

# Cost of Living Case Studies

How agencies and partnerships are making a difference in the cost-of-living crisis

March 2024



Adeiladu Cymru  
Iachach  
Building a Healthier  
Wales

## Feedback

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## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all the individuals who agreed to share their work as well as to the volunteers and staff who ran the projects highlighted here. We are also grateful to colleagues and networks who helped us identify the great work taking place on the cost of living response across Wales and the UK.

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## Key learning points

We heard from a range of partners and have highlighted 8 in-depth examples of recent work related to the cost of living crisis across Wales and the UK in this document with two further Welsh examples briefly highlighted.

All of the major themes (food, energy and housing; income and debt; mental health and well-being; health and care) from our All-Wales Cost of Living summit in March 2023 are covered. Work highlighted includes examples at both the local/regional level and national level and in both urban and rural areas. It covers the breadth of Wales and beyond and features a variety of agencies and partners, including local authorities, the NHS, private businesses, and the voluntary/community sector.

Factors that delivered benefits included:

- The use of simple schemes and designs with proper planning, including use of co-location and single points of contact
- Maximising income via UK level resources
- Multi-agency working and coordination via regional bodies, such as public service boards or local government groups
- Incorporating the voluntary/community sector, private local business, and local NHS organisations
- Genuine community co-production that incorporates local needs and data and which identifies clear targets for action
- The use of pilot approaches and iteratively evaluating and modifying the relevant programmes, with expansion if successful
- The use of targeted approaches where appropriate, such as focussing on children/young people, deprived areas or elderly people
- Being flexible and adaptive when logistical challenges around delivery are inevitably encountered
- Setting out clear values, such as the Future Generations Act Well-being Goals and Ways of Working

- Communications planning on campaigns and ensuring that message channels and accessibility are accounted for
- Planning evaluations beforehand, partnering with universities and measuring both qualitative and quantitative data, especially social value and return on investment tools/metrics

Conversely, key challenges included:

- Typical short length of funding and related uncertainties
- An over-reliance on simple qualitative feedback for evaluations
- A neglect of impact measurement and learning points in certain cases
- Issues often arising when involvement of multiple IT and administrative systems occurs in projects

## Summary table

Title	Intervention	Setting	Theme	Partners	Impact
Building a Healthier Wales pilot	Income maximisation pilot	Cwm Taf Morgannwg; targeted at young people	Income & debt	Citizen's advice; local public services	Increased engagement with significant income gains for clients
Children's hospital alliance reducing 'Was Not Brought' rates	Data analysis and pilot interventions, including transport assistance	Children's hospitals across UK	Health & care	Research alliance; hospital charities; NHS	Transport and administrative support cost-saving interventions for reducing 'Was Not Brought' rates
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	Pension top-up campaign; health and well-being advice	Multiple local authorities; targeted at older persons	Income & debt; Mental health & well-being	Local authorities; national charity; NHS; police	Generated over £10million in unclaimed benefits; over 300,000 printed guides distributed
Hospital to a healthier home	Discharge support, including home improvements and advice	Hospitals across Wales	Health & care	Hospitals; local businesses; social care	Significant reductions in length of stay and re-admission; significant housing funding accessed
Keep Warm, Keep Well Pembrokeshire	Warm spaces and community hubs	County voluntary council; local community spaces across county	Food, energy & housing	Voluntary council; local volunteers; regional and national funders	28 community hubs maintained; Energy vouchers, fuel top-up, air fryers, income maximisation advice and hot meals distributed

Title	Intervention	Setting	Theme	Partners	Impact
Participatory budgeting in Gwent	Community involvement in funding cost of living measures	Local communities across region	Mental health & well-being	Local authorities; public service board; charities	Successfully established participatory budgeting and received positive feedback
Menter Môn community freezers	Free community food pantries using freezers with local volunteers	Local rural communities across Anglesey	Food, energy & housing	Local businesses; local authority; local volunteers	Thousands of meals successfully distributed; positive feedback from service users
Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association	Heating vouchers, cooking lessons, and redistributing food waste	Housing association tenants in Merthyr Tydfil	Food, energy & housing	Housing association; charities; local businesses	High social value demonstrated through training and mild exercise; significant food distribution
Children's Vale of Glamorgan food projects	Community food pantries (give what you can) and classes	Local communities across county	Food, energy & housing	Local authority; local charities; schools	Hundreds supported with food parcels, cost of living advice and classes

## Background and methods

This project is part of the Building a Healthier Wales response to the cost of living crisis in Wales, using a public health approach. This follows the publication of *Cost of living crisis in Wales: A public health lens* by Public Health Wales and the successful *All-Wales Cost of Living summit* in March 2023. Attendees at our summit clearly identified that a series of case studies was needed to rapidly share best practice on responding to the cost of living crisis in a sustainable manner.

Our examples included:

- Income maximisation pilot by BaHW [Income & Debt]
- ‘Was Not Brought’ tools and parental food provision by Children’s Hospital Alliance [Health & Care]
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Stockport Council and Trafford Council (Pension credit top-up campaign) [Income & Debt]
- Hospital to a Healthier Home (discharge support) [Health & Care]
- Keep Warm, Keep Well in Pembrokeshire (Warm spaces/hubs)
- [Food, energy & housing; Mental health]
- Gwent Public Service Board participatory budgeting [Mental health]
- Menter Môn, Anglesey (community freezers) [Food, energy & housing]
- Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association [Food, energy & housing]
- Vale of Glamorgan food projects in Llantwit Major and Cadog’s Corner (Food pantries and community classes) [Food, energy & housing]



## Methods

Case studies allow for the collection of single or multiple sources of data/knowledge to understand how interventions are implemented within varying contexts (Shannon et al., 2021). An explanatory case study approach was undertaken for this work (Yin, 2003). Our research question was “how have public bodies and voluntary/community sector organisations impacted on the negative consequences related to the cost of living crisis?”. The ECLIPSE tool [Wildridge & Bell, 2002] was used for data extraction and retrospective case studies were identified and selected following a broad search of key websites and suggestions from partners.

