SUSTAINING AND STRENGTHENING
COMMUNITY WELLBEING
TOGETHER IN THE COVID ERA

IWN Caerphilly
Community Discussions Summary
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David Llewellyn
Integrated Wellbeing Networks Lead, Caerphilly
david.llewellyn@wales.nhs.uk

INTRODUCTION

'It is recognised that post pandemic recovery is a complex and long running process that will involve many agencies and participants. The manner in which recovery processes are undertaken is critical to their success. ***Recovery is best achieved when the affected community is able to exercise a high degree of self-determination.'*** [1]

In late July and August 2020, the Integrated Wellbeing Network (IWN) in Caerphilly facilitated a series of online Zoom meetings with community organisations and services based in Risca, Rhymney, New Tredegar and Bargoed. The aim was to explore how we might best work collectively to sustain and strengthen wellbeing in the post COVID era and to understand how IWNs can help support that.

The meetings were facilitated to be interactive and collective with all attendees actively encouraged to participate. Verbatim transcripts were gathered whilst the chat box was used by participants for additional information and comments

Individual reports from each meeting have gone out to participants. This report summarises the main findings from those meetings (based on their thematic structure), as well as integrating some key points from other discussions with agencies and organisations that took place over the same period. The aim is to stimulate further discussions and actions.

IWN BACKGROUND

In the Caerphilly CBC area, the IWN focus prior to COVID-19 outbreak was on the Neighbourhood Care Network (NCN) north, primarily the upper Rhymney valley with place-based wellbeing collectives in development in Rhymney, New Tredegar and Bargoed. Through these, wellbeing assets maps were created in Rhymney, New Tredegar and Bargoed during IWN development up to February 2020, with nascent plans for agreed collective wellbeing initiatives - see www.cwtsh.wales for details.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the focus of the IWN programme switched in mid-March 2020 to work with Aneurin Bevan Health Board Public Health on its COVID response. This initially focused upon community information and mobilisation, followed by development and delivery of the Test, Trace, Protect programme with partners. The original IWN work in Caerphilly restarted in late July beginning with the discussions here. Through the COVID specific work undertaken, it is clear there is a need to extend the activities to the other NCNs in the Caerphilly CBC areas as appropriate and we that has commenced with support in the Risca area.

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[1] Recovering from Emergencies; UK Government 2010

Sustaining and strengthening community wellbeing together in the post COVID era

Thematic structure of the meetings

1. How well positioned are the localities for (post-COVID) wellbeing recovery?
2. Understanding health and wellbeing challenges in the area due to COVID pandemic and restrictions
3. Creating and taking opportunities together to sustain and strengthen wellbeing in the COVID era
4. How do we build collectively on the positive activities in the local areas? What additional services and support might be needed?
5. The next practical steps to recover confidence and enhance wellbeing in the local areas including a successful test, trace, protect programme

MAIN FINDINGS

Are areas well-positioned for (post-COVID) wellbeing recovery?

- Many of the services and activities indicated on the wellbeing assets maps (see Bargoed example in Appendix 1) in the areas have been affected critically during the pandemic and lockdown.
- Some have continued to operate, albeit often in a different capacity or using different operating models, but many have not been in operation.
- Despite the awful situation and the adversity encountered, there are nevertheless clear opportunities that have emerged, and the task will be to build on those effectively.

Understanding health and wellbeing challenges in the area resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown measures and restrictions

- There were obvious wellbeing issues and inequalities before the pandemic - it and the lockdown has exacerbated those
- Mental health and wellbeing issues were undoubtedly exacerbated; mental health support services in various sectors often had to work online which made it difficult for organisations and clients.
- Conversely, the lockdown also resulted in *some* cases in strengthening of resilience, both individually and collectively.
- Some areas saw increased support needed for issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic abuse.
- It has been difficult for some sectors of the population to access services and information, which has increased isolation and exacerbated issues.
- GP and primary services had to reconfigure the way they operated – this approach has been welcomed but considered to exclude some people who lack the facilities (IT for example) to be able to avail themselves of the services.
- Some have been reluctant to visit GPs –need to ensure messages to community that they should visit GP if necessary

- Physical wellbeing also suffered; however, there was online activity whilst people 'discovered' and used their local green spaces for walking
- There has been a lack of understanding sometimes amongst some locally about regulations and advice - sometimes a lack of clarity of where to obtain information.
- Bereavement from COVID could be a major issue for families affected especially around Christmas.
- Unemployment is a very worrying prospect. The coming months could be exceedingly difficult indeed especially after furlough ends.
- There may be stigmatisation of those who have tested CV positive – lack of support financially or logistically means it is tempting not to isolate for those individuals.
- There is a distinct lack of confidence in some sectors of the community over re-engaging with the community. This can be exacerbated by a lack of clear messaging over what is permissible together with the lack of safe facilities to support reintegration, especially as community centres continue to be inactive e.g. some elderly people have been vulnerable and frightened to go out since lockdown.
- There were concerns about (public) transport links and the restrictions – has impacted people accessing work and services especially in more deprived and isolated areas
- There is a danger that some community activities will not recommence and continue - some community activities have already closed for good.
- Young people were unclear where they could find support

Creating and taking opportunities together to sustain and strengthen wellbeing in the COVID era - How do we build collectively on the positive activities in the local areas? What additional services and support might be needed?

