

SUBJECT: TACKLING POVERTY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

MEETING: Public Services Select Committee

DATE: 19th November 2020

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

To seek elected member endorsement for a broad coalition of public service partners to work in partnership to deliver the aims of Monmouthshire's Tackling Poverty and Inequality Plan.

To provide members with an overview of our approach to tackling poverty and inequality and to emphasise the importance of adopting a multi-agency approach.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That members communicate to Monmouthshire's Public Services Board their support for a joined-up, multi-agency approach to tackling poverty and inequality across the county.

That members consider the Public Service Board's aspirations to reduce inequalities between communities and within communities and to support and protect vulnerable people.

That members consider and comment on the emerging approach to involving partners (including private and community sector) in our collective efforts to address poverty and inequality.

3. KEY ISSUES:

It has long been recognised that within Monmouthshire poverty is often regarded as a 'hidden' issue. Whilst using aggregate measures, the county is generally regarded as more economically advantaged than many other local authority areas in Wales, this aggregation of data can serve to obscure the lived experience of many individuals families and households who experience very real financial hardship. These issues are not new for our county, but the effects of the pandemic-related economic downturn have thrown them into very sharp relief.

Since the Council resolution in the summer of 2020 to create two dedicated roles to lead and coordinate the tackling poverty and inequality agenda for Monmouthshire, a revised action plan has been developed, under the umbrella of the Social Justice Strategy. The council recognises, however, that its ability to make substantial progress on this agenda when acting in isolation is limited. Like other aspects of the county's Wellbeing Plan, poverty and inequality are complex problems which cut right across the remit of the public services – and beyond.

The draft plan will be taken to Monmouthshire's Public Service Board in early December 2020, to provide information and assurance to our public service partners, as well as to seek their active support and commitment to delivery against specific objectives.

Key aspects of the Draft Tackling Poverty and Inequality Plan

Definition of poverty.

Poverty is an undeniably complex concept which is rooted in the lived experience of the individual. It can prove difficult to define more difficult still to measure; all definitions are unsatisfactory in some respects, but on balance it is felt that it is helpful to seek to encapsulate a collective understanding of the term 'poverty'. Following discussion with partners, it is proposed that we adopt the widely-used Joseph Rowntree Foundation definition of poverty which is:

"When a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation)."

In order to provide some quantitative measure, we will also monitor the number of households where household income is below 60% of the median income for the UK (but recognise that measures of low income, whilst useful, are not the same as measures of poverty, because they take no account of a household's essential expenditure).

Shared Purpose

The proposed shared purpose set out in the draft action plan is:

"We will work together to promote equitable prosperity in Monmouthshire and wherever possible to prevent our citizens experiencing poverty.

We recognise that, despite our efforts, there will be points in people's lives at which they experience financial hardship. When this does occur we will come together to provide support to make that experience as brief, as infrequent and as manageable as possible. We will help people to emerge from that experience with greater levels of resilience."

Our Approach

Poverty is a result of both individual circumstances (e.g. life events/transition points) and circumstances over which individuals and households have limited control (such as the availability of local employment). We will take a multi-layered approach, supporting individuals and households who need specific help, whilst also striving to create neighbourhoods, communities and systems within which everybody has the opportunity to flourish.

Priority Areas

In light of the Covid 19 crisis the emerging priorities for this Action Plan will focus initially upon the following, whilst recognising that the challenge will be to build sufficient humanity into the system to recognise that when people are under financial stress they are not at their most rational:

- Employability skills and employment support;
- Children and young people disadvantaged by poverty;
- Mental health / emotional support / coping skills;
- Inequality - the particular character of poverty within a relatively affluent county; and
- Crisis prevention: helping people to access support at earliest opportunity, and support to navigate available offer.

In addition, there are two aspects which will weave throughout these priorities. These are:

- 1) Housing, because a secure, high quality home underpins every other aspect of a person's wellbeing; and
- 2) Community development and co-production, because lasting solutions can only be developed if the 'subjects' of interventions are empowered, involved and are able to exercise real agency in their own lives.

These priorities have been developed with partners in response to intelligence that has been gathered on the ground in a rapidly changing environment. They will be kept under constant review and may be subject to change over the life of this action plan. Any such changes will be reviewed by the Tackling Poverty and Inequality Action Group and Partnership on the basis of evidence and a clear rationale.

Partnership Structure

As discussed, poverty and inequality are complex problems which no single organisation has the ability to solve working in isolation. The catalyst for driving and delivering the actions set out in the plan will be the Tackling Poverty and Inequality Steering Group, which will report directly to the Public Service Board. This multi-agency steering group will also link appropriately with other key partnerships which come under the auspices of the PSB.

Membership of the steering group will be sufficiently flexible to adjust as necessary to the plan's priorities, but will not be confined to representation from Public Service Board partners. In particular there is currently a substantial third sector representation (all of whom are represented at PSB level by GAVO) which we would wish to see nurtured and potentially expanded a time goes on.

