



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 30TH JANUARY 2024

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS AND EVALUATION OF
CAERPHILLY CARES AND EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING
SCHEME**

REPORT BY: DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on progress, key successes, and challenges of the Caerphilly Cares Service and Employee Volunteering Scheme.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Local Government has an important role in building confident and connected communities as part of its efforts to improve resilience, wellbeing and reduce inequalities. Community life, social connections and having a voice in local decisions are all factors that underpin well-being and resilience; however, inequalities persist, and many people experience the effects of disadvantage, social exclusion or lack social support. Community-centred approaches directly address the marginalisation and powerlessness caused by entrenched inequalities.
- 2.2 Caerphilly Cares is about that changing relationship with residents and communities, promoting independence and increasing people's control over their own lives. It's about working 'with' residents and communities, rather than delivering 'to' them as passive recipients. Providing support at the earliest point to reduce the need for statutory intervention and helping people to help themselves.. Providing residents with a single support gateway, designed primarily to fill gaps in services and alleviate pressures on statutory provision.
- 2.3 This approach to delivering services is about mobilising assets within communities. Assets such as skills, knowledge, and social networks, are the building blocks and should not be ignored. A sole focus on community needs and deficits limits the options available and sometimes increases stigma by labelling people with problems. Community engagement and outreach is a vital component of behaviour change interventions and the support from peers who share similar life experiences can be a powerful tool for improving well-being and resilience.

3. RECOMMENDATION

3.1 Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the content of this report.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Early intervention, resilient and empowered communities is more important now than it's ever been. People's wages and welfare payments are not keeping pace with rising living costs, in particular, the costs of energy, fuel, housing, and food. Alongside this the Council has unprecedented savings to make, which means services cannot and will not look the same as they do now.

5. THE REPORT

5.1 Caerphilly Cares has continuously evolved since its inception as the Council's initial response to the Covid 19 Pandemic.

5.2 In the period from 1st April 2022 to 31st August 2023, the team received 6973 calls and 2128 emails asking for support. The team has made referrals to appropriate partners and services to provide relevant support. Examples of the help provided is categorised below:

• Calls	6,973
• Emails	2,128
• Winter Fuel Payments	744
• Fuel Vouchers	797
• Food Bank Vouchers	1,648
• CAB referrals	257

5.3 There are several key themes identified through caseloads to date, the most common ones being:

- Financial Insecurity
- Debt
- Mental Health (all tiers)
- Bereavement
- Physical Mobility
- Drug and Alcohol Dependencies
- Ongoing Health Struggles
- Digitally Excluded
- Cost of Living
- Isolation
- Domestic Abuse

5.4 The team has supported various provisions, charities, and individuals both internally and externally and continues to forge relationships with partner organisations. Collaboration and partnership working with Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Citizen's Advice, Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) local foodbanks and Benardos through to local support groups continues to grow rapidly.

5.5 As Caerphilly Cares has evolved and developed since the pandemic, the needs of Caerphilly Borough residents have also changed. The close ties with Housing and

Social Services have strengthened and improved. Regular communication to evaluate the process mapping has been completed with various teams to help further shape and develop Caerphilly Cares as a service area that can directly respond to identified need.

