – they may not have family to help them access via digital means • Can be re-directed to various organisations – can be very frustrating • Adaptations taking too long and increased costs due to shortages • Digital exclusion • Contact centre delays disengages community & public • Mental health support needs more investment for Armed Forces group • Individuals don't want to engage in some instances • Loneliness and not going out due to Covid • Respite support

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms complex – scared to be open in case money taken away / not understanding • Waiting lists for mental health are quite heavy • Are community courses available for all? These not working and those who work but want to improve
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better approach to income maximisation. Limited services currently to support • Communication to veterans could be improved. Hwbs role to support. Better knowledge of armed forces covenant needed • Targeted communication to key groups e.g. people of a certain age. Use electoral role to identify key groups. Send letters and leaflets out to people to signpost them to help – especially for older people. • Town & community councils acting as Hubs/community centre • Food shops rather than banks with education on how to cook • Good practice identified across county and replicate • Better understanding who is using foodbanks to target support • Opportunity to co-ordinate / streamline food banks / shops • Every contact count – 1 opportunity to develop script to ask do people know what benefits they are entitled to and how to access them e.g. Delta well-being, social worker, district nurses, carer, PCSOs, social prescriber • Key information with council tax demand notice e.g. what benefits there are and how they can access them • Focus on prevention • IT skills training for older people • Making best use of local press and communication e.g. Llanelli Star, Journal etc • Need to get back into communities post covid for face to face presentations to groups/speak to groups • Targeted campaign for unclaimed benefits • County Councillors well connected with their communities • App development which is already happening now between trading standards and domiciliary care that could be rolled out further. Allows for sign-posting to relevant organisation so that the individual receives the support that they need • Cooking tutorials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support quite 3rd sector reliant – funding limited • Short-term funding • Scammers target these population groups • Older population increasing and income is more fixed. • Fear of covid still prevalent in older age groups • Lots of people on oil in rural Carmarthenshire do not get the fuel cap.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volunteering for older people who have a wealth of knowledge, help in community settings and schools• Making organisations like Age Cymru more visible• Community HWBS facilitating coffee mornings, support groups, help and advice sessions• Computer courses at day centres etc to help people interact• Annual check on elderly/disabled• Greater use of existing bases – community centres etc• Solar panels on Council homes & halls – underspend on housing budgets• 130 halls in Carmarthenshire. Co-ordinator & forum existing in CAVS – ambassador roles in communities• Development of green spaces to allow people in our most deprived areas to grow their own food. | |
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Following SWOT, consider overall discussion and identify areas for possible cross-sector collaboration in the following priority areas:

Preventing poverty

- Every Contact Count – key script for workforce that support people to ask right questions about benefits available
- Real Living Wage – public sector response, pay staff but also expect of commissioned services.
- Positive parenting and family support schemes
- Family centres – nurture families not just children
- Help with fuel poverty that can be promoted by partners
- Events for community to showcase what is available.
- Structured forum to share information between partners. Collaboration with CAVS forum
- Direct targeting of benefits.
- Transport – make community cars available. Bus timetables have changed since COVID-19
- Older people find it difficult to access Bus Passes online – Transport for Wales
- Hwbs are essential – smaller hwbs (rural hwbs are key).
- Ensure that the poverty cycle is broken before it begins i.e. ensuring that young people have a good standard of education and are given opportunities to become as skilled as possible so that they can access further and higher education, leading to better paid jobs in the future and therefore reducing the risk of them being in poverty.
- Increasing financial literacy at a younger age so that people are financially savvy i.e. budgeting and making sound decisions about money.
- Schools like Penrhos are already doing some good work with their community. We need this to be delivered across the board so there is equality for all
- Better cross organisation collaboration in terms of making individuals aware of opportunities to access benefits, funding etc.
- More awareness of opportunities. Promotion of food HWBS and foodbanks
- Start with our own tenants – more resources needed to identify those in need and support vulnerable people
- Use of cllrs and housing staff – house check and support for referrals etc
- Make Every Contact Count – PSB
- Isolation/high costs in farming communities – work with organisations such as RABI, DPJ Foundation, Tir Dewi
- Provide as much information as possible through a range of mediums – face to face, newsletters, website, social media etc