- There has been a lot of excellent working to support vulnerable and shielding individuals, e.g. Caerphilly buddying scheme and community mutual-aid type support such as Risca CV19 volunteers. This should be continued through Community Regeneration, GAVO and the community organisations
- There are clear opportunities to develop and use creative approaches to support wellbeing – online and actual.
- Physical activity - many people have greater appreciation of local greenspaces they have used for walks and activities. Support better use of our greenspaces – opportunities.
- Enhanced mental health and wellbeing support is needed - ensure new resources such as ABUHB Foundation Tier is developed whilst support given to third sector too and the new primary care mental health activities are used.

- Local activities are vital to supporting wellbeing. Some communities saw increased friends and neighbour activities whilst existing and emerging organised groups played major roles in some, e.g. Risca CV19 volunteers, St Gwladys, Parent Network groups. Support of these is crucial going forward. Some places such as Philipstown and New Tredegar were able to put in place small financial support schemes for people, which were invaluable.
- There are opportunities to build on positives/strengths – a lot of people and community groups have stepped up to help in the pandemic. They have been empowered through proactive attitudes. People can see that they have coped - need to build on this.
- Recognition of what has been achieved by communities in the lockdown and restrictions would be welcome
- Opportunities to get different sort of volunteering; work with GAVO on this in place-based approaches and online
- Work with appropriate services and organisations such as Digital Communities Wales and others to ensure digital exclusion is not an issue
- Need to enhance work with DWP/Supporting People/Community Regeneration/Communities 4 Work/CAB etc to ensure support as far as possible for people – note that a lot of people affected are unused to the situation re. benefits etc.
- Community Wellbeing Champions programme run from the IWN programme was successful in relaying messages and engaging key people in the community as was the IWN FB social media channel.

The practical steps to recover confidence and enhance wellbeing in the local areas including a successful test, trace, protect programme

- There is acceptance that TTP is necessary and vital to dealing with the COVID pandemic. However, this must be clear advice and guidance available. There is a need to avoid stigmatisation and, crucially, enhanced financial and logistical support is needed for those who self-isolate.
- There is a need to ensure that GPs and primary care (and other health and wellbeing) services are accessible to all with relevant information is available more widely – for example, clear messages and access re. COVID, but also Flu vaccination and other health provision and services especially in the winter months
- Verifiable, properly targeted community information around COVID is still key (especially moving forward); there is still confusion over what was/is permissible. We need to continue online routes through social media and enhance work with libraries (and community groups) to ensure they continue to act as information portals for people.

Sustaining and strengthening community wellbeing together in the post COVID era

- There is a need to ensure wider digital access so that people can access information and address isolation – many activities took place online during the lockdown.
- Support for young people especially those whose life chances appear to have been affected is crucial - need to liaise with youth services, work agencies and others (schools)
- With shielding at an end, there is a need to continue support wellbeing for vulnerable people. Support has created some 'dependency', but with guidance and support, people can get used to "new normal". We need to support activities around this, indoors and outdoors
- Community centres need to recommence wellbeing activities, which are vital to their area. The window of opportunity is quite short with autumn approaching and darker evenings. Support is needed to enable this *safely*. A clear need to ensure advice and logistical/financial support is available. Facilitate local centres and activities to support each other in the coming weeks through peer-to-peer networking.
- Support local place-based wellbeing activities and continue to network these together with services
- Work with Caerphilly Countryside, Parks, NRW and specific groups to support outdoor social distanced activities. Opportunities for formal GP connections in those respects?
- Create and develop creative approaches to support sustain wellbeing (real and online) as we approach the winter months: wellbeing events and festival?
- Develop Bereavement support projects such as that proposed by Head4Arts

BRIEF CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The above findings are clearly not exhaustive since the number of communities and groups involved in discussions to date has been necessarily limited.

However, often messages were common across the discussions, and the findings capture many of the main elements of what happened during the pandemic lockdown and the impacts and opportunities as we seek to move forward.

There are opportunities to re-examine how services and activities are provided and this will be crucial in the event of further restrictions, particularly as we reach the winter months. There has been tremendous work in adapting and providing services across sectors under difficult circumstances; the challenge will be to ensure they are as inclusive as possible, especially to reach the most vulnerable in our communities.