- 5.6 SPOCs (special points of contact) have been created within the team to improve relationships across departments such as Housing, Social Services (IAA in particular) and Job Centre Plus (JCP), where co-location working has proved an invaluable learning tool for staff in understanding the complexities of the issues faced by our residents. This has also bettered our response times and overall customer service standards as a result by providing a seamless gateway to appropriate support.
- 5.7 Since transferring over from Social Services in July 2022, the Community Connector team has supported over 900 individuals with 1-1 support. Of the 900, 300+ individuals have accessed community groups and 250 have been supported to attend groups. Over 200 people are now 'signed off' from support with no intervention needed. To achieve the teams' outcomes and measures, the Caerphilly Cares Gateway is the primary path into the service, which ensures people are receiving the right support with no duplication across other programmes.
- 5.8 To date, the team has supported individuals to complete carers assessments, occupational therapy assessments, referrals to Rehabilitation Officer Visual Impairment Sensory Team, the Mental Health Team and to other partner services to help address the needs of each individual. Individuals who have received support have re-engaged with their communities, gained new relationships, friendships and have built confidence and resilience to overcome the barriers that have stopped them from doing this independently. Alongside this, they have also received support to maximise their income and have had appropriate aids in their home to help retain their independence.
- 5.9 Whilst the initial response to the Cost-of-Living crisis focused mainly on crisis-level support due to the urgent pressures and rising energy bills, the focus now is on longer term responses. Within the context of ongoing economic challenges, it may reasonably be assumed that the crisis is likely to be ongoing for some time; therefore, there are also a range of potential initiatives either in development, or at the initial stages of consideration, which are outlined below.
- 5.10 Engagement has been a key activity because it is recognised that in many cases there is already a range of support available; however, many hard-to-reach residents are either not aware of this support or face barriers to accessing it.
- 5.11 Between September and December 2022, an initial series of cost-of-living roadshows were held, supported by staff from across various Council departments, to engage with residents and promote the wide range of support available. Further engagement was also conducted via staff attendance at public events, including CCBC Christmas markets, jobcentre events and events organised by partners including Groundwork and Members of Parliament/Senedd Members. In total, cost-of-living support was promoted at over 40 specific sessions, with direct support, referrals or signposting given to over 150 citizens.
- 5.12 In 2023, engagement has continued via attendance at the full programme of CCBC public events (8 events to date), alongside smaller but more targeted community outreach, including cost-of-living sessions in schools, libraries, welcome spaces and with groups such as the Parent Network, to engage those residents who may be harder to reach.

- 5.13 Two special cost-of-living editions of Newline have since been produced by the Communications team and circulated in October/November and March/April respectively, to ensure that information was made available to all residents, including those who may not access the website due to reasons including digital exclusion.
- 5.14 In addition to this generalised cost-of-living promotion, frontline teams are also working in partnership to promote specific campaigns relevant to support residents and maximise their income through promotion of their entitlements, such as Pension Credit, where intelligence from DWP suggests that this benefit in particular is under-claimed. A large-scale cost-of-living event is also being planned for November 2023, to promote key messages and opportunities for support as we move into the winter.
- 5.15 From April 2022 to August 2023 the income maximisation team funded by the Caerphilly Cares / Cost of Living budgets and based within the Housing Rents team has generated an additional £4.6m for residents.
- 5.16 The team has visited CCBC owned sheltered housing schemes to offer residents the opportunity to meet with staff to discuss any concerns and to access one to one support and advice relevant to cost-of-living. As part of this work, the team have assisted numerous residents with claiming their £200 winter fuel payments and completed over 30 Pension Credit checks. In addition, residents have also received advice on energy and water bills, with staff contacting providers on their behalf when needed, as well as exploring other benefit entitlements that they may have been unaware of.
- 5.17 The team also contacted significant numbers of residents via telephone and home visits to fill out their winter fuel applications, with contact in many of these cases also leading to additional benefit claims. They also attended local Jobcentres and have worked in partnership with the Ukraine Resettlement Team.
- 5.18 In addition to the above, work has been carried out throughout the year to raise awareness across all departments of the range of support that is available for residents. This is aimed particularly at those staff that may not traditionally consider themselves as working in a supportive role, but who may nevertheless encounter members of the public within their day-to-day work (as well as friends and family) who may be struggling.
- 5.19 A Cost-of-living Hardship Grant has been established in response to identified need across CCBC frontline support services, for those in need of urgent financial support but are not eligible for or have exhausted existing grant schemes, in particular those that might be working but are experiencing In-Work poverty. The grant has been operational since April 2023 and provides either direct financial assistance (up to £700) or equivalent white goods (if that is the specific need). The primary eligibility factor for the grant is professional judgement (via referral from an officer providing support), to give flexibility to support those who may not have been approved for other grants based purely on traditional criteria such as employment/benefit status etc. Eligibility criteria as follows:
- Individuals are not able to apply themselves – applications can only be made on their behalf by a member of staff from a team/organisation that has been permitted access to the fund. This ensures an element of professional decision making as the first stage of the process, with the intention that the staff member will have had conversations to give an understanding of the applicant's circumstances