The following criteria were used in the initial selection of cases:

- UK based intervention(s) delivered in the last 24 months.
- Examples align with the four themes from our cost of living summit (health & care; food, energy & housing; income & debt; mental health & well-being)
- Example can demonstrate a measurable impact
- Appraisal performance using an adapted RE-AIM framework [ref]

The project team then gathered additional information on the following:

- Nature of the intervention (What?)
- What key factors ensured delivery (How?)
- What changes have occurred as a result of the intervention (So what?)
- What learning has occurred (What would you do differently?)
- Further information such as quotes, images and links to the work

# Case Study 1

## Building a Healthier Wales income maximisation pilot in Cwm Taf Morgannwg (income & debt)

### What?

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, a specific concern arose around 16-24 year olds (a group particularly affected by job insecurity) lacking sufficient money and resources for health. This was therefore targeted by the strategic, multi-agency Building a Healthier Wales Coordination Group, featuring senior leaders across all sectors in Wales. Building a Healthier Wales is an ongoing initiative, established for the prevention element of Wales's long term health & social care plan.

In 2021, the coordination group was able to use underspend from the national early years and prevention fund to pilot a new approach to income maximisation. Specifically, the pilot was a targeted outreach and partnership programme (using advertising, media and referrals) to provide financial advice and maximise income. In addition to targeting a particular demographic, it was also targeted to a specific health board with known levels of high deprivation.

The programme helped to drive uptake to the existing Advicelink Cymru service, a Welsh Government funded Citizens Advice service designed to help people who are most in need of advice services, particularly those who would not usually seek advice. They in turn provided advice on income, employment and benefits to those who needed it.

## How does it relate to our cost of living findings so far?

This project was conceived as a pilot with a robust evaluation (including comparator area) planned from conception. The project built on existing partnerships and the established Advice Link Cymru service as a foundation. It drew on voluntary and community sector links and structures to establish new partnerships and drive uptake through advertising and referrals. It was also able to refer to partners in turn where appropriate and, finally, it sought to access UK level financial support.

It responded to a clear reported need and target group (people aged 16-24) and impacted on our income & debt theme. Unexpectedly, a benefit of the work was provision of mental health advice in response to emergent need, reflecting the interplay between finances and mental well-being. The work also touched on Fair Work, which is a wider theme in the wider determinants of health.

## What were the outcomes and impacts?

In the pilot area client survey, 53% needed advice on benefits and tax credits and around 1 in 5 on debt and housing. Depth interviews reinforced the difficulties that young people have found themselves in due to rising costs, lower incomes and poor budgeting skills. 20% of young people in the pilot area self-reported a mental health issue, the same as across Wales. This highlights a major issue for this age group.

Advisers are considered professional, friendly, understanding and good listeners. They were able to build good relationships with young clients and 90% of clients found the service helpful. Compared to the previous year, client numbers of any age have risen in both the pilot (77%) and comparator areas (19%).

The findings point to the intervention as the driver of higher increases in uptake in the pilot area, though other factors cannot be excluded as contributing to this difference.

153 young clients in the pilot area had an income gain (total income gain £408,652), 5 had debts written off (£38,749), 258 had re-imbursments (£13,438) and 19 had payments rescheduled (£52,447). 89% said they were likely to contact Citizens Advice again if they needed help in future.

## Enablers, barriers and lessons learned

The pilot benefited from building on existing infrastructure and a simple model, including a single advice fund with an established, expert provider with excellent outcomes. The project featured a well-planned evaluation from the start with appropriate comparator mechanism. The pilot also benefited from the high potential of the target group, with many young people who would benefit from the service not having heard of it before. Finally, being able to rapidly establish informal partnerships within the community and community sector in the endeavour also proved useful.

Timeline and funding challenges only allowed for limited proactive engagement with young people and partnership development despite the identified need. There were communication and monitoring challenges related to timings and time pressure and awareness needs to be raised that Citizens Advice can support young people with the issues identified in this pilot.

A longer-term project and the timing of funding streams will be considered in future alongside more formal and interactive partnership arrangements. The branding and promotion of Citizens Advice will also be considered in how it relates to young people with social media identified as a clear future channel.

Finally, campaign monitoring and evaluation tools will be introduced in future.

## Further Information

"I would 100% recommend it over any other help that anybody else would look for. People my age may be a bit, I don't know whether it would be sceptical or just generally naive. I think people my age might think there isn't anything they could do. They don't really know. But I would 100% tell anybody my age that the best people to contact in this situation is Citizens Advice because no matter what help they think might be out there, if they can't help they can point you in the right direction"

<https://publichealthnetwork.cymru/topic/building-a-healthier-wales/>



**Are you aged 18-24?**

Do you need advice on which benefits you can claim?  
Do you need financial support and guidance?  
Are you struggling with debts?

**Citizens Advice Merthyr Tydfil can help**

**Telephone advice - 01685 382188**  
For a local advice appointment or for any ongoing queries, please contact our admin line.

**Email advice - [advice@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:advice@citizensadvice.org.uk)**  
For advice via email, contact our advice email address.

**Universal Credit - 08000 241 220**  
For help claiming Universal Credit, call our Help to Claim team.

**Advice online**  
Our website [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) is available to you at any time.

**cyngor ar bopeth** **citizens advice** Merthyr Tudful Merthyr Tydfil



**Citizens Advice RCT @RCTCAB · Feb 16**

**Aged 16-24**

Our team can help you to make sure you're getting all of the money you should be.

Call or email us for more info.

**Are you aged 16 - 24?**

**Do you need support and advice to help ensure you are having all of the income you are entitled to?**

**Call or email us for an appointment.**

**Phone number: 01443 409284**  
**Email address: [Enquiries@carct.org.uk](mailto:Enquiries@carct.org.uk)**

**cyngor ar bopeth** **citizens advice** Rhondda Cynon Taf

## Case Study 2

### Reducing 'Was Not Brought' (WNB) rates and tackling family food poverty by the Children's Hospital Alliance (health & care)

#### What?

The Children's Hospital Alliance brings together 13 of England and Wales's biggest paediatric hospitals, undertaking a number of funded projects and schemes. Two recent examples include schemes to reduce WNB rates, and the tackling of family food poverty during hospital stays.

For the former, the scheme used local data in combination with machine learning to drill down into differences in WNB rates between the most and least deprived groups of children. This then drove the development and selection of a variety of local pilot interventions, targeted at the most deprived groups, which were then measured for ongoing impact. Interventions included transport assistance, administrative pre-clinic calls, interactive patient portals, clinician pre-clinic calls and school based appointments.

For the latter, food voucher/meal provision schemes were created and provided in 9 hospital sites which allowed clinical staff to provide parents/guardians in need with free/subsidised meals on site providing a significant cost-saving for the household.