Services will undoubtedly be a mix of real and online. Digital exclusion has been a problem and addressing that and helping community and other centres which provide wellbeing services and advice to recommence those safely is crucial.

Clear advice and practical support are undoubtedly needed in many cases regarding the latter. The regulations and their communication have been very confusing for many community groups and organisations. Moreover, those centres often depend on volunteers many of whom in some cases have been vulnerable. Practical steps with effective support to support community facilities become functional are needed now before the winter onset

Mental health and wellbeing services will be crucial whilst better working with employment and support agencies will be hugely important as the economic impacts of the pandemic worsen. Isolation especially amongst older people in our communities remains an issue. The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated **existing** wellbeing inequalities and challenges.

The IWN assets-based approach to enabling wellbeing collaboration in localities should help address those and maximising opportunities, through participatory budgeting to realise initiatives for example, will be vital. However, there are some undeniable constraints in that the IWN will have continue to work largely online, which can exclude key groups. Moreover, the need and desire to extend IWN activities across Caerphilly CBC area, as opposed to the initial NCN north area, will stretch resources. In those respects, ensuring enhanced working across partners and developing an effective Community Wellbeing Champions network will be crucial.

The pandemic crucially highlighted the need for place-based approaches to wellbeing and support for community groups and organisations involved in wellbeing activities in their areas will be crucial going forward, ensuring they work appropriately and effectively with services.

Finally, an effective TTP programme is clearly vital to addressing the pandemic and there is acceptance of that in the discussions to date. TTP communications will need to be clear and support for testing, and those undertaking isolation where needed, must be similarly clear. Certain sectors of our communities will continue to need targeted, effective approaches aimed at for example young people, older members, the BAME community. Indeed, clear effective messaging and communication to support wellbeing more widely, especially in the post COVID era, is vital.

Appendix – example of Wellbeing Assets Map

Cwtsh
Bargoed
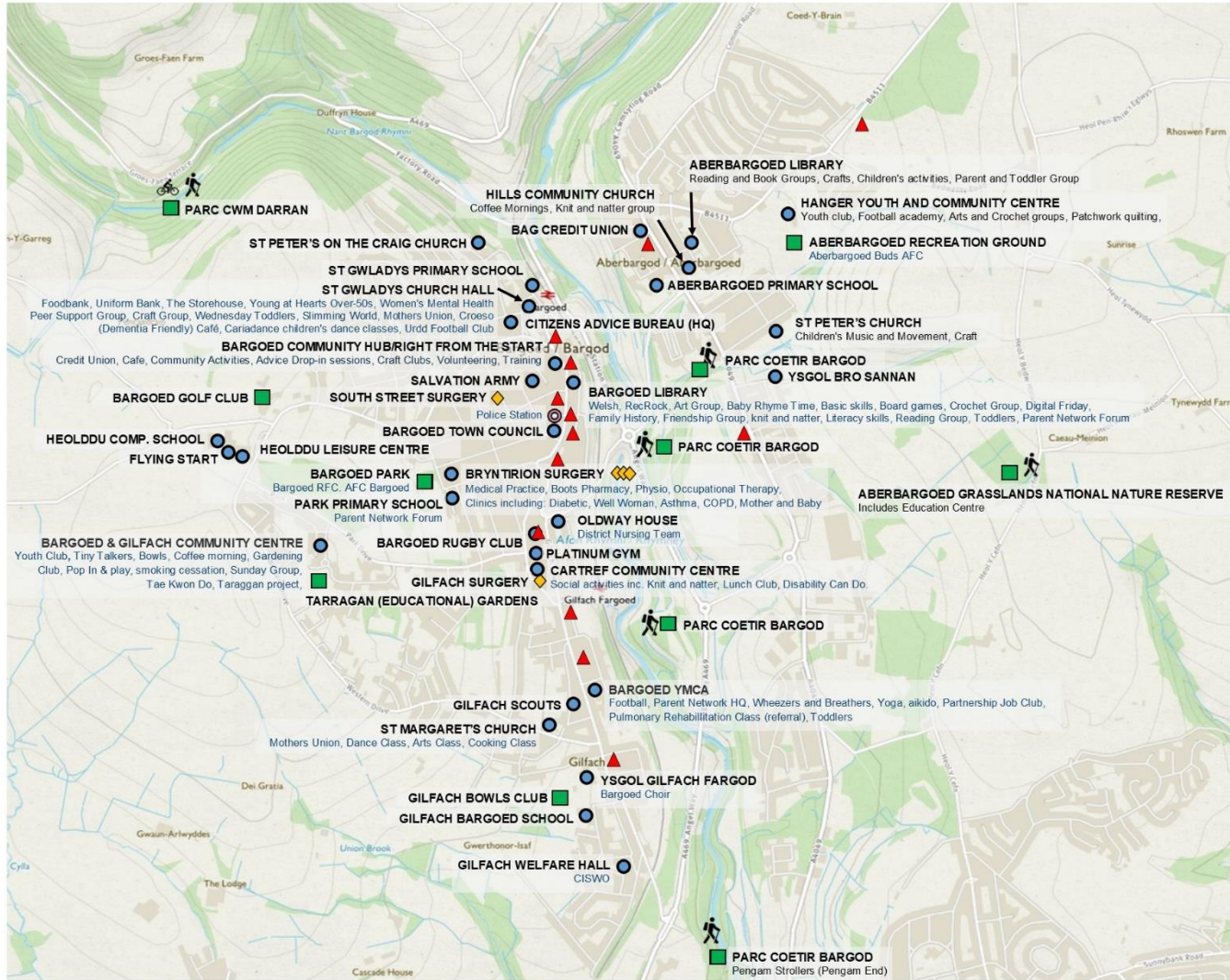
Integrated Wellbeing Network