- Individual must have exhausted other commonly available funds (most notably DAF). If DAF has not yet been applied for (and is a relevant option) then they will be asked to apply for this first.
 - Income and Expenditure Summary – mandatory for all applications.
 - 2 most recent bank statements – mandatory for all applications.
 - The process above is constantly under review and overseen by staff from Caerphilly Cares, Housing and Supporting People; to ensure appropriate checks are in place to avoid abuse of the scheme, whilst also trying to prevent applications being unnecessarily onerous for those requiring urgent hardship support. The use of the Charis portal for the white good option of the grant ensures that the white good will be allocated and delivered direct.
- 5.20 Since commencement, there has been 230 successful applications to the Fund, totalling payments of £152,500 to residents. This has also included applications for white goods totalling £2,753 in value. Applications appear to be evenly spread across the Borough in terms of the location of beneficiaries and reasons for applications include energy costs, housing/rent costs, food costs, debt repayment, transport, other utility costs, clothing, furnishing costs (including carpet) where people in crisis have had to move accommodation within a short timescale.
- 5.21 A Community Support Fund (CSF) has been established to enable community groups to access funding to deliver projects relevant to the cost-of-living. Initially this took the form of a network of Welcoming Spaces (also known as Warm Hubs) across the county borough, to provide local people with a warm and welcoming space to spend time, meet new people, try new things, and access services and advice. The Welcoming Spaces have been funded primarily via the CSF, with an additional £62k provided via the Welsh Government Warm Spaces funding during the Autumn/Winter 22/23 period. Through Spring/Summer 2023, the Welcoming Space network evolved to deliver alternative activities relevant to the changing needs of the cost-of-living crisis, for example projects linked to food provision; however, we expect a return to a focus on providing warm spaces as we approach another Autumn/Winter period. To achieve sustainability within our communities, the Community Development team are consulted on each application to ensure the maximum potential can be reached alongside the most appropriate support.
- 5.22 To date 60+ Welcoming Spaces projects have been approved across the borough, totalling £250,000 of investment in community provision. The Welcoming Spaces now cover a vast geographical area, with much of the County Borough in good proximity to a Welcoming Space.
- 5.23 As Welcoming Spaces are confirmed, they are being added to an overall directory/map which is available via the CCBC website/Cost-of-living landing page. This directory has also been shared with specific internal and external partners who will be able to support isolated and/or vulnerable customers to access these spaces within their community. Where appropriate, teams across the Council that provide support relevant to cost-of-living issues can use welcoming spaces as an opportunity to engage with attendees and provide advice or further support from these venues.
- 5.24 In addition to the approval of funding for community organisations, the funding has also been used to establish Welcoming Spaces in Council venues, most notably within the CCBC Libraries network. Whilst libraries have always been open

community spaces, via the Welcoming Spaces funding they are now also able to offer hot drinks across all 18 locations. Since commencement in November, approximately 38,000 hot drinks have been given out, however the most significant positive outcomes of this initiative have been those relating to customer engagement. Library staff have reported that while accessing free hot drinks, customers are having more in-depth conversations with library staff, which gives the opportunity for customer consultation and identification of need, with greater potential for appropriate referrals to then be made to offer support.