Improving the lives of people living in poverty

- Development of local hubs to co-ordinate and streamline support
- Communication is key – targeted communication, not reliance online, use of council tax demand letter and local communication
- Role of community and town councils and third sector is key or local community hubs
- Grow food locally and make seasonal food choices. Love Food, Hate Waste campaign
- Prosiect ETO – circular economy approach to re-use
- Some people struggle to pay their rent but have nothing left for other needs
- Private sector – people who are asset rich but cash poor – particular issue for older people
- Improved work opportunities
- Trust the Trader list
- Warm Places – ensure support to help maintain places that are already open and providing and important community support structure
- Improve financial literacy and budgeting skills.

- Ensure that families and individuals are receiving all the help that they are entitled to.
- Retrofit existing housing stock to become more energy efficient to reduce bills. Extend this to look at the Council employing individuals who are furthest away from the labour market to develop their skills within Green construction to take advantage of this meaningful employment opportunity.
- Look at developing fuel banks at a community level – this includes logs etc.
- Organisations are already doing good work (energy advice, benefits etc) and we all need to work together to publicise together
- Using CCC website (events timetable) for all local organisations to promote events. This would reduce duplication but also increase partnership and collaboration
- 'Assist my life' is an app that covers transport, health and other that can be publicised
- Promotion of job opportunities and support in completing applications
- Promotion Too Good To Go – where companies offer food bags at the end of the day rather than it going to waste.
- Sharing of information/intelligence within the Local Authority
- Purchasing cooperatives in communities where goods and services are obtained at reduced prices due to bulk purchasing
- Financial support
- Transport – co-ordinate existing organisations
- Sir Garedig – promote more fully to harness all to support neighbours etc
- Online – mapping route for helping people through the maze of different organisations / services
- Improve contact centre response times
- More resources together – CCC/Dyfed Powys = combined contact centres

Helping people into work

- Education to employers on what support available
- Support people into occupational courses and apprenticeships
- Free public transport – is there a need to prioritise older people? What about young people who need to travel to work?
- Dolen Teifi transport schemes
- Volunteering as a route back into work e.g. new scheme with Plant Dewi
- Revisit the Council recruitment process – same application form for a Director and Refuse collector. Is this necessary?
- Levels of literacy and numeracy – need to consider in terms of recruitment. Are we losing good officers? What about people with life skills and experience who may be suitable for jobs?
- Working with education institutions to develop the green construction and retrofit skills of those furthest away from the labour market to take advantage of employment opportunities offered.
- Increased cohesion between DWP, Careers Wales and the Council.
- Ensure that Careers advice and guidance is relevant to the local area.
- Communities for Work are already doing good work but this scheme needs to target all wards
- Promotion of job opportunities and support in completing applications and CV's
- Promotion of free access to use of I.T. resources in Libraries
- Delta – can we expand it further to support more people in social care

Better understanding the challenges

- Use data to focus work on those eligible for funds rather than expect all individuals to apply
- Council departments tend to work in silos – are we sharing information and could we make better use of resources?
- Rural poverty – poverty in the agri sector. Free schools meals correlation with rural areas needs to be better understood.
- Challenge of low paid jobs – specific sectors such as health, social care, hospitality – failing to recruit
- Challenges as a result of Brexit