## How does it relate to our cost of living findings so far?

The work built off an established healthcare based partnership with strong links to academia and the voluntary/community sector. It made extensive use of modern digital technology and local data and utilised ongoing evaluation from the outset. It also sought to address known need and did so with an equity lens, focussing on deprived groups.

Specifically, it dealt with the health & care theme but by utilising tools centred on financial support and the Cost of Living crisis.

## What were the outcomes and impacts?

Overall, the WNB rates were reduced by 52% in targeted groups with a further 17% increase in advance cancellation. Advance cancellations are ultimately beneficial as they allow for the relevant appointment slots to be re-used. Key findings included a cost benefit of ~£5 for every pound invested for transport support interventions and £2 for every pound invested for a pre-clinic telephone call from an administrator to provide a reminder about the appointment and an offer to re-book. Benefits were not identified on the same scale for the other types of interventions. Positive feedback was received throughout for all interventions.

For the food voucher/meal provision scheme, positive qualitative feedback on well-being of carers and continuity of caring was reported as well as cited benefits for household finances

## Enablers, barriers and lessons learned

The scheme benefited from the use of an existing research network that was able to provide project support. It also benefited from strong local leaders who bought into the schemes and a clear focus on poverty and reducing WNB rates, emphasising a cost saving and equity focus and rationale. The use of local data and ongoing measurement was key to generating the most important findings of the study and supporting the argument to continue the interventions, particularly for transport support. Expressing the results in cost-benefit terms also helped generate buy-in and ongoing commitments from stakeholders. Many of these enablers were cited in our summit.

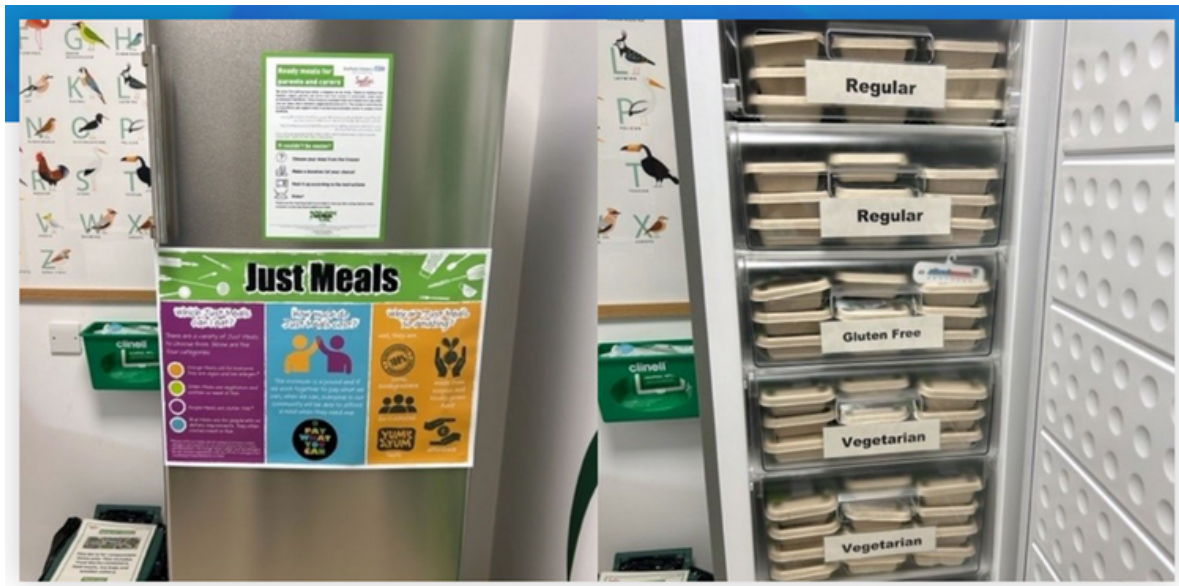
Barriers included the quick time-scale which was partially mitigated by simple design and rapid, clear communications. Implementation and availability of local data varied significantly with IT problems being common, however local leadership and project support from the network ensured effective adaptations could be made. Ideally, pilots would have run for longer with greater post pilot planning as commitments on future funding or match funding proved difficult in certain instances.

## Further Information

“This has made a huge difference to me and my child, as I’ve been able to stay and help support my child on their most difficult and poorly days as I’m not hungry and am able to give better support. This has also ensured that I have not had to go into debt to afford to eat whilst my child is staying in the hospital and I cannot work” - *Parent*

<https://childrenshospitalalliance.co.uk/our-work/>





## Case Study 3

### Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Stockport Council and Trafford Council: A city region response to the cost of living (Income & debt; Mental health & well-being)

#### What?

A monthly cost of living response group brings together more than 50 people from across the city region – including council officers, housing providers, police and the voluntary sector – to share good practice, raise on-the-ground issues and showcase some of the support available. Being age-friendly is a ‘golden thread’ running through work with a city region approach taken, including close working with NHS, police, and Fire & Rescue.

A ‘Winterwise’ printed guide was produced in partnership with a national charity with input from local partners (councils, NHS, police, fire and rescue) and older residents. 362,000 English language copies distributed by councils, ambulance service, housing providers, pharmacies, transport, and the voluntary and community sector. The booklet was also put up in local spaces, such as libraries and supermarkets, with easy-read, audio, digital, British sign language, Bengali and Urdu versions.

A pension top-up campaign was also delivered over a number of years in Greater Manchester. Organisations were offered free printed resources and for staff and volunteers to attend a free one-hour online training session with Independent Age on Pension Credit and Attendance Allowance.

The resources were used in neighbourhoods by councils, housing providers and community groups, including community group drop-ins, door knocking and telephoning. Local councils were provided with data packs with information at a ward level estimating the number of pension credit claimants to target wards. Certain councils also distributed winter well-being packs to recently discharged older residents and committed to becoming real living wage employers.

The combined authority partnered with national charity Independent Age, which funded printing of up to 100,000 jointly branded Don't Miss Out leaflets, which were distributed across the 10 council areas in Greater Manchester. The leaflets were aimed at older people, their family and friends, and frontline workers, and directed people to Independent Age's Helpline and to the free Independent Age information guides about later life financial entitlements. With capacity in advice services across Greater Manchester extremely limited, LAs agreed to promote the Independent Age Helpline and website as the main points of contact. Campaign messaging was also printed on 250,000 pharmacy paper bags in target areas, where pension credit was not being claimed by many.