- 5.25 As a response to rising fuel costs and periods of cold weather over the winter months, a supply of warm packs was purchased. Approximately 550 packs were distributed during the 22/23 Autumn/Winter period, with each pack including items designed to “heat the human not the home”, such as a hat, scarf, gloves, blanket, hot water bottle, thermal mug, hand warmers and a home thermometer. A small quantity of enhanced packs also included thermal underlayers and bodywarmers for those at most risk, including rough sleepers. Warm packs were distributed via front line Council staff responsible for supporting vulnerable residents (such as Emergency Housing, Floating Support and Community Connectors), as well as a range of direct partners including Cornerstone, Platform and POBL. Packs were also distributed to venues within the Welcoming Spaces network, including CCBC Libraries, to enable staff and volunteers to provide immediate support to anyone attending and disclosing a need.
- 5.26 In advance of the 2023/24 Winter period, a procurement exercise has been completed to secure a contract for regular and sufficient supply of packs for those in need. This will enable services to distribute an even greater number of packs over the coming season, with the intention of extending their reach to vulnerable residents. Packs are distributed with the understanding that they should only ever be a short term and immediate measure to address the risk of cold for the most vulnerable; and that wherever possible the allocation of a pack should be accompanied by a referral to Caerphilly Cares to address wider concerns.
- 5.27 Work has been ongoing to combat the issue of fuel poverty across the County Borough, via a dual approach of direct financial assistance to address the immediate need of people to heat their homes; and the provision of energy efficiency advice as a long-term preventative approach to manage future fuel poverty. Council teams including Housing (Rents) and Caerphilly Cares have worked in partnership with Citizens’ Advice and supportive community organisations, to distribute fuel vouchers to residents on prepayment meters in need of immediate support with their energy bills. 788 vouchers were issued in 2022/23, with a further 230 vouchers having been issued this year since April 2023.
- 5.28 To ensure the fuel vouchers were not simply a one-off unsustainable measure, a large number of CCBC staff, including the Cost-of-living team based within Housing (Rents) and Private Sector Housing teams, have also conducted energy advice visits, whereby delivering these in partnership with financial assistance and support from Citizens’ Advice has enabled us to reach a far greater number of residents. In the last year this partnership has supported over 500 residents, providing them with fuel vouchers, key energy efficiency advice and low energy lightbulbs, alongside over 160 energy advice visits by the Private Sector Housing team. This work has prevented vulnerable families from disconnection and provided key energy advice tips and support. The partnership was also able to secure £144,000 from Discretionary Fund underspends to ensure that the project can continue throughout the upcoming Winter.

- 5.29 In addition to the work outlined above, funds have also been allocated under the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) to develop a Cost-of-Living Energy Project, to enable continuation (and expansion) of work to improve properties rated D, E, F and G (low) in terms of energy efficiency. An Energy Crisis Grant has been developed to allow significant improvements to be made to these properties up to the value of £5,000 (dependent on eligibility according to specified criteria), including the installation of new boilers and windows where required, to improve Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings and combat the risk of fuel poverty in the long term. The grant has been operational since April 2023 and is still in its infancy, however 3 grants have already been fully awarded with works completed, with a further 5 awaiting install and an additional 19 applications being processed.
- 5.30 This central grant element of the project is also supported by additional work to support residents to improve energy efficiency, including aforementioned energy advice visits and the distribution of low energy lightbulbs. The lightbulbs have been funded via the SPF Cost-of-living Energy project and have also been installed in 48 newly let CCBC properties, alongside wraparound financial health checks and energy advice for all new tenants. This process will be ongoing for all void CCBC lets.
- 5.31 As can be seen above, the range of work to address energy efficiency is rapidly expanding and is due to be supported by further community-based work e.g., development of energy champions network to raise awareness of energy saving messages, communication of key energy saving campaigns to residents, work with schools etc.
- 5.32 Feedback from partners identified small numbers of residents are unable to engage effectively with support services (such as Citizens' Advice and the Jobcentre) due to the lack of a phone to enable even simple contact such as arranging appointments and providing feedback no support applications etc. In response, a stock of basic mobile phones was purchased for provision to vulnerable customers. Phones have been allocated via referral from professionals (including CCBC staff and relevant partners) and complement existing schemes which allow for provision of sim cards/credit top up.
- 5.33 As a result of increasingly high demand for Citizens' Advice services it has been identified that there is need for greater capacity in terms of specialist debt and welfare benefit advice. In recognition of their established expertise in this field an agreement was made with Citizens' Advice to fund an additional Specialist Welfare Benefits Adviser and Debt Adviser. The staff members were recently recruited and will soon commence delivery as part of the existing Let's Talk Money project, which is already run in partnership with Families First, Supporting People and Citizens' Advice Service.
- 5.34 Specific support has also been developed in partnership with Supporting People, to utilise the cost-of-living budget to provide hot meals for homeless people within the Borough, in recognition of the knock-on impact of the cost-of-living crisis in terms of the general public feeling less able to afford the more informal support that rough sleepers will often rely on. CCBC's Supporting People team has worked with Cornerstone to develop a simple process for instant provision of hot meals to homeless people. The first 3 months of this provision proved extremely successful, leading to the engagement of many service users who had previously been reluctant to engage. Given this success, approval has now been given to extend this project to include those most vulnerable in Temporary Accommodation (homeless awaiting accommodation).

