

What Works Scotland seminar: Community-led Approaches to Reducing Poverty

Introduction

Thank you for the introduction Clare and thanks to What Works Scotland for organising such an important event. Before I begin I would like to take the opportunity to welcome you to Clydebank Town Hall and Museum. If you get the chance, please take a look around; you'll learn, not only about Clydebank's industrial past – John Browns and Singers – but about the men and women who build this town and the lives they lived.

Deprivation in West Dunbartonshire

Colleagues, whether you work in local government, the third sector or academia; whether you're a community activists or a trade unionist, we're all here today because we share common goal - we want our communities free from poverty; and we believe our communities can lead the way.

Here, in West Dunbartonshire, tackling deprivation underpins all that we do - in Education, Regeneration, Housing and in Community Development.

Yet, in spite of our efforts, poverty, entrenched over generations, persists. The Scottish Government recently published a deprivation map of Scotland, based on the 2016 'Index of Multiple Deprivation'. The map provides a street-by-street illustration of where poverty lies, and what strikes you first, when you look at it, is the geographical basis of Scotland's inequality. Still today, it is our post-industrial communities which suffer most; Glasgow, a sea of deep-red, denoting high levels of deprivation; Edinburgh, showing swathes of dark blue, representing relative prosperity. West Dunbartonshire, with its proud industrial past, has seen deprivation increase and at a faster rate relative to other parts of Scotland. Drumry and

Whitecrock, here in Clydebank; Bellsmyre and Castlehill, in Dumbarton, among the most deprived communities in Scotland. For those of us from West Dunbartonshire, behind those statistics, lie our friends, our neighbours our family members and, at times, maybe some of us.

Lived-experience and Personal Testimony

It's the lived-experience and personal testimony of those experiencing poverty which best illuminates the struggles poverty induces. In West Dunbartonshire our residents struggle everyday:

- Families ripped-off by private landlords because they can't get a social house that meets their needs;
- Under-employed parents, struggling on stagnating wages;
- Young people, suffering from ill mental health, seeing benefits slashed by the Department of Work and Pensions.

Residents tells of their frustrations, as they find themselves manoeuvring between (and negotiate with) multiple government agencies, local authority departments and local charities, just to get keep their heads above the water.

Poverty is Political

But that's not where the complications end. For those in poverty, fate often depends on the interconnect policies and funding priorities of different governing parties at each tier of government - in city chambers and town halls; at Holyrood, and at Westminster. Each party and each tier of government blaming the other for hardships families face.

It reminds us that Poverty is Political. While we're here today to discuss 'community empowerment', if we accept that poverty is political, then we should recognise that community empowerment must go hand-in-hand with political empowerment too.

Community-led campaigns: examples of success

Encouragingly, Dr Crisp's report tells how grassroots community campaigners have successfully lobbied both the government and the corporate world to change policy and practice – on issues such as Pay Day Loans and the Living Wage. Here in Clydebank, a recent example of community-led social action saw local activists campaign for a direct bus route between our town and the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital - a campaign which engaged thousands and was ultimately successful.

While Dr Crisp's report reviews evidence across a whole range of areas - from food banks to credit unions; community currencies to social assets - the concept of 'social action' is a theme which is weaved through it all and I particularly enjoyed the way which real life stories are used in the report to illustrate the evidence and bring it alive:

- Like the kids from Newcastle who, by producing their own anti-poverty manifesto, successfully lobbied for a 'free school meals' programme on their estate, during the summer holidays
- Or the Welsh mums who began running activities from void flat in a town block, because their kids had nothing to do, and are now providing gyms, music studios and 'work experience schemes' for over 200 children a week.

Two fantastic examples of approaches to reducing poverty, run for and by those within the community which is experiencing the deprivation.

'Nothing About Us, Without Us, Is for Us'

As I read Dr Crisp's report yesterday afternoon, it brought to my mind that old mantra, first adopted by the Disability Rights Movement in the late 1970s: 'Nothing About Us, Without Us, Is for Us'. It might be overused now, but I do feel it captures the essence of what Dr Crisp's report is about.

As a local authority, the overarching principle expressed in that mantra - *that no*

policy should be decided by any representative without input from those who will be affected - is something which the Labour Administration on West Dunbartonshire Council has worked hard to embed over the past five years. To give you two examples:

In Education: we've enhance the student voice in our schools and we've empowered Parent Councils, which are now the best funded in Scotland with parents sitting directly on our education committee. Pupils told us that the visible involvement of parents in school life played an important part in their success, with West Dunbartonshire schools achieving their best ever exam results last year. We're now also the leading authority in Scotland, when it comes to pupils from areas of deprivation achieving 5 or more Highers.

In Regeneration: we're the Charrette capital of Scotland - for those of you who don't know what a charrette is, it's an intensive urban planning workshop for the whole community, where designers work with citizens to help the community draw up a collective vision for how their community *should* be. We've held charrettes in Clydebank, Dumbarton, Bowling and Balloch. These charrettes have helped us secure significant funding and now, across Clydebank and Dumbarton, you'll see exiting regeneration underway.

In Clydebank, the old John Browns shipyard, which lay derelict for over a decade is, today, the west of Scotland's biggest regeneration site - with social infrastructure at the heart of that development, including a new leisure centre opening in January 2017, a Health Centre and state-of-the-art, publicly owned, Care Home soon to follow alongside hundreds of homes for social rent.

The challenge of community-led approaches

The truth is though, embracing community-led approaches for tackling deprivation, is much, much more challenging than funding a parent council or organising a

design charrette – especially if the approach is to be inclusive of those in the community who are most severely affected by poverty.

Because the most social excluded might not have the time, or the bus fare, to make it along to a parents' council or a community meeting; they'll may be priced out of the sports clubs at the local community centre and they might not have the confidence to turn up to a MP's surgery to report the injustices they've faced in dealing with DWP.

In West Dunbartonshire, we're lucky to have organisations like the 'Clydebank Independent Resource Centre'. Rooted firmly in the community, having grown out of the unemployed action groups of the 1970s, their independent status means they can reach people that local councils and government agencies simply can't.

But, the truth is, with deprivation in communities like ours ingrained over generation in spite of our efforts, we need to do more, and we need to reach out further still.

'Your Community' initiative

Last year, West Dunbartonshire Council began rolling out an innovative model of engagement called 'Your Community'. Because each community is different, the 'Your Community' initiative works at a micro-level, within sub-communities, across Clydebank, Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven. Based on research and best practice, the 'Your Community' initiative recruits local people within our most deprived community and works with them to reach out further, to their neighbours and friends; to those who have never before attended a community meeting, cast a vote or had their voice heard.

Concluding Remarks

'Your Community' won't wipe out deprivation, but it will, I hope, amplify the voice of those at the coal face of poverty and that, I feel, is the first step towards those affected most by poverty feeling empowered enough lead: having their voice heard,

their stories understood and knowing that they have a place in their own community.

As Dr Crisp writes in his report, there is 'no silver bullet', when it comes to deprivation. I'm sure Richard would agree though, that the sense of community here in West Dunbartonshire and the level of involvement we have from our citizens puts us in a strong position to learn from and embrace the sort of Community-led Approaches to Reducing Neighbourhood Poverty written about in his report.

I look forward to listening, discussing and learning from you all this afternoon; thank you again for being with us today and please have a chat with me at the break if you'd like to hear more about our work here in West Dunbartonshire.

Thank you

Councillor Patrick McGlinchey

- Depute leader of West Dunbartonshire Council
- Spokesperson for Infrastructure, Regeneration & Economic Development