### How does it relate to our cost of living findings so far?

The general approach reflects a good example of multi-agency, partnership working, featuring both statutory organisations and charities. It featured the provision of information to vulnerable groups prior to winter via a preventive, co-produced resource that helped to mitigate cost of living pressures as well as potential hospital admissions.

Specifically on income and debt, pension Credit is extra money from the Department of Work & Pensions designed to help with daily living costs for people over state pension age and on a low income.

For older people, a successful application for Pension Credit could mount to an additional £3,300 a year to help with living costs, with even small Pension Credit awards granting eligibility to other benefits including housing costs, council tax, and heating bills. With rising costs of living, promoting Pension Credit is a key way in which Age-friendly Communities can support older adults to live well.

## What were the outcomes and impacts?

Over 300,000 printed copies of the Winterwise booklet were distributed with positive feedback from older residents on their content and accessibility, the relevant webpages also received thousands of unique visitors. The duration of the pension top up and Winterwise campaign coincided with an additional £10 million generated in annual unclaimed benefits with the biggest gains actually coming from passported benefits that accompany pension credit.

## Enablers, barriers and lessons learned

Evaluations of previous campaigns were very valuable with particular lessons including the importance of co-producing resources, using multiple communication channels (including printed materials), and considering accessibility and digital inclusion of any provided information. These evaluations were high-quality, having resulted from a partnership with a local university department.

Working with an established national charity expertise in information and advice and the ability to provide training was also an asset. The project also benefited from the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub's existing partnership and network working arrangements and long term commitments to city region and age friendly approaches.

These existing partnerships were also able to ensure that high quality local data was available for use.

It was acknowledged that there were still difficulties in ensuring good, even coverage across the city region with resources available and varying levels of commitment between local authorities. An evaluation with further lessons in underway for this latest work.

## Further Information

“The magazine was informative and sends the message that old people are not expected to sit at home and vegetate” - *Service user*

<https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/greater-manchester-combined-authority-stockport-council-and-trafford-council-city#pension-top-up-campaign->



## Case Study 4

### Hospital to a healthier home (health & care)

#### What?

This programme started as single hospital operation in 2019 and has since evolved into national policy following a successful three month pilot. It now receives a combination of local health board funding, regional integration funding and NHS delivery unit support, and is present in 17 hospitals across five health boards. The aim is to support staff and patients with quicker, safe discharges; to improve patient flow through the hospital; and to reduce readmissions. Specific issues in Wales have been identified around care packaging, step down facilities and housing. Wales has particularly poor quality housing in turn leading to high fall rates and poorer health in older people. It also has longstanding issues regarding hospital flow and community discharge of elderly people from hospitals.

Caseworkers work with NHS staff to identify relevant patients and that timely home adaptations/repairs are made. Home assessment also occurs following discharge with falls advice and home safety advice/work, ongoing housing support, welfare benefit checks, charitable sources, housing grants, community occupational therapy and energy advice. The service involves NHS inpatient ward staff, the voluntary and community sector, Welsh Government, local authorities and recently has expanded directly into some emergency departments.

## How does it relate to our cost of living findings so far?

This is an innovative programme that has arisen as a small pilot in response to a longstanding system disconnect issue between health and housing and has managed to secure long-term funding commitments following robust, ongoing evaluations that have demonstrated cost-savings for redirected investment. It involves genuine multi-agency partnership working, including work in the NHS and use of regional level bodies. This scheme and many of these enablers featured extensively in our summit.

The project delivers a range of items related to our themes of housing, energy, health and care

## What were the outcomes and impacts?

For 2021-22 alone, the programme saved 25,520 bed days and halved the re-admission rate (the service has a readmission rate of 5.7% compared to a national average of between 12-15%) for those it served yielding a return of investment of £8.60 for every £1 spent.

Significant amounts in funding have been accessed and increasing demand has been well managed with very positive feedback from patients and staff.

Between January 2023 and March 2023 (Q4) it achieved the following:

- 2415 referrals
- 941 Healthy Home Checks
- 234 successful benefit applications (some of these are applications from Q3 that were not approved until Q4), totalling £941,196 (approx. increased £4022 increased annual income per patient)



- 2862 home improvements to a value of £867,159
- 11354 bed days saved

## Enablers, barriers and lessons learned

Key enablers included the development and use of best practice guidance, use of quality standards, high quality training of case workers, gathering and incorporation of feedback from partners, raising awareness of the service (for example by attending ward staff inductions) and co-location on hospital sites. In addition, strong partnership working at local, regional and national level backed by robust evaluation evidence has been key to scaling up the work from the initial strong pilot.

The importance of communication and feedback loops has been vital in gaining hospital staff trust. As the service becomes more embedded, the number and quality of referrals increases. Feedback has highlighted unique aspects of the service. For example, caseworkers taking photos of patient's homes to add to OT assessments in hospital, providing valuable context and adding value to OT assessments, or the fact that the service can move furniture (social care staff and local authorities no longer do this, leading to potential delays).

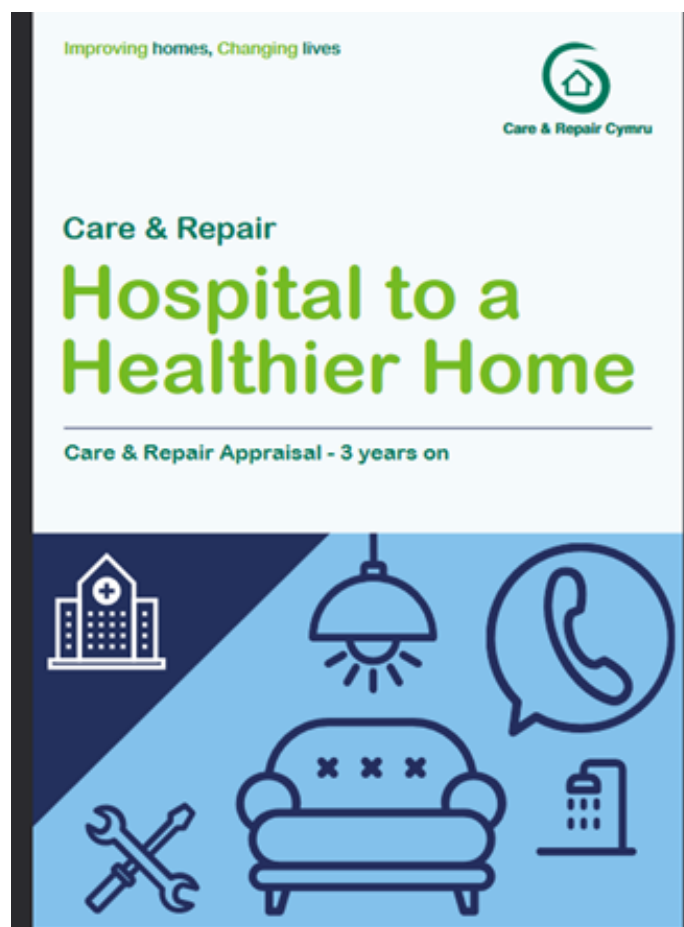
Lessons for the future include expansion of physical presence, including in emergency departments. They are seeking even better integration of the service in response to high ward staff turnover, agency staff and staff rotation in hospitals. One of the means for this is seeking integration into national discharge planning guidance by Welsh Government. Finally, the programme is also seeking further stable and long term funding and to improve on data sharing and monitoring at a strategic level.