- 5.35 There are now 23 established food organisations such as Fare Share members, Food Co-ops, Food Banks, and Food pantries within the county borough. The need for Food Bank support has increased in the URV area by 95% over the past several months.
- 5.36 The team has been successful in setting up the Caerphilly Food Network to coordinate all food poverty & insecurity initiatives across the borough. The steering group which is made up of private sector, third sector and food organisations throughout Caerphilly take a lead on developing the network to work cohesively, avoid duplication and share best practice.
- 5.37 As part of the Food Network funding has been obtained to enable 4 local community groups to employ local food development officers, who can learn and share best practice across community organisations. For example, Community Volunteers Wales (formerly Risca CV19) has developed a very successful food pantry model, St. Gladwys in Bargoed a thriving Fairshare and luncheon club scheme.
- 5.38 The team is also working collaboratively with the Rural Development Programme Team on the Food 4 Growth initiative targeted at food producers, growers & manufacturers as well as decreasing food waste.
- 5.39 The Community Cooking Champions project, supported by Morrisons has proved to be a great success. The project provides an 8-week cooking course to learners who attend one day a week and learn how to cook nutritional and healthy meals. When they complete the course, they receive a slow cooker. Participants are referred into the project by residents who have engaged with Caerphilly Cares and other partner support services such as Multiply who provide follow up courses with interested participants. We in turn encourage the participants to volunteer in community settings to establish sustainability.
- 5.40 The team has also developed an excellent working relationship with Coleg Y Cymoedd jointly delivering Community Cooking Classes for specific groups including Young Carers aged 12 to 16 years and Mums & Dads who are sole parents. As well as setting up a social supermarket in URV and supporting a thriving Food Pantri on the Risca High Street. *(Case study included in Appendices)*
- 5.41 The installation of the first outdoor Community Fridge in Graig Y Rhacca is nearing completion. The fridge is stocked with close to sell by date from Local supermarkets and is aimed at tackling the need for fresh food on an estate where there is only one shop open part time.

5.2 Volunteering

- 5.2.1 During the last year, the team has successfully merged the previous 'Buddy Scheme' with the social services Volunteer Service. With the service being on hold since the inception of the pandemic, the majority of the first 6 months (to March 2023) was spent completing preparatory work to ensure the service could restart safely. This included contacting all registered volunteers, completing DBS checks, contacting everyone on waiting lists to assess needs and suitability, and merging 4 databases (Social Services database, Caerphilly Cares database, Buddy scheme database and any waiting lists) into one central database.
- 5.2.2 The CCBC Employee Volunteering Scheme (EVS) was agreed in early 2020 but officially launched in October 2021 due to the pandemic. The EVS enables staff to give their time to support our communities either as a part day/day release from their

role with permission of their manager or as part of a long-term opportunity, which is done in their own time and entitles them to claim up to an additional 2 days leave of absence as a thank you.

