

Voices of Swansea: Challenging poverty stigma together

Implications for policy and practice



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Summary

- » This report summarises key insights relating to understanding, preventing and addressing poverty stigma at a local level in Swansea and beyond.
- » The aim of this project was to inform Swansea Council's forthcoming 2026 Tackling Poverty Strategy and wider efforts to address poverty stigma in the area.
- » To achieve this, in partnership with a team of Swansea-based community researchers, the Wales Centre for Public Policy brought together local policy makers, practitioners and experts by experience to explore their perspectives in dialogue with international evidence, and to co-create evidence-informed actions for working towards a stigma-free Swansea.
- » The actions put forward in this report are based on:
 - a) seven focus groups with 46 people across seven community groups;
 - b) four workshops with people with lived experience, policy makers and practitioners; and
 - c) findings from a rapid evidence review.
- » In total, eight actions were prioritised for consideration by Swansea Council and wider services (see Figure 1).
- » Participants then explored what would be required to make these priorities a reality in Swansea. The report sets out participants' suggestions for how these priorities could be implemented in practice in Swansea.



Removing stigma from access to support

Delivering services with dignity and respect

Changing language, culture and systems



Improve data sharing across departments to streamline access and support processes

Establish access to universally free poverty stigma training for professionals, particularly targeted at addressing stigma

Increase the involvement of people with lived experience when designing, delivering and evaluating services



Eliminate repetitive assessments by integrating services and sharing information

Ensure that services are convenient for people who need to access them, for example by ensuring the provision of a physical space or in-person services to avoid digital exclusion

Ensure accessible and stigma-free language in communications such as official forms and letters



Invest in community spaces that offer multiple services

Explore ways of better supporting groups most likely to experience poverty stigma, such as asylum seekers and refugees, who often face worklessness

Figure 1: actions prioritised for consideration by Swansea Council and wider services

About this report



This report summarises key insights into understanding, preventing and addressing poverty stigma at a local level in Swansea and beyond.

It is based on findings generated through a collaborative, place-based research project led by Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) alongside a team of Swansea-based community researchers and the Pont Collective. Our aim is to inform Swansea Council's forthcoming 2026 Tackling Poverty Strategy and wider efforts to address poverty stigma locally. To achieve this, we brought together local policy makers, practitioners and experts with lived experience to examine local policy, practice and lived experience in relation to poverty stigma, in dialogue with international evidence. This process supported the co-creation of evidence-informed actions to address poverty stigma in Swansea.

This report has been published alongside a community report, developed by the community researchers involved in the project (Ramasut et al., 2025), and a rapid evidence review (RER) carried out by The Poverty Alliance and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU) (Robertson et al., 2025).

Wider programme of work on poverty stigma

The research and recommendations set out in this Policy and Practice Report form part of a wider programme of work by WCPP to strengthen and inform efforts to prevent and address poverty stigma within public services in Wales.

The programme was prompted by a 2022 review of poverty and social exclusion conducted by WCPP for the Welsh Government, which identified addressing poverty stigma as a key priority for people experiencing poverty (Carter et al., 2022).

To build on this work and inform policy and practice at both local and national levels, we commissioned a rapid evidence review examining how poverty stigma has been effectively prevented or addressed in policy and practice in the UK and internationally (Robertson et al., 2025). Alongside this, we established the Poverty Stigma Insight Network to share ideas, good practice and examples of what works, while placing the voices and expertise of people with lived experience of poverty stigma at the centre of identifying problems and shaping solutions.

All of this work aligns with Objective 4 of the