## Further Information

“The quality [of discharges] is a lot better since we’ve got Care & Repair because there are a lot more checks going on than we would have done and been able to action previously. If you’ve got people with, say chest problems with damp and things in property, because they are those properties that actually been changed now, that stops them being readmitted again in the future because of the housing condition. So, it’s a knock-on preventative effect” - *Ward staff*

<https://careandrepair.org.uk/projects/hospital-to-a-healthier-home/>



## Case Study 5

### Keep Warm, Keep Well in Pembrokeshire (food, energy & housing)

#### What?

Keep Warm Keep Well (KWKW) in Pembrokeshire is a programme of support established in October 2022 for residents of Pembrokeshire during the cost of living crisis. Work took place to connect people to local information, support and services to help them throughout the coldest months of the year in response to the Cost of Living crisis. Across Pembrokeshire, communities and organisations responded to the crisis offering a range of local solutions, supported by the programme.

The associated Pembrokeshire Community Hub was made the single point of contact for anyone experiencing financial hardship or who would like information about what support is available in their area as part of the Keep Warm, Keep Well programme. Local solutions created included Warm Welcome Community Spaces, single point of contact, hot meal provision, energy and fuel vouchers, warm packs, air fryer delivery, discretionary funding for fuel top-ups (working with private partners), fuel poverty advice, income maximisation support, baby clothing banks, and pet food banks.

## How does it relate to our cost of living findings so far?

The work built off an established multi-agency, cross-sector partnership with a co-ordinating role for the County Voluntary Council for Pembrokeshire, partners included the local authority and voluntary/community sector. The Council already had experience of distributing local, regional and national funds when funding came in for work. The use of a single point of contact and central community spaces (with co-location of several solutions) were consistently highlighted as good practice in our All-Wales Cost of Living summit.

Specifically, this work sought to address food, energy and fuel (with a particular focus on rural fuel issues such as reliance on oil heating), and income/debt. The solutions tackled many aspects of these and certain aspects, such as air fryer distribution, sought to take a longer term, sustainable, cost saving approach.

## What were the outcomes and impacts?

On warm hubs, 73 Warm Welcome Community Spaces were provided with grant funding and roughly 15,000 people benefited from these with over 500 volunteers involved at various points in delivery. Over 12,000 hot meals were provided in these community spaces.

On fuel and energy, over 700 energy vouchers were issued and roughly 600 'Warm Packs' were delivered. Roughly 260 air fryers were distributed and 25 £250 fuel top-ups for heating oil issued.

Finally, 521 people were provided with income and fuel poverty advice/support which yielded an estimated £12,000 in reduced bills or funding accessed for clients.

40 older people were supported with income maximization with over £11,000 in additional grants/benefits accessed. Over 2000 calls were received by the Pembrokeshire Community Hub and 140,692 leaflets were delivered to households alongside thousands of webpage views and social media interactions.

## Enablers, barriers and lessons learned

The scheme benefited from a simple, centralised format using an established multiagency partnership with a strong track record. It was also able to make use of significant volunteer interest and the high numbers of volunteers made a crucial difference. The scheme also worked well cross-sector with a voluntary council in a coordinating role. These all featured in our All-Wales Cost of Living summit as suggestions, and the work covered our income and debt, fuel, and energy themes.

Lessons for the future included considering the use of dedicated professionals and referrals for certain aspects of financial support and advice, helping to address difficulties in accessing certain benefits or discretionary funding. The scheme was developed quickly and further advance planning was recommended in future around practicalities of delivery. For example, certain issues arose around fuel and heating oil top-ups regarding voucher use and deliveries by private sector companies. These issues were subsequently resolved with pragmatic and practical conversations but it was reflected that this could have happened in advance of the scheme by communicating with those companies earlier.

## Further Information

“During this “cost of living crisis” it has been increasingly difficult for clients to be able to access the most suitable option to deal with their debts because of the costs involved when the most suitable option is insolvency. It has also been more difficult to access charitable support to pay the costs of insolvency. Debt relief orders and bankruptcy offer a fresh start to people who simply can’t repay their debts. But upfront application fees mean that some people are priced out... Recent Citizens Advice data shows 50% of the people we help with debt have a negative budget - meaning their income doesn’t even cover essential bills and spending. The availability of funds from KWKW has ensured that clients are able to access the most suitable options for them to deal with their debts to be able to make a fresh start and are not excluded due to costs”  
- Staff member

<https://www.pavs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/KWKW-Report-June-2023-V2.pdf>



The poster features a background of a pink and white geometric pattern. At the top left is the Wales 2023 logo, and at the top right is the Hwb Cymunedol Sir Benfro Pembrokeshire Community Hub logo. The main title 'Keep Warm, Keep Well in Pembrokeshire' is in bold purple text. Below it, the text states: 'The cost of living affects everyone. Support is available via Pembrokeshire Community Hub. Call 01437 723660 or email enquiries@pembrokeshirecommunityhub.org'. A photograph shows a person in a colorful winter jacket looking at a document. To the right of the photo, it says: 'Visit www.connectpembrokeshire.org.uk and click 'Keep Warm, Keep Well''. Below the photo, a section titled 'Support available:' lists four bullet points: 'Map of warm welcome spaces available via www.connectpembrokeshire.org.uk or call the Hub to find your nearest.', 'Information on a wide range of cost-of-living support.', 'Connecting you with local support and services who can help when finances are stretched.', and 'Access to mobile data to stay connected.' The bottom section has the heading 'One call, that's all' in bold purple, followed by the text: 'We're recruiting community volunteers to ensure no-one goes cold or hungry this winter - if you have a spare hour or two, please call us.'