- 5.2.3 Recruiting volunteers is becoming increasingly more difficult, an issue shared across the voluntary sector and one which GAVO is acutely aware. To increase recruitment, the team has attended events and activities arranged with CCBC colleagues & external partners (e.g., Which Way Now? Event, Play in the Park, Carers group), implemented a timetable of pop up sessions in the majority of libraries across the borough, organised stands in a variety of supermarket foyers and pop up sessions in Caerphilly town centre (Castle Court shopping precinct).
- 5.2.4 To further encourage new recruits and thank existing volunteers, the team have set up a monthly prize draw for the volunteers. Prizes currently include a £15 Love to Shop voucher and a month's free use of a CCBC leisure centre of their choice (this started 1st of June 2023). Prizes have also been sought from links made with community champions based in the major supermarkets in the borough, providing additional incentives for volunteers at no cost to the service.
- 5.2.5 A new referral form and an updated set of criteria have been devised, making the process of receiving referrals smoother by providing more detailed information to ensure referrals are appropriate and matches are easier.
- 5.2.6 The scheme was developed using Volunteering Wales system to record and report on volunteer engagement. This system, used by CVCs on a Wales wide basis and is contract managed by the WCVA, has been under development as part of a new tender for the majority of the year. This has led to delays in being able to promote the EVS as widely as the team would have liked, however following the soft launch of system in July the council has been set up as a 'large' (umbrella) organisation and any opportunities linked to CCBC will be monitored by Caerphilly Cares going forward. This will allow us to better understand numbers of volunteers across the organisation and simplify the process of registering to volunteer with CCBC.
- 5.2.7 Caerphilly Cares was successful in securing a second round of funding (October 22 – October 23) from the WCVA Strategic Volunteering Grant, building on the work achieved in the first, short term round which ended in June 2022. The focus of the grant is on the development of the EVS and encouraging our private sector contractors to engage in volunteering. To this end, initial discussions have been held with Procurement to explore how we can maximise social value obligations of our suppliers.
- 5.2.8 The Volunteer Network was established at the start of 2023 to ensure that the volunteer experience is the universal across all departments and that all teams are following the same policies when advertising, recruiting and supporting volunteers. It provides a vehicle for sharing information about the volunteering projects that are available, shared training opportunities (for members and the volunteers), best practice sharing and shared promotion of projects.
- 5.2.9 The team has been working with GAVO and HR to draft a Volunteer Policy for the authority. The policy scope will include all departments that host/manage volunteers, standardising procedures, expectations of both the volunteer and the organisation and ensuring that volunteers have a positive, worthwhile experience with CCBC regardless of where their placement is held.

5.2.10 A new volunteering landing page has been developed on the corporate website. <https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/volunteering>. The new pages provide a one-stop-shop for members of the public wanting to volunteer with us in a clear, approachable, and user-friendly format. The pages went live on the website at the end of August and were officially launched at the end of October.). Videos of both the Caerphilly Cares Employee Volunteering Scheme and the Caerphilly Cares Be-Friending Service can be seen in the following links:-
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5hyGNk8GUw>
<https://youtu.be/49qt5cvVdhw>

Snapshot of volunteering workstream data up to end of August 2023:

Measure	Total	Breakdown
Volunteers registered with Befriending Service	51	41 community volunteers, 9 CCBC employees (EVS)
People receiving support from a volunteer	78	41 linked to social groups, 37 receiving 1:1 support
EVS volunteers registered (CCBC)	54	54 individuals some of which will have undertaken more than 1 opportunity
Volunteering opportunities held (EVS)	6	FSM deliveries, tree planting (x2), painting at TARRAGAN Bargoed, GYR community association relocation, Cooking Champions course
Volunteer Network meetings held	3	January, April, July (next date planned for October) 2023
Departments with volunteer opportunities	7	Caerphilly Cares, Youth Offending, Leisure, Sports Development, Youth Service, Countryside, Tourism

5.3 Partnerships and Collaboration

- 5.3.1 At the forefront of delivery has been a commitment to collaboration, in many cases utilising existing resources and services to adapt and tailor delivery in innovative ways, across departments. This has been supported by the formation of internal working groups at both a Strategic and Operational level.
- 5.3.2 Key partnerships have been developed across the Council and with partner organisation as outlined above. These include; Catering, Libraries, Housing, Leisure, Supporting People, Department of Work and Pensions, Citizen's Advice, The Parent Network, Coleg y Cymoedd, Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations, as well as numerous community-based organisations (This list is not exhaustive).
- 5.3.3 Many of the responses and initiatives established have been developed because of these partnerships; and indeed, would not have been possible without the support of these teams in both identifying needs and then assisting in the delivery of services. In particular, the development of the Cost-of-living Hardship Fund has been a direct product of effective partnership work between Caerphilly Cares, Housing (Rents), Customer Services and Supporting People. These teams continue to work in close partnership to administer and manage the fund as it evolves alongside the changing nature of the cost-of-living crisis. On a wider basis, the network of partners (both internal and external) utilising the fund continues to grow and initial feedback from partners has been extremely positive, demonstrating that it is working to support the needs of residents in crisis.

