

Neath Port Talbot
Poverty Symposium
Post Event Report



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Poverty Symposium

On the 20th September 2019 a multi-agency Poverty Symposium took place in Port Talbot's Princess Royal Theatre.

The event brought together practitioners from a range of organisations, to identify opportunities for improving the way that services and support are delivered to people on low incomes across Neath Port Talbot.

The aims of the day were to:



- understand more about the number of people living on low incomes and their situations
 - develop a shared understanding of how low levels of income contributes to the health and well-being of our population
 - learn about approaches from elsewhere that may help us make an impact on the current situation
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- begin developing an understanding of what we currently do as a system to support those in our communities in the greatest need, including using case studies to explore the routine response to different scenarios
 - agree together what opportunities there might be for system improvement, in the context of what we know will make the greatest difference to outcomes

The Symposium Agenda is available at [Appendix 1](#).

Key Themes

The World Health Organization states that: Poverty is a key factor in explaining poorer levels of health between the most and least well-off population groups within the same country. Yet differences in health also follow a strong social gradient. This reflects an individual or population group's position in society, which translates in differential access to, and security of, resources, such as education, employment, housing, as well as differential levels of participation in civic society and control over life.



At the Poverty Symposium a range of experts were invited to explore the causes of poverty, the impact of welfare reform, the day-to-day experiences of poverty in our communities, the increase in poverty in working households and the relationship between income and well-being.

The presentation slides from the event are available to view here:

<https://www.npt.gov.uk/povertysymposium>

Informed by the series of presentations attendees were then invited to engage in a workshop session to address the following question:

How can we collectively support the best outcomes?

There were a range of responses to the question that can be broadly categorised into nine key themes that seem to reflect the World Health Organizations assertions around poverty and health:

1. Food
2. Transport
3. Housing
4. Education
5. Work
6. Social and cultural inclusion
7. Access to support
8. Affordable credit
9. Health literacy and mental health services

In addition to the emerging themes, responses in the workshop identified a number of improvements that could be made to the current system:

- Skills development within services
- Joint Strategy development
- Improved data sharing
- Co-production of services

Considerations and Suggested Improvements

1) Food

Considerations

There are already a number of schemes in our communities designed to reduce the impact of food poverty such as school holiday enrichment programmes and food banks. However, as food poverty becomes an increasing issue more will have to be done to co-ordinate efforts to improve the situation in Neath Port Talbot.

Suggested improvements

- Create a Food Waste Reduction Bill to encourage more supermarkets and distribution centres to release surplus/near-end date food to local charities who will re-distribute it to families.
- Create a food bank alliance to raise awareness of the location of local food banks
- Set-up cooking skills training and holiday hunger schemes at existing food banks to work with families and individuals to encourage them to cook together

2) Transport

Considerations

The public transport that is available is expensive and transport times do not link in with work patterns which makes it difficult to access work opportunities and local amenities.

Suggested improvements

- Improve the availability of public transport and ensure it links with employment opportunities
- Make transport more affordable
- Improve the promotion of community car share schemes and community transport initiatives

3) Housing

Considerations

The cost of housing and utility bills impacts on overall spending power. A lot of housing stock in Neath Port Talbot is older and not necessarily suitable for private tenants.

More energy efficient homes could help address fuel poverty but are more expensive to build than less efficient alternatives.

Suggested improvements

- Strengthen regulation of the private rented sector
- Improve the availability of affordable housing, perhaps capping rental costs
- Raise awareness of local housing issues with the Welsh and UK Government

- Establish a 24-hour emergency homelessness service
- Promote the availability of the Discretionary Assistance Fund

4) Education

Considerations

Research shows that amongst the population of pupils entitled to free school meals school attendance and attainment are lower, whilst exclusions are higher. With the highest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in Wales this is an increasing challenge for services in the locality.



Suggested improvements

- Offer free childcare to all pre-school children, at the moment this is limited by age and is restricted in the number of hours offered
- Reduce the costs of school (uniform, transport, trips, food)
- Make better use of schools as community hubs, as bases to work with residents in and out of school hours
- Ensure all schools have breakfast and after-school clubs
- Amend the curriculum to focus more on developing money management skills, training on appropriate relationships and life skills
- Increase the availability of apprenticeships
- Re-introduce the provision of free basic skills training
- Lobby the government to abolish university fees and re-introduce grants for low income families
- Explore available help into Improve support for adults who wish to enter further education

5) Social and Cultural Inclusion

Considerations

The cultural landscape must also be considered in discussions about improving the current system, we are now in a situation where:

- Almost 1 in 2 will children will experience the separation/divorce of their parents
- The number of blended families are increasing
- New inequalities are emerging such as the postponement of parenthood in higher socioeconomic groups and early parenthood in lower socioeconomic groups
- Both parents working when children are under 5
- Changes in parents' roles – greater father involvement
- There has been a shift from out of work poverty to in work poverty
- Child poverty on the rise driven by reductions in benefits/tax credits and in work poverty

Suggested improvements

- Increase the promotion of the 101 phone number as a reporting mechanism for anti-social behaviour and drug litter such as needles.