KEY
- ⬤ Community 'Hub' or Amenity
- ▲ Cafes. Pubs, Restaurants
- ⬛ Green Space or Outdoor Activities
- ◆ Primary Care Services
- ◉ Other

PARC CWM DARRAN

ABERBARGOED LIBRARY
Reading and Book Groups, Crafts, Children's activities, Parent and Toddler Group

HILLS COMMUNITY CHURCH
Coffee Mornings, Knit and natter group

HANGER YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE
Youth club, Football academy, Arts and Crochet groups, Patchwork quilting,

BAG CREDIT UNION

ST PETER'S ON THE CRAIG CHURCH

Aberbargod / Aberbargoed

ABERBARGOED RECREATION GROUND
Aberbargoed Buds AFC

ST GWLADYS PRIMARY SCHOOL
ST GWLADYS CHURCH HALL

ABERBARGOED PRIMARY SCHOOL

Foodbank, Uniform Bank, The Storehouse, Young at Hearts Over-50s, Women's Mental Health
Peer Support Group, Craft Group, Wednesday Toddlers, Slimming World, Mothers Union, Croeso
(Dementia Friendly) Café, Cariadance children's dance classes, Urdd Football Club

Bargoed

CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU (HQ)

ST PETER'S CHURCH
Children's Music and Movement, Craft

BARGOED COMMUNITY HUB/RIGHT FROM THE START
Credit Union, Cafe, Community Activities, Advice Drop-in sessions, Craft Clubs, Volunteering, Training

Bargoed / Bargod

PARC COETIR BARGOD

YSGOL BRO SANNAN

SALVATION ARMY
SOUTH STREET SURGERY

BARGOED LIBRARY
Welsh, RecRock, Art Group, Baby Rhyme Time, Basic skills, Board games, Crochet Group, Digital Friday,
Family History, Friendship Group, knit and natter, Literacy skills, Reading Group, Toddlers, Parent Network Forum

BARGOED GOLF CLUB

Police Station

BARGOED TOWN COUNCIL

PARC COETIR BARGOD

HEOLDDU COMP. SCHOOL

FLYING START

HEOLDDU LEISURE CENTRE

BARGOED PARK
Bargoed RFC. AFC Bargoed

BRYNTIRION SURGERY
Medical Practice, Boots Pharmacy, Physio, Occupational Therapy,
Clinics including: Diabetic, Well Woman, Asthma, COPD, Mother and Baby

ABERBARGOED GRASSLANDS NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE
Includes Education Centre

PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL
Parent Network Forum

OLDWAY HOUSE
District Nursing Team

Afc

BARGOED & GILFACH COMMUNITY CENTRE
Youth Club, Tiny Talkers, Bowls, Coffee morning, Gardening
Club, Pop In & play, smoking cessation, Sunday Group,
Tae Kwon Do, Taraggan project,

BARGOED RUGBY CLUB

PLATINUM GYM

CARTREF COMMUNITY CENTRE
Social activities inc. Knit and natter, Lunch Club, Disability Can Do.

GILFACH SURGERY

TARRAGAN (EDUCATIONAL) GARDENS

Gilfach Fargoed

PARC COETIR BARGOD

GILFACH SCOUTS

BARGOED YMCA
Football, Parent Network HQ, Wheezers and Breathers, Yoga, aikido, Partnership Job Club,
Pulmonary Rehabilitation Class (referral), Toddlers

ST MARGARET'S CHURCH
Mothers Union, Dance Class, Arts Class, Cooking Class

Gilfach

YSGOL GILFACH FARGOD
Bargoed Choir

GILFACH BOWLS CLUB
GILFACH BARGOED SCHOOL

GILFACH WELFARE HALL
CISWO

PARC COETIR BARGOD
Pengam Strollers (Pengam End)

BARGOD - BARGOED : GILFACH : ABERBARGOD - ABERBARGOED