- 5.3.4 In terms of external partnerships, this report outlines key collaborative work with the Citizen's Advice Service as an essential partner. Work is also ongoing to develop stronger links with local Housing Associations specifically in relation to the cost-of-living crisis, which has led to them signing up as partners for the Hardship Fund as well as referring people for support on a more general basis.
- 5.3.5 Work with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABuHB) has resulted in the use of the Caerphilly Cares Gateway by GPs to increase Social Prescribing and through their Neighbourhood Care Networks (NCN's) they have agreed to contribute £193,408 per calendar year to support the expansion of the Wellbeing Community Connector Service by 4 full time members of staff to add capacity to the already established service.
- 5.3.6 Numerous activities have been supported by community organisation, without whom the fundamental principles of Caerphilly Cares would not be achievable.

'The Parish Trust has been privileged to work alongside Caerphilly Cares in our collective mission to support the people of Caerphilly. The team have played an instrumental role in enabling us to network, collaborate, source funding, and bring together innovative ideas to benefit our local community. Through our collaboration with Caerphilly Cares, we have witnessed tangible benefits that have had a profound impact on our organisation's ability to serve our community effectively. The assistance and guidance provided by Caerphilly Cares have not only enhanced our outreach but have also helped us to streamline our efforts, ultimately maximising our impact. In working with Caerphilly Cares, we have experienced a genuine commitment to empowering local charities and community organisations. The guidance and resources offered have been invaluable, making it easier for us to navigate the challenging landscape of community support. The connections forged through Caerphilly Cares have opened doors to potential funding opportunities, resource sharing, and a wealth of collaborative initiatives that benefit the people of Caerphilly.' Rev. Dean Aaron Roberts (CARE Trethomas)

Further testimonials in support of collaboration are included in the Appendices.

5.4 Key Achievements

- 5.4.1 Staff training and development has been a crucial part of the successful delivery of Caerphilly Cares. A genuine passion for providing the best customer experience has been key. As the team gained new staff members it was crucial to instil the same caring ethos into the team and build on the team culture that has been created.
- 5.4.2 Sharing this ethos and culture has been a key priority, through several focussed initiatives to help and improve the customer/resident experience across the Council and our delivery partners.
- 5.4.3 A 'What Matters' briefing session has been developed for staff to support their conversations with vulnerable people to ensure that the discussions are person centred with 'how can you help yourself' being the starting point. Alongside the Connect 5 train the trainer course, which is a Public Health Wales brief intervention course for mental wellbeing. Both have been delivered to Caerphilly Cares staff and included in the programme of training to volunteers and to those requesting such support Council wide. These initiatives are being rolled out and have been widely valued, with some overwhelmingly positive feedback collected. Many stating they had learned so much and that everyone in the Council should have these sessions, especially operational staff.

Money Invested in Communities and Economy

Total amount of grant invested into the community = **£1.4m**

Total amount of Income Maximisation to Residents = **£8.9m**

- Over 1,000 fuel vouchers issued to residents.
- Food Network established amongst 25 established organisations (Foodbanks, Fare Share, Pantries, private sector etc.)
- 1,200 Foodbank referrals made.
- Over 60 Community groups supported.
- 60 Welcoming Spaces established, supporting over 3,000 residents across 1,000 community-based sessions.
- 51 Volunteers providing 1-2-1 support to vulnerable residents.
- Over 950 residents assisted by Community Connectors in reducing Loneliness & Isolation
- 540 Warm Packs given to the most vulnerable in our communities.