- Increase awareness of the impacts adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in schools, churches, play groups and libraries to enable earlier intervention
- Develop a better understanding the importance of digital inclusion
- Increase knowledge and awareness in the community of the pertinent issues, such as county lines and domestic violence as well as income maximisation and financial skills
- Strengthen community networks to generate support for low income households and improve social diversity
- Improve the distribution of wealth, there is a noticeable gap in pay between the public and private sectors

6) Work

Considerations

There has been a shift from out of work to in work poverty.

- Research undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation¹ shows that while a combination of complex factors explains the continuing problem of in-work poverty in the UK labour market, employers' decisions and practices around pay play a central role. Influencing employers to take action on low pay therefore represents an important part of any strategy to solve in-work poverty.
- Employers often have limited knowledge about their employees' financial wellbeing and/or experiences of in-work poverty. There is a need to build on existing resources and tools that can help employers gain a better understanding of these issues.
- Employers can adopt a range of practices to support financial wellbeing among their employees. Paying wages above the real Living Wage rate and providing security in working hours are among the most important contributions they can make. Some employers pointed to training and in-work progression strategies as a means of providing a route to better jobs for employees.

Suggested improvements

- Reduce full-time working hours but keep wages the same, to give people more time to spend with family, exercise and educate themselves contributing to better health and wellbeing
- Commercial property lease prices are too high which prevents people from setting up businesses
- Encourage local employers to pay the National Living wage
- Invest in the provision of free childcare in Wales to enable families to work
- Create a single point of access into employability support, at present there are various routes and services that could be co-ordinated
- Implement Guaranteed Interview Schemes for those in poverty

¹ Findlay, P., Lindsay, C., Watson, A and Young, D. (2019) *Influencing employers so more people break free from poverty through work*. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/influencing-employers-so-more-people-break-free-poverty-through-work>

However, with 44% of people who will be on Universal Credit are not expected to look for work due to illness or caring responsibilities employment and employability are not the only solutions to the low income issue.

7) Accessing support

Considerations

Locally the range of support services on offer is very strong. However, accessing these services can sometimes be hindered by complex referral systems, high thresholds for access, location and opening times can be barriers for some.

This is further complicated as many services are now delivered on digital only platforms, such as the provision of Universal Credit. Restricting access to services makes it more difficult for some sections of the community to claim their entitlements.

Suggested improvements

- Join up advice provision through advice networks
- Expand digital inclusion services by working with community partners
- Lobby the Welsh Government to review Council Tax benefit scheme
- Develop multi-agency community hubs in each community offering a range of services such as: befriending, counselling skills, literacy, numeracy, budgeting, confidence building.
- Extend school holiday hunger schemes across Neath Port Talbot, existing School Holiday Enrichment Programme is too limited
- Provide early years play support at playgrounds, centres, food banks, welfare advice centres
- Run a Pension Credit take-up campaign

8) Affordable credit

Considerations

People on low income pay more for a range of essential products and services. This is the extra cost of being poor and a driver of poverty

Over 3 million people access high cost credit in the UK and more than 12m people have less than £50 in savings.

Suggested improvements

- Replace pay day loans with Local Authority loans supported by money advice sessions
- Promote Credit Unions as an alternative to borrowing from or saving with national banks
- Offer more support for families and individuals moving onto Universal Credit
- Lobby the government to increase basic benefit payments.

9) Health Literacy/mental Ill Health and ill Health Prevention

Considerations

Lower income is associated with:

- increased behaviours that lead to poor health
- reduced ability to access or undertake healthy behaviours
- barriers to access to healthcare and reduced participation in preventive health care programmes
- increased poor health when compared with having a higher income
- having more than one health condition

The impact of low income (poverty) on health and wellbeing at the start of life can be lifelong.

Suggested improvements

- Increase the provision of free mental health services
- Organisations to cease the use of exclusionary practices, specifically 'three strikes' and you are out
- Doctors to authorise benefits not Department of Work and Pensions
- Make a sustained effort to foster and develop emotional health and well-being.
- Promote Making every Contact Count
- Develop an App to assess mental well-being and link to local support services
- Improve the links between antenatal care and universal health visiting services

Improvements to the current system

Develop skills within services

We need to develop the skill-sets of those working in our services, collect and share data more effectively, co-produce services and interventions in order to produce a shared or joint strategy to improve the outcomes for the people of Neath Port Talbot.

