

Written Submission to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

Because of the rurality of Powys and its sparse population poverty and deprivation tends to be hidden from official statistics, making some of the issues associated with poverty even harder to remedy. Living in a rural area tends to cost more (+10-20%) and accessing goods and services is often harder with less choice and alternatives. Although Powys has a high rate of employment this is not matched with levels of income which tend to be lower than the Welsh average.

Owning a private vehicle is almost a requirement of working as public transport is limited both in schedules and locations. The large distances involved in Powys also make it difficult to access service, such as health care. Almost one in five people have to travel more than 15 minutes (by car) to the GP's surgery, with much longer journeys needed to access hospital services, there being no district hospitals in Powys. Most homes in Powys do not have access to the gas network and rely on more expensive alternatives to heat their homes, which are often also inefficient.

The Powys Public Service Board

The Powys PSB was established in April 2016 and has been working on developing a well-being assessment and plan. The plan, towards 2040, was published on 2nd May and sets out a partnership vision of what Powys will look like in 2040. The PSB feels that by setting this long term agenda it can tackle the issues which take a more concerted joint approach to solve.

However the PSB's focus has been on preparing the ground for effective joint planning and working, making sure that the actions we take are the ones that will deliver the most benefit to our communities and businesses. Therefore, I have included more information of initiatives the council, and partners, are taking around poverty.

The Well-being Assessment

The assessment considered various aspects of well-being in Powys. The production of the assessment took around 18 months and involved a range of stakeholders and partners. The final assessment detailed 31 aspects of well-being in Powys, assets and deficits.

The findings of the assessment regarding poverty were as follows:

Analysis by stakeholders found that the three areas that impact most negatively on the national well-being goals are

- people's ability to travel around the county,
- suitable accommodation options for older people / living independently and
- poverty and deprivation.

Poverty and Deprivation:

Some areas of Powys are very deprived, due to many people in part time employment (46% of women work part-time) or on very low pay. In 2016, average weekly pay in Powys was £366 (Wales: £407, UK: £439). This was a fall of £15 per week in Powys since 2015, whilst Wales rose by £19 and UK by £14. The unemployment rate is 1% (1.3% male, 0.8% female) and Powys has a low number of workless households (15.3%, Wales: 19.4%)

Fuel poverty is high due to lack of access to cheaper fuels such as gas. Home ownership rates are in decline among the younger generation and people are remaining in the rental sector.

Travel times to GP surgeries and other public services is extremely poor, Ystradgynlais, in particular is in the worst 10% of areas in Wales.

Towards 2040, the Powys Well-being Plan

The PSB recognised that it needed to think longer term when developing its plan than just the immediate 5 years the plan would be in place. In April 2017 the PSB held a 'conversation' where, using the evidence from the assessment and other information they developed their vision for Powys in 2040. Much of this vision was underpinned the need to retain our young people providing them with skills and decent jobs in modern businesses which were in turn attracted to the county by the potential of an excellent work/life balance offered by the attractive and accessible countryside. The 4 objectives which make up the high level vision in the plan are:

- People in Powys will experience a stable and thriving economy
- People in Powys will enjoy a sustainable and productive environment
- People in Powys will be healthy, social motivated and responsible
- People in Powys will be connected by strong communities and a vibrant culture

Under each local objective there is more detail around what success will look like.

The economy objective explains how Powys will change to become - a prosperous county with a well-educated and skilled local workforce where opportunities exist for all and everyone can reach their full potential, reducing poverty and deprivation. The county's own talent, together with innovators and entrepreneurs who are attracted to the county, invest in Powys and contribute to its success.

One of the outcomes under this objective is:

- A strong and stable economy will improve wages, reducing poverty and disadvantage and improving people's overall health and well-being

The social objective anticipates a Powys that is - welcoming, outward looking county where residents enjoy a sense of well-being, belonging and a good quality of life, where there is fairness and equality of opportunity for all and people can achieve what they want.

Some of the outcomes under this objective are:

- People will have more choice and will be able to access the type of homes they want.
Advances in technology will ensure good access to housing that is affordable to live in
- Schools will offer pupils, of all abilities, a more flexible teaching approach ensuring everyone has the best possible school experience, achieves their potential and can move forward with their lives
- The college courses offered will be tailored to meet employment gaps so Powys businesses can employ home-grown talent wherever possible

The community and culture objective has outcomes supporting more local access to services, which are provided by local organisations.

- Community hubs will exist across the county offering residents a mix of services all under one roof, reducing the need for people to travel to several places
- Social enterprises, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and charities will play a vital role in delivering services locally, supporting the local economy

The steps that have been developed to deliver this vision in the short term cut across the objectives providing a joined up approach: improved digital infrastructure will help people to access the services they need more easily for example.

Work being undertaken by Powys County Council

The council's Vision 2025, corporate improvement plan, has a strong emphasis on improving the economic well-being of the residents of Powys. Many of our activities support this and the PSB's vision of a more economically stable county.

The Vision 2025, corporate improvement plan includes the following initiatives:

The Economy:

- Ensure there is a greater choice of affordable housing and extra care provision so people have a choice of where to live and stay in their communities
- Develop 250 new affordable homes across the county and support our housing association partners to develop a similar number of new affordable homes
- By 2019/20 we will develop an inward investment strategy and action plan to attract new and relocating business
- Help address barriers to employment to support people into work and better paid opportunities

Health and Care:

- Supporting Unpaid Carers - Ensuring the well-being of unpaid carers before, during and after caring through information, advice and assistance, supporting education, skill and training opportunities for employment, respite and community support
- Tackling Adverse Childhood Experiences - Working with families we will make the maximum positive impact within the first 1000 days of a child's life, focusing on preventing adverse childhood experiences. We will do this through developing a joint plan to implement good practice guidance
- Mental Health - Across all tiers, from health promotion through to specialist services focus on further improving integrated working arrangements and on well-being, early help and support for people of all ages
- Supported Housing - Develop suitable accommodation for young people, people with a disability and older people that enables them to access basic services, build good relationships with neighbours and others, and maintain their independence

Learning and Skills:

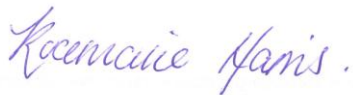
- We will continue to raise the attainment of all pupils, including vulnerable pupils, with a specific focus on pupils eligible for free school meals
- We will support schools to roll out the new education curriculum by 2022 which aims to equip young people for life and make them more adaptable to change
- We will provide key childcare and play requirements, moving towards delivering 30 hours of free early education and care for working parents by 2021

- We will improve routes to employability by:
 - Strengthening work based learning across the county, providing opportunities that encompass a diversity of formal, non-formal and informal arrangements including apprenticeships, work placements and informal learning on the job for all age groups by 2025
 - Creating additional apprenticeships, including higher and degree-level apprenticeships by 2025
 - Ensuring that there is easy access to high quality careers advice and guidance, and clear information about the local jobs market
 - Promoting the development of enterprise and work readiness skills in young people

Residents and Communities:

- By 2019 we will review the passenger transport offer for our communities and working with residents we will provide a service that is fit for purpose

The council has also introduced an impact assessment process which must be undertaken when developing new projects, service changes and budget proposals. As well as assessing the impacts against a number of legislative and regulatory requirements it includes a question about how the proposal will help to prevent poverty.



County Councillor Rosemarie Harris

Executive Leader, Powys County Council

25 May 2018

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