**Keep Warm, Keep Well  
in Pembrokeshire**

The cost of living affects everyone.  
Support is available via Pembrokeshire Community Hub.  
Call **01437 723660** or email  
**enquiries@pembrokeshirecommunityhub.org**

Visit  
**www.connectpembrokeshire.org.uk**  
and click  
**'Keep Warm, Keep Well'**

**Support available:**

- Map of warm welcome spaces available via **www.connectpembrokeshire.org.uk** or call the Hub to find your nearest.
- Information on a wide range of cost-of-living support.
- Connecting you with local support and services who can help when finances are stretched.
- Access to mobile data to stay connected.

**One call, that's all**

**We're recruiting community volunteers to ensure no-one goes cold or hungry this winter - if you have a spare hour or two, please call us.**

## Case Study 6

### Menter Môn Community Freezers (food, energy & housing)

#### What?

As the cost-of-living crisis takes its toll, the aim of the project is to help tackle food poverty by providing free quality meals in community freezers across the Island. Delivered through the Neges project, Menter Môn, Anglesey Council works together to stock ten freezers in ten community hubs (open on a weekly basis) across the island (focussed on deprived rural areas) with locally produced ready meals made by local businesses. Each hub had a local community leader who helped identify particular persons to target in the local community and to coordinate personal deliveries if necessary.

This was in response to food poverty being a known local issue and it used microwave meals to overcome typical issues with food distribution, such as people not having the capability to travel, or cook and work with ingredients due to costs, lack of knowledge, disability and so forth.

#### How does it relate to our cost of living findings so far?

This project relates to our food theme and was a response to local needs around food insecurity. It highlights extensive partnership working between communities, local authorities, charities and local private businesses to support the community, a recurring theme in our summit.

Finally, it used local community hubs as accessible points of contact, building on existing work by the local authority and community warm spaces.

## What were the outcomes and impacts?

The scheme has so far distributed 16,000 meals since January 2023, including up to 12,000 meals in one 12-week period, with food deliveries often being fully distributed within a few hours at the hubs. The scheme was externally evaluated by a research company which reported a range of positive feedback via surveys and interviews. Service users highly rated the food quality, ease/convenience of collection, and ethos of the project and supported its continuation.

Most service users had heard of the hubs either via word of mouth or from a volunteer at the hub and were regularly accessing the relevant community spaces. A spectrum of age groups utilised the freezers, however a disproportionately high number of people aged 35-49 years old and 65+ years old used the service. Those using the service were struggling with high food costs and reported signs of food insecurity. Most had not been using food banks recently (citing access and stigma) suggesting a novel group was being reached.

Additional benefits of the scheme included reports of improved socialising and community cohesion round the hubs and the hubs also facilitating signposting to other sources of help and support, such as warm hubs, for vulnerable service users.

## Enablers, barriers and lessons learned

Key enablers included the targeted response to local need and utilisation of existing community spaces and leaders as resources. It also benefited from using an existing local authority framework and programme in the form of Menter Môn. Partnership working with local businesses and charities were crucial to the success and viability of the scheme. The omission of any means testing or eligibility checks also helped to remove stigma and speed up roll-out and delivery. Finally, the use of local volunteers and community leaders with high autonomy granted, allowed the hubs to be very responsive and adaptive and to make changes quickly, with learning then often shared.

The evaluation found that there were consistency issues with delivery timings which affected the reliability of the service for service users and some service users still struggled with accessing the hubs. There were also repeated suggestions that a hub could be beneficial in Holyhead itself, despite its urban status, due to the high level of need there. Hub managers expressed concerns that certain groups and individuals could still be missing out and suggested that the use of local data, alongside better data collection at the hubs, may facilitate better targeting.

Future suggestions included expanding the scheme with the use of other related community projects, such as food swap schemes and community cooking classes.

## Further Information

“It is a wonderful idea and has been very successful in our area, but I didn't think the quality of the meals was great...it would be handy if some vegetables could be included” - *Service user*



<https://www.mentermon.com/en/>



Community freezers combat food poverty



## Case Study 7

### Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association during the cost of living crisis (Income & debt; mental health & well-being)

#### What?

Merthyr Tydfil housing association is an established, non-profit organisation providing housing in the area with a long history of supporting tenants. The association has had three recent schemes related to the cost of living.

Tŷ Pantri saw them work with Fareshare Cymru and Browns Fresh Fruit and Veg Wholesalers, providing affordable access and home delivery to food for those ordering from the service. Here, boxes of home essentials and fresh fruit and vegetables were delivered to the homes of customers. This initially began during the Covid-19 pandemic however it began to use up significant resource. The association therefore worked with local community organisations who have since maintained the scheme.

Fit and Fed began via a partnership with Street Games Wales back in 2017. It was initially a pilot session funded through Cwm Taf Morganwg Health Board and coordinated by Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil. Eight sites were then established for children and young people across the borough, where sports, physical activity, arts and crafts were delivered and where a nutritious meal was provided. Several local charity partnerships were key to ongoing delivery. In late 2021, a successful National Lottery Community Fund application enabled them to expand the project to 15 sites and deliver the project for another three years at least.

Clyd a Chynnes is a funding scheme allowing for financial support and a holistic approach to tackling the Cost of Living crisis. It includes essential heating vouchers to tenants struggling with their heating bills as well as essential food, cleaning and toiletry parcels. In addition, it has allowed the association to provide Clyd a Chynnes/Cosy and Warm (slow cooking lessons) sessions and warm parcels to the most vulnerable tenants in the association, as identified through Housing, Maintenance and Rent teams. Finally, they worked in partnership with Communities for Work Plus to offer training and employment opportunities and Keep Wales Tidy for a Swap Shop, where clothes, toys, and books were swapped to prevent them going into landfill and to provide an affordable way to access some quality clothing.

### How does it relate to our cost of living findings so far?

Housing associations have been frequently cited in our work thus far with several positive features on display here, including being community grounded, being driven by local needs, identifying and actively supporting vulnerable tenants, and working closely with both statutory partners and the voluntary/community sector. The association also planned evaluations and was accordingly able to demonstrate impacts, including through the use of social value measurements. Finally, the schemes were able to pro-actively acquire several extra funding sources, including some that provided longer term certainty.

The work cut across several themes in a deliberately holistic manner, including food, energy, income and mental health and well-being. These all ultimately utilised a housing focus.