Suggested improvements

- Train staff in our organisations to recognise and respond accordingly to those who have had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
- Better maintain and promote the DEWIS community directory
- The Council working as one, rather than in separate directorates
- Integrate IT systems

Improve data sharing

Each organisation represented on the day has access to a wealth of information which could be used and shared more effectively to inform the development of services that meet the needs of those living in our communities. There are currently no formal arrangements in place to assist in the sharing of information and in many cases our IT systems are not compatible with one another.

Suggested improvements

- Use the data we have to better understand our population and create tailored services to meet identified needs
- Improve data sharing between organisations
- Use evidence based practice but leave room for innovation
- Ensure there are clear monitoring and evaluation processes in place

Co-production with service users

By determining what really matters to the people who live in our communities we would be better placed to design services that 'work' for the service users. By embracing the concept of community-led initiatives there would be an opportunity for residents to develop their skills and make most of community assets, addressing local issues with local initiatives.

Suggested improvements

- Find a mechanism to enable decision makers to hear directly from those living in poverty to find out what really matters to them
- Identify the assets we already have in our communities, build on these strengths and identify any gaps
- Stop using consultants and instead develop the skills in our organisations and communities.

Joint Strategy Development

If we were able to develop skills in our organisations, improve data sharing and co-produce services with services users we would be better positioned to develop multi-

disciplinary and/or multi-agency strategies to tackle some of the issues in the locality. Working together we could identify those most in need of support, pool budgets and respond collaboratively to ensure a co-ordinated response and best use of limited resources.

Suggested improvements

- Set-up a multi-disciplinary team to work with low income families to challenge poverty more effectively
- Increase budgets for key services

Recommendations

It is recommended that the information from the Poverty Symposium is used to inform the development of a multi-agency strategy to outline what needs to be done to improve the lives of those living on a low income in Neath Port Talbot.

Not all of the suggested improvements that were captured on the day can be progressed locally. However, there is an opportunity for our elected members to lobby the Welsh Government and influence Policy development.

Symposium Agenda



NEATH PORT TALBOT POVERTY SYMPOSIUM AGENDA

Date:	Friday 20 th September 2019
Venue:	Princess Royal Theatre, Port Talbot
Timing:	9.00 a.m. – 3.30 p.m.

In this event, we will work together to identify opportunities for improving the way that services and support are delivered to people on low incomes across the county borough

Today we aim to:

- understand more about the number of people living on low incomes and their situations
 - develop a shared understanding of how low levels of income contributes to the health and well-being of our population
 - learn about approaches from elsewhere that may help us make an impact on the current situation
 - begin developing an understanding of what we currently do as a system to support those in our communities in the greatest need, including using case studies to explore the routine response to different scenarios
 - agree together what opportunities there might be for system improvement, in the context of what we know will make the greatest difference to outcomes
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9:00 REGISTRATION (Tea/Coffee)		
9:30	Welcome	Cllr. Doreen Jones, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Equalities
9:45	Setting the scene: The national picture	Naomi Eisenstadt, Honorary Research Fellow at University of Oxford and London School of Economics
10:30	The Welsh Context	Dr Steffan Evans, Policy and Research Officer, Bevan Foundation
10:45	The Neath Port Talbot context	Steven Phillips, Chief Executive, Neath Port Talbot Council
11:00 BREAK (Tea/Coffee)		
11:15	The impact of welfare reform	Deven Ghelani, Director of Policy in Practice
11:35	How low levels of income impacts on learning and education outcomes	Sam Greasley, Head Teacher, Awel y Môr Primary School, Port Talbot
11:55	Opportunities to improve income levels through employment support and by developing the local supply chain	Gareth Nutt, Director of Environment, Neath Port Talbot Council
12:10	The relationship between income and wellbeing	Dr Keith Reid, Deputy Director of Public Health, Swansea Bay University Health Board
12:30 LUNCH		
13:00	Tackling high cost credit – early lessons from the End High Cost Alliance	Jonathan Morris, Business Development and Strategic Partnership Manager, Tai Tarian and Sian Williams, Director of External Policy and Innovation, Toynbee Hall
13:40	What can we do to improve the situation?	Workshop Session
14:40	Q&As	Panel
15:10	Call to action and closing remarks	Aled Evans, Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning, Neath Port Talbot Council
15:30 CLOSE		