



**West Cheshire Poverty Truth Advisory Board Delivering a Fairer Future**  
2<sup>nd</sup> October 2023

**Chaired by:** Barbara Dean and Lisa Denson

**Attendees**

Councillor Lisa Denson, Barbara, Carole, Sarah, Tyra, Tracey, Gus, Maureen, Mark, Rachel, Councillor Rachel Williams, Steph Ellis, Clare Roberts, Cath Fletcher, Alison Amesbury, Nancy Evans, Gillian Cowan, Jack Mayhew, Jade Cox.

**Apologies**

Shirley, David Briggs, Wayne Gayles, Susan, Jason Bishop, Antony, Sharon Marshall, Clare Card, Elaine Mitchell.

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Lisa welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a round of introductions.

**2. Notes from previous meeting**

All agreed that the notes of the previous meeting were an accurate record.

**3. Upcoming Issues for people in hardship**

**Pension Credit** - Gus raised the issue of people not claiming pension credit and whether there was an opportunity to promote take up during challenge poverty week.

**School Uniform** – it was identified that the cost of school uniform and school essentials is still having a big impact on families. Also it was noted that children are being penalised in school if they don't have the right items. There appears to be a lot of variation across different schools with different support and policies in place. There is also some good practice in place, for example through the Malpas Community Kitchen who are supporting families with preloved uniform. It was also noted that Mike Amesbury MP has done a lot of work in this area and could be approached around local activity.

**Actions:**

- **Pension Credit and Affordable Uniform to be included in Challenge Poverty Week if possible**
- **School Uniform task and finish group to be established.**

**4. Housing Update**

Alison Amesbury gave a presentation on the housing and homelessness landscape, including the housing register process and some of the support available. There have been some changes within the team including Dave Fenton the new manager with oversight of these areas.

Alison explained that the housing allocation policy gives people a banding (A-C) based on their housing need with band A being the most urgent need. Although there is support available to specific groups, for example care experienced young people, in the majority of cases the banding is due to housing need. Other groups such as ex offenders are supported through planned release arrangements but would fall within the existing processes.

The Council manages the housing register and the system but landlords upload properties to the site and select the successful applicant. Alison noted that there is significant pressure on the available stock with demand outstripping supply. In particular there is high demand for one bedroom properties, larger four bedroom properties and also waits for properties that require adaptations.

Alison gave an overview of the increase in homelessness and high numbers of people in temporary accommodation. There are a number of factors at play including the increase in S21 – no fault evictions by private landlords, the escalating cost of living affecting both tenants and landlords, and people not seeking help and advice early enough in the process. Activity is planned to develop a local ‘call before you serve’ offer to landlords with an aim of reducing evictions, and also to improve homelessness prevention services.

Wayne Gayles provided a written update which Barbara presented to the board. It resonated with the wider housing picture identifying that demand for homes remains high. Customers are still affected by cost-of-living pressures and support services remain at saturation with growing and complex support

needs. Wayne also identified that more customers are presenting for support for the first time. Weaver Vale has a long-standing focus on helping people to sustain their tenancies, which has resulted in no evictions year to date for rent arrears and rent collection and arrears performance holding steady year to date.

It was noted that there is some variation across the housing associations within the Borough about the information and support that they provide to tenants, and also in the engagement of tenants. There was also discussion about the face to face offer in place for residents.

Steph mentioned that there is a webinar coming up hosted by Cheshire West Voluntary Action aimed at community and voluntary groups to find out more about support routes for people struggling with their housing situation, signposting and prevention.

## **5 Challenge Poverty Week and Walk Further Together Exhibition**

Nancy gave an overview of the planned activity for the Exhibition at the University. It was planned to have events on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> October and Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> October. This would be followed by a public exhibition at St Mary's Creative Space on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> November, the proposal was to have day one targeted to people who are already active and engaged in the food and poverty agenda, and one day targeted at the general public and wider civic and business leads and decision makers.

There are also planned activities coming together during Challenge Poverty Week taking place between 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> October. Inspirers will have stalls in Blacon and Ellesmere Port on 16<sup>th</sup> October and in Northwich and Winsford on 18<sup>th</sup> October.

It was agreed it would be a good opportunity to invite social prescribers, community groups, and schools to visit and find out more alongside practical ways to support the agenda.

### **Actions**

- **Sharon to finalise arrangements and send out confirmation.**
- **Clare and Steph to feed in their suggestions and potential links to the Guarantee our essentials campaign.**

## **6. Local Transport Plan Consultation**

Jack and Jade gave an overview of the upcoming engagement to develop a new local transport plan that is fit for the future of Cheshire West and Cheshire. They introduced an exercise to get some initial feedback from PTAB members.

It was noted by all what a crucial role transport plays in the life of many and how it intersects with poverty, for example, in making sure people can access essential services, hospital appointments, school and affordable food.

It was suggested to engage with Dial House and the Autism Hub, GP surgeries and hospitals and schools as part of the engagement. A specific session has been arranged to have a full discussion and feed into the process on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

**Poverty Truth Advisory Board Development Workshop – 7<sup>th</sup> December**