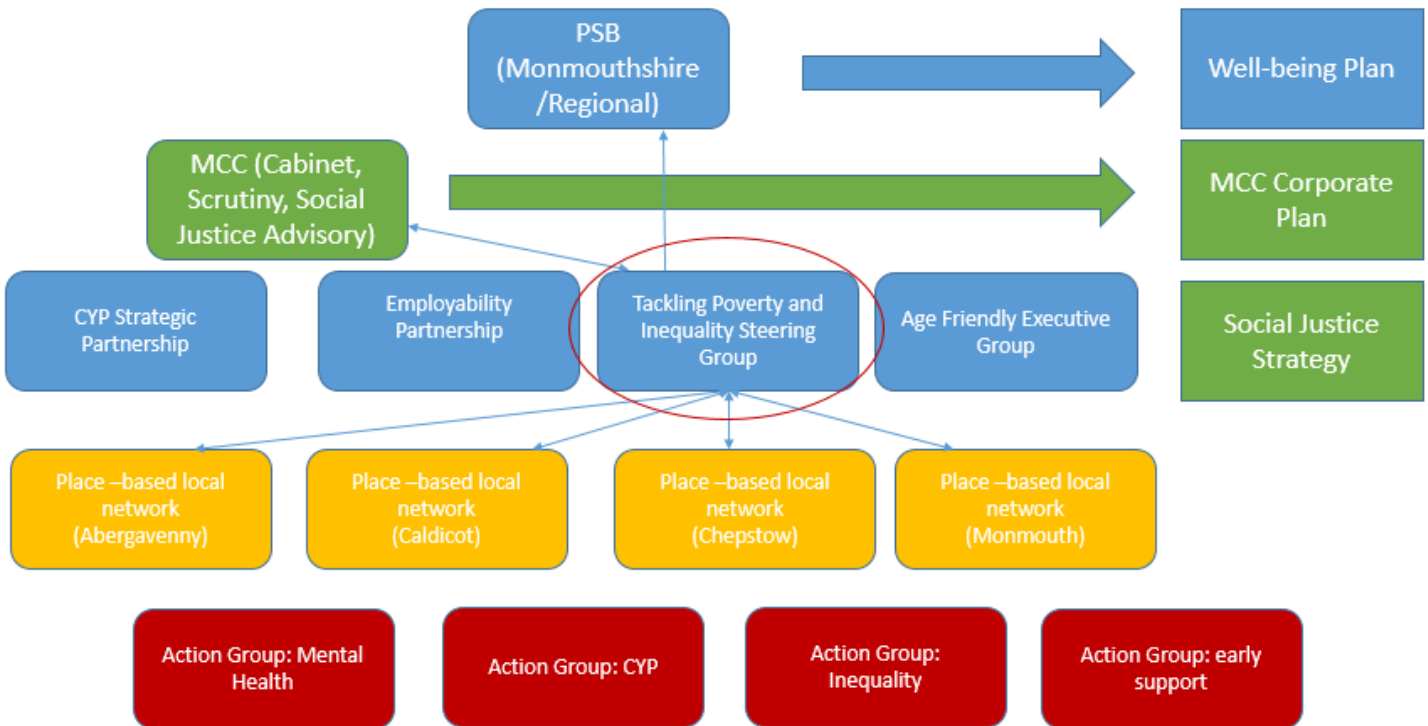
Through the various MCC service areas that are represented on the Steering Group, its work will also be reported to MCC's Social Justice Advisory Group, Strong Communities Select Committee and Cabinet.

In keeping with the principles of the Social Justice Strategy, co-production will be at the heart of our approach to tackling poverty and inequality; as such we will work with our communities as equal partners, working in a local, place-based way, using the local neighbourhood partnerships to bring the skills, knowledge and passions of local communities to the fore.

Finally, we have recently established a Monmouthshire Tackling Poverty and Inequality Network which notionally sits under the Steering Group and which aims to connect a wide coalition of individuals, groups and organisations across different sectors and geographical footprints in order to bring about meaningful action.

Public Service Board partners' commitment to all these groups will be essential to secure their long term success.

Housing and co-production



4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

Evaluations are being completed as these steps are developed and will be available for scrutiny when the work identifies key decisions that need to be taken. Delivery of this agenda is explicit within the county’s Wellbeing Plan, which is a key vehicle for our delivery of our commitments under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

5. REASONS:

Monmouthshire County Council has made a commitment to tackling poverty and inequality in the county. In order to do this effectively it is essential that the council works effectively in partnership with public service and other partners.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

There are no resource implications attached to this report.

7. CONSULTEES:

The Social Justice Advisory Group have been consulted on the broad principles of the proposed plan and delivery structure and will review a detailed draft before final approval is sought at Cabinet.

The Public Service Board's Tackling Poverty and Inequality Steering Group have been consulted regarding the proposed delivery structure for the action plan and the proposal has been developed in accordance with their feedback

8. AUTHOR:

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