

Reshaping Programme: Strengthening Communities - A response to Audit Wales Reports on Tackling Poverty and Third Sector Working

Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny
Committee 23rd October 2024

Background



In October 2023, a report on Strengthening Communities and work to tackle poverty and the cost-of-living crisis was referred to Cabinet with the recommendations of the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee, Governance and Audit Committee, Community Liaison Committee and Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee.



The report set out work being undertaken by the Council and the proposed approach to responding to four Audit Wales reports. Three reports focusing on poverty were all Wales reports and a Vale of Glamorgan specific report focused on working with the Third sector.



The Audit Wales reports encourage changes in how the Council works with the community, the third sector and social enterprises.



To assist with this work the Council engaged the Cwmpas development agency to undertake a programme of engagement on its behalf.

Methodology



The Cwmpas team undertook a review of the Council's strategic documents including the Council's Corporate Plan, The Annual Delivery Plan, the Public Services Board Wellbeing Plan, the Council's Procurement Policy and Strategy and documents relating to the allocation of the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).



A series of online interviews were undertaken with Council Officers to understand the current work being undertaken in relation to poverty and their experience of working with the Third Sector and Social Enterprise.



An online interview with members of the Ardal team was undertaken as the Vale of Glamorgan Council are part of the collaborative Ardal procurement partnership.



An online interview with the Leadership Team from Swansea Council's Tackling Poverty Service was undertaken to understand their approach to the anti-poverty agenda.

Methodology



Online interviews with key representatives from several Third Sector organisations and Social Enterprises based or working in the County were arranged and these focused on their working relationship with the Council.



Interviews and online focus groups were also held with Town and Community Councils.



The interviews explored the barriers and challenges to working with the Council, as well as any opportunities to develop, and their appetite to work together with the Council to deliver services.



Cwmpas undertook two engagement workshops which also discussed the initial findings, namely, a Social Enterprise workshop for key officers of the Council and a workshop based on Section 16 requirements for Third Sector providers in the County focusing on social care.



Cwmpas attended and presented to the Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee (VSJLC) to discuss initial findings.

Outcomes

Cwmpas produced a report presenting the key findings and their recommendations from the internal interviews and external engagement with the Third Sector and Social Enterprise.

A separate summary report outlines the engagement activities that Cwmpas undertook with Town and Community Councils.

Key Findings – VoGc Interviews



Cwmpas concluded from its review of the Council's strategic documents that there has already been a shift in priorities and actions towards a focus on tackling poverty more holistically and a greater emphasis on working with the Third Sector, Social Enterprise and community partners.



There is significant activity happening on the ground to tackle poverty, however, much of this work is funded via short term funding, which staff recognised can result in short term thinking.



It was recognised the Council had responded quickly to the cost-of-living crisis. However, rural poverty and pockets of deprivation within affluent areas were highlighted as issues which can be overlooked.



Concerns over the current asset transfer process and interviewees felt this could be strengthened to create opportunities for community ownership of assets.



Recognition that the Council cannot 'do it all' and now was a good time to review current working arrangements with Third Sector partners and identify areas to collaborate further with both Social Enterprise and Third Sector organisations in the future.

Key Findings - 3rd Sector, Social Enterprise and TCC Interviews



Participants considered they had strong working relationships with staff from the Council, generally these were with an individual member of staff, rather than with a wider team.



It was felt the Council engages proactively about some potential opportunities, but these engagement efforts can appear uncoordinated.



Third Sector organisations and Social Enterprises are out working with communities and often have ideas about how services with/or for the Council could be developed. These organisations would like the Council to develop a point of entry for these ideas.



They would like to be more involved in decision making and have greater opportunities to influence funding decisions that may affect the sector.



The Section 16 workshop highlighted that Third Sector organisations and Social Enterprises want to engage and work in partnership with the Council and each other, to explore service delivery ideas and provide commissioned services and are keen to have a conduit to enable this.



Town and Community Councils expressed a desire to be able to influence the decision-making process further and that the community asset transfer process needs to be reviewed.

Recommendations

Cwmpas recommends that:

The Council develop a Poverty Strategy, supported by a monitoring framework to review the remit and impact of the various workstreams to ensure alignment and consider longer term resourcing and investment.

The Council update the existing Voluntary Sector Compact engage differently with the Third Sector both through the Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee (VSJLC) membership and through a programme of proactive engagement activities using a similar approach to the Section 16 forum on engaging with the wider Third and Social Enterprise sectors to promote collaboration.

The Council undertake detailed mapping of the social enterprise sector and implement a series of awareness raising workshops to promote Social Enterprise amongst internal Council staff and Elected Members and develop web resources for social enterprises.

Within the Section 16 forum the Social Services team consider a programme which outlines procurement opportunities ahead, allows time to explore joint working between organisations to create co-produced solutions and allow the sectors voice to be heard.

The Council develop a clear definition and vision for community resilience and self-reliance, in line with the Audit Wales Report recommendations.

The Proposed Response & Recommended Way Forward



Regarding the development of a Poverty Strategy, work has been undertaken to build specific anti-poverty commitments into the development of the new Corporate Plan 2025-2030, and the Reshaping programme.



In response to the recommendations concerning the Council's relationship with the Third Sector, a new Relationship Statement has been included in the draft Corporate Plan 2025-2030. This would replace the existing Voluntary Sector Compact and will be consulted on as part of the Corporate Plan consultation.



Regarding Social Enterprises, the Council proposes to undertake further work as part of the Reshaping Programme and will include developing a better understanding of existing organisations and opportunities, and development of information on the Council's website.



The Council proposes to continue a standing agenda item at the S16 Forum to set out the procurement opportunities ahead for the next two years and will encourage a sector led Forum, given the opportunity to set agenda items and raise any issues pertinent to them.



The Council will review how procurement activities are being shaped, planned and designed.



In response to the recommendations concerning a clear definition and vision for community resilience and self-reliance, the Council is building these into the development of the Corporate Plan 2025-2030, and the Reshaping Programme.