5.5 Challenges

5.5.1 There have also been some notable challenges, namely:

5.5.2 There generally remains limited understanding of the Employee Volunteering Scheme amongst both staff and managers, which may be attributed in part to poor visibility on the previous Intranet pages. Further promotion amongst teams is needed. Discussions have taken place with the Transformation Team to explore the possibility of future volunteering opportunities being advertised on the new Engagement HQ system. Further to this, the team are working with Communications to develop a short film to promote the scheme, which will be posted online but can also be used as part of presentations at team meetings.

5.5.3 There are several services providing information, advice, assistance, and support across the Council with varied levels and types of engagement. The challenge moving forward is to rationalise touch points and streamline provision with the customer experience at the forefront. Adopting a person-centred approach and a 'what matters' approach is key to ensuring the starting point is what people can do for themselves.

5.5.4 Whilst the partnership with GAVO has been overall positive, with some excellent examples of collaboration. For example, Caerphilly Cares funding for volunteer training and joint work on changing the National Volunteer platform. There have also been some challenges regarding potential duplication of provision. This has partly been down to communication issues and misunderstandings. Several positive meetings have now taken place and a clear way forward identified.

5.5.5 Development and delivery of SPF projects with late notice of funding and lack of clarity from UK Gov in relation to guidance, monitoring requirements and evidence has led to challenges and barriers in rolling out successful projects. Balancing these delays and barriers with the processes and needs of departments such as Housing has proved difficult at times; and short notice requests for information (outcomes, evidence, and finance) can prove challenging when having to collate information from a range of partners without well-defined timescales.

- 5.5.6 There is a need to develop appropriate targeting to ensure that initiatives support those most in need. It can be difficult to establish parameters/eligibility for this when balancing a limited resource with a desire to help residents. We have still not developed a consistent solution for this, although currently tend to allocate resources based on staff referral and professional judgement.
- 5.5.7 Waiting lists for external partners e.g., Supporting people providers (due to the demand).
- 5.5.8 Insufficient bespoke provision in communities for the needs of the individuals i.e., Memory and Sensory Loss Services, Learning Disabilities.

5.6 Conclusion

Caerphilly Cares is not a 'service' that operates in isolation, it reflects the ethos of the Transformation Strategy # Team Caerphilly Better Together that influences how we engage with our residents and how our services respond.

The current cost of living crisis means more people are unable to afford the essentials, which has significant and wide-ranging negative impacts on mental and physical health. These can have long-term consequences for the people affected and the systems and services that are needed to support them. People living in the poorest parts of Wales already die more than six years earlier than those in the least deprived areas, and the cost-of-living crisis will accelerate what were already increasing differences in health between those with more and less money.

The current crisis is not just a temporary economic squeeze: it is a long-term public service issue affecting the whole population, which means communities will become even more reliant on public services and as a result, building social resilience and self-reliance in citizens is even more important than ever.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 The gap between the most deprived and the most affluent has widened and continues to widen, and with the increase in living costs, fuel costs, National Insurance, and inflation this is likely to be exacerbated. This highlights the need to take an in depth look on how we intend to support our communities moving forward in the context of significant budget challenges to respond to and mitigate the anticipated growing demand for support.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This report is for information only and on this basis an integrated impact assessment is not required.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Total forecasted staffing related costs for Caerphilly Cares in 2024/25:

Forecasted Caerphilly Cares Salary Costs = **£1.8m (inc. £117k allocation to Housing Rents team)**

Total Forecasted Grant Funding (Income) = **£700k**

Total Forecasted Staffing Cost to CCBC = £1.1m

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no personnel implications.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 This report has been sent to the Consultees listed below and all comments received are reflected in this report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 None.

Author: Tina McMahon, Caerphilly Cares Manager

Consultees: Dave Street, Deputy Chief Executive
Richard (Ed) Edmunds, Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services
Mark S Williams, Corporate Director for Economy and Environment
Councillor Carol Andrews, Cabinet Member for Education and Communities
Cllr Teresa Parry, Chair of Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Brenda Miles, Vice Chair of Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee
Sue Richards, Head of Education Planning and Strategy
Rob Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Steven Harris, Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services
Nick Taylor - Williams, Head of Housing
Sandra Issacs, Rents Manager

Background Papers:

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Testimonials and Case Studies