## What were the outcomes and impacts?

For two of the projects, the HACT Social Value Bank and specific surveys and outcomes were used to demonstrate the social impact of these projects. For Fit and Fed, the HACT Mental Health Calculator was also used to demonstrate the impact on mental health.

For Tŷ Pantri, the outcome “able to save regularly” in the HACT Social Value Bank was used and, according to this, the social value for this project, was £36,366.

Over the 2022-23 financial year, the Fit and Fed Merthyr Tydfil project has provided 219 free sessions to children and young people across the borough. The project has been accessed 4397 times by 2300 different children and young people. Through the project, 4397 meals have been provided to the children and young people accessing the provisions. It has provided 54 accreditations to young people in Level 2 Food Hygiene, Level 1 Sports Leaders, Sustainability Training and Food Hygiene Passport. We have provided one residential to help develop the skills, confidence and aspirations of the young people who access the project.

Through using the Social Value Calculator and their Mental Health Calculator, the following outcomes were demonstrated for that financial year:

- General training for a job (£115,058)
- Regular volunteering (£41,503)
- Frequent Mild Exercise (£388,141)
- Mental Wellbeing (£987,359)

In summary, for the £94,383 awarded the year, each pound has returned £16.23 in social value. The project also had a demonstrable, positive impact on mental well-being.

Clyd a Chynnes has received positive feedback from tenants so far with an unexpected emphasis on how useful it is for combatting loneliness and isolation.

## Enablers, barriers and lessons learned

Established connections and extensive partnership working were cited as key, as well as the ability to draw on experience of successfully making local food applications. Co-production has extensively featured in all of the schemes highlighted here, with the needs of the community being identified prior to the start and a focus on relevant cost of living themes maintained. Each project had a clear plan and evaluation which were largely stuck to.

Adaptations were necessary, initially £30 vouchers were issued to help with energy costs, but this has been increased up to a value of £100. The slow cooking sessions have been broken down into six week blocks so the team doesn't over stretch itself and that there is time to evaluate. Following consultation with the service users, times have been changed so that there is a hot nutritious meal being ready for their children when they get home from school that day. Capacity was reached on certain occasions with certain projects, such as Ty Pantri, then handed over to relevant partners.

Sustaining funding, identifying new funding sources, and regularly having to make funding applications remain a key challenge. Opportunities to link into local authorities and public service boards have also been highlighted as a future ambition.

## Further Information

“The service that you are providing is helping us significantly as a family. Even though I am not your tenant, you treat me as I am and help me so much with this.”

“As a house, we have never been in this position before, where we are both now out of work, and how this has hit our family finances. This pantry is a godsend to us. Through you and Hope, we can afford to eat and have a balanced diet with it.”

“We get better value for money with you because we have a greater choice with your essential boxes, and of course, your fruit and veg is fresh on the day. If ever I can volunteer to help make the project happen please let me know.”

“I wouldn’t know what I would do without this, it’s a huge help to me. And you’re the only person I see on a Thursday. Thank you.”

” - *Service users*

<https://www.mtha.org.uk/>



## Case Study 8

### Participatory budgeting in Gwent (Mental health & well-being)

#### What?

Gwent public service board (PSB), a regional multi-agency partnership, was formed by a recent merger of constituent PSBs and recently acquired interest in the use of participatory budgeting. This form of budgeting already has a strong legacy for community grant making in the UK with recent expansion of its use in Scotland. It is an innovative process which enables residents to have direct decision making powers over the allocation of resources in their communities in a way that is fair and transparent.

In Gwent, the local public health team has set up integrated well-being networks funded by the regional partnership board, a partnership between local authorities and the local health board. Each town/city area has its own network and is supported to access various funding sources, including local authorities, the local health board and Welsh Government. Participatory budgeting serves as an antidote to cycles of inequality, low public trust and poor community aspiration that are apparent in many deprived areas in Gwent.

A number of participatory budgeting exercises, in most local authorities, were conducted either by outsourcing to specialists or by being carried out in-house by local authority teams. Generally, small pilots were conducted consisting of 2-3 funding rounds with public voting at various points to help decide bid awards.

Voting processes include use of email/websites and virtual voting platforms as well as in-person market-style events with token voting. Most pilots sought to use prevention and long-term principles and featured community involvement in planning throughout, deliberately channelling the five ways of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act

## How does it relate to our cost of living findings so far?

For the funded projects specifically there were a variety of topics. However, projects mainly focussed on capital spending on community buildings, activities and resources. Many of these in turn related to our cost of living themes on food, mental health and well-being. Gwent PSB and participatory budgeting were both frequently mentioned in our summit.

The participatory budgeting and Gwent PSB work as whole also relate to several points that arose from our recent events including the need for partnership working, budget integration, longer term funding, use of the voluntary and community sector, and genuine co-production with a focus on local needs.

## What were the outcomes and impacts?

Qualitative feedback and engagement were undertaken by an external provider as part of a planned evaluation and broadly found the approach to work with increased community empowerment and participation and more community centred spending as key outcomes.



Specific feedback from those involved included that participatory budgeting supported local causes that make a real difference to the community (58% strongly agreed), improved social connections and goodwill in the community (52% strongly agreed), encouraged individuals to play an active role in the community (51% strongly agreed), encouraged a more caring, supportive community (50% strongly agreed) and contributed to the community being a better place to live, work, learn or play (48% strongly agreed).

## Enablers, barriers and lessons learned

The establishment of unified PSBs with strong partnership working and the foundation provided by local integrated well-being networks with multiple funding sources were key enablers. Other enablers cited were co-production, community involvement, use of face-to-face events, accessible voting systems. Finally, the work benefited from a unified and robust evaluation framework conducted externally. Many of these enablers were consistently cited in our summit.