- Need to understand peoples live experiences – Poverty Truth website – understand what difficult choices people are having to make. Can we set up a forum to better understand the local challenges?
- Concern relating to crime figures – need to monitor any future trends
- LGA Cost of Living website – examples of good practice. Cornwall in relation to transport
- Mapping of access to advice with common referral processes into multiple services
- Need to understand the barriers to access
- Advise the advisers – training/services
- Need for a media push on poverty – like with covid
- Use of volunteer schemes needs to be promoted
- Luncheon clubs to come back into play
- Sharing of information to identify issues of concern / look at being able to look at solutions.
- Bring partners into HWBs to provide extra information / specialisms.
- Better access to data at a local level – utilising internal data and data from partner organisations.
- Events like today's are an important element and provide an opportunity to work together.
- How does the work of the PSB and the Tackling Poverty Advisory Group feed across the Council? Everybody needs to understand poverty at every level of the organisation.
- Will this event happen again? These events usually happen and then attendees feel that they don't hear anything again.
- More collaboration and partnership events that can help signpost services e.g. roadshows, but also mapping the provisions that are available, this could be done through an information service? This would reduce duplicating services and overwhelming the customer
- Single/Geographical point of contact for people accessing services
- Stigma that some people feel in terms of claiming benefits or receiving help
- One size doesn't fit all – diverse population, how do we get information out to individuals of different race, religion etc.
- How we help individuals coming into the Country from overseas to integrate and understand how communities work
- Finding information on the Corporate website, people struggle to access what they really want to find
- Challenges in terms of this winter, money, jobs, COVID, flu.
- Will access to internet be a luxury that some people will not be able to afford moving forward which will make accessing online help more problematic

Summary of key themes from discussions as outlined at the event by Barry Liles, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

- There is a need to raise awareness and understanding of what support is available
- However, there is so much information out there it is difficult for people to know what support is available – can we streamline entry points? Develop a One Stop Shop approach for in-person and online content?
- There is a need to ensure a consistent message across all organisations, will have a greater impact – develop a Making Every Contact Count approach
- Employers have a key role to play in providing support to their employees. If employees feel supported and well informed they will be able to convey messages within the communities that they live in as well
- Young people access to work – there is a lack of awareness and co-ordination around apprenticeships, graduate programmes and entering the world of work. In addition, there is a need to develop a closer working relationship with businesses – harness interest and support from the sector by providing guidance and clarity on opportunities
- Young people and specific population groups – not enough awareness of value, budgeting and managing money. Financial literacy seems to be a barrier that needs further support to overcome
- Transport to access support and work opportunities – lack of availability is an issue but also lack of understanding and information about what is available
- Loneliness and isolation are key contributors to cost of living – challenges in terms of accessing support networks available accelerate other well-being issues for individual
- Digital literacy with specific population groups. Most information is now mainly available online which means that many who are digitally excluded are missing out on messages/support available

Proposed actions

1. To further develop the role of the Council's Hwbs at Carmarthen, Ammanford and Llanelli. There is an opportunity to utilise them for cross-service/cross-sector input and for them to act as a single point of contact for onward referral.
2. To develop a plan for roll-out of the Hwb Fach y Wlad approach or series of roadshows targeted at the 10 towns and other locations where there may be opportunities for outreach support.
3. Develop a targeted campaign to raise awareness of unclaimed benefits with guidance on how to claim. Need to consider most appropriate ways of targeting specific population groups or geographical areas.
4. There is an opportunity to further support fuel banks across the county.
5. There is a need for a multi-agency response to employment challenges – from an employer perspective and a job seekers' perspective. Need to consider multi-agency jobs fairs, career support, promotion of employment opportunities and barriers to public sector recruitment.
6. There is a need to further develop stakeholder links with town and community councils. They are very well connected and have close working relationships with their local community – could help access to most vulnerable in our communities.
7. Establish a communication network with key stakeholders in order to keep each other informed and provide a platform for information exchange and on-going involvement.
8. There is a need for some traditional communication such as leafleting, use of community newsletter. This should form part of a wider communication plan to be developed.
9. Making Every Contact Count – there is a need to identify key front line officer who will be in contact with vulnerable people and provide support to them to enable a conversation that can trigger the next step of support for that individual.