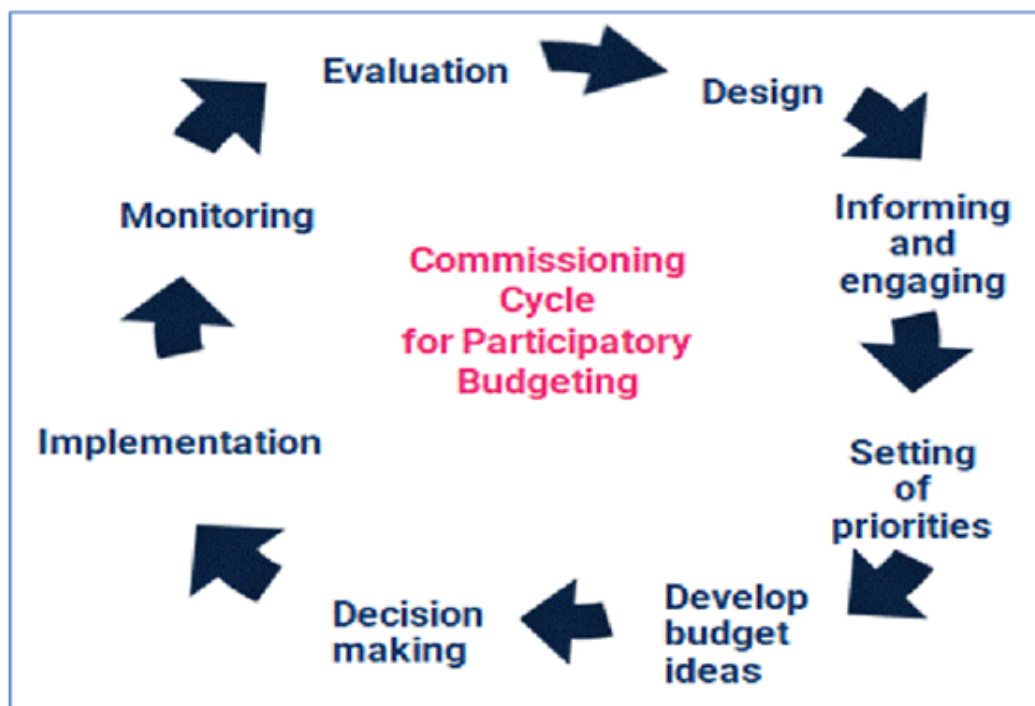
Barriers encountered included concerns over the small size of funding amounts and the risk of digital exclusion, especially for voting. In addition, one local authority was not able to participate due to pandemic disruption and a lack of governance arrangements to support the work at the time.

In future, there are plans to utilise more co-production and improve accessibility share with an effective model template developed for use across the area that also features shared learning. Funding levels will also be increased and further evaluation will be planned for and conducted.

## Further Information

“People are now taking a lot more pride in the rugby ground. Some of the funding provided benches, so people can just come and sit, as well as working in the garden. We wanted to provide something for the community, especially after the isolation of Covid. A lot of the houses locally only have a back yard, so people really appreciate the garden and access to green space. The support of the local community is a massive thing. People come up to us and say ‘I voted for you.’ That’s brilliant.” - *Council staff*

<https://www.gwentpsb.org/en/>



## Case Study 9

### Vale of Glamorgan food projects in Llantwit Major and Cadog's Corner (food, energy & housing)

#### What?

This case study features two local schemes. The first saw a multi-sector steering group explore food insecurity as a local issue in the rural area of Llantwit Major under the Llantwit Food Project. The area already had a successful weekly food pantry addressing food insecurity and food waste (users make a £5 payment and can then take 10 items of their choice plus fresh fruit and veg) run by the local CVC Glamorgan Voluntary Service and a regular community connecting loneliness café, the 'Chatty Café' run by third sector group 'More in Common' Llantwit Major. The steering group continued to generate ideas and worked with partners using local data (such as mapping surveys and qualitative methods) and funding. Now, in response to newly identified local needs, the group are setting up a monthly 'More than food' hub with other co-located support services (home improvements, healthy ageing advice, financial support, citizens' advice bureau, childcare, and housing advice). They are also developing potential outreach services for the food pantry in harder to access areas reflecting the rural challenges of the area, and are promoting the healthy start and food & fun programmes as well as local community gardening opportunities.

The second saw Cadog's Corner Development Group, a community steering group in Barry establish Wales' first Big Bocs Bwyd, a community pantry where people can access food and hygiene products on a 'pay as you feel' basis at Cadoxton Primary School.

The project has evolved recently to include a community laundrette, uniform swap shop and a Good Food café where school children prepare meals for community guests tackling loneliness, isolation, and access to good food.

### How does it relate to our cost of living findings so far?

This work highlighted several points that emerged from our other events, including the use of community activism and resources, citizen participation, and being driven by local need and data. It is looking to co-locate services in central hubs and both schemes featured extensive community involvement, including the use of small financial contributions for food pantries by users.

This work mainly focussed on our Cost of Living theme of food but with clear benefits for income and debt, and mental health and well-being too.

### What were the outcomes and impacts?

The Llantwit Food Project received £98,702 in grant funding to take forward this work. Over a 3 month period, the More Than Food Hub has supported over 30 residents on a range of topics such as housing, falls, benefits, homelessness, financial entitlements, and keep fit activities and 220-260 people per week benefit from the use of the CF61 community food pantry in Llantwit Major. The Big Bocs Bwyd in Cadoxton has redistributed over 2 tonnes of food waste and 7 tonnes of FareShare food in 2 months alone. The Good Food Café serves 38 guests each week helping foster intergenerational friendships and develop a stronger sense of community spirit.

The schemes have also received qualitative feedback from users. The Cadog's Corner and Cadoxton school scheme feedback included improved upskilling of individuals regarding understanding of the importance of good food, improved levels of wellbeing, reduced levels of anxiety, and improved pupil confidence levels of cooking meals for their families. The Llantwit Food Project community scheme feedback includes developing a sense of community belonging, reduced social isolation, and local residents being more aware of the support available, particularly those that are often linked to wider issues associated with food insecurity e.g. housing, debt, well-being, finances, etc.

## Enablers, barriers and lessons learned

Key enablers cited for the schemes included the use of community involvement and resources, focussing on specific local needs and data, and a commitment to the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Generally, the popularity and the usage of the schemes exceeded expectations. The scheme also links to a wider 'Food Vale' programme, which includes resources and a single landing webpage.

The Llantwit Food Project scheme wasn't initially sure how much time partners would be able to commit to regularly attending the 'More than food' Hub and ensure that there was consistency in the support available. There was a particular concern given the need to allow people time to build up the confidence and trust but they were happily surprised that organisations can see the benefit of being out there in the community and are keen to commit to the monthly sessions as part of their existing roles.

Since establishing the 'More than food' Hub the scheme has been approached by several new partners asking to attend to promote their support services to the community, services are apparently keen to be back out there in the community, following the pandemic.

## Further Information

"Rent is just sooo high, there is just no money left. Maybe just £20-£30 a week for food. Any help is appreciated" - *Service user*

<https://foodvale.org/where-can-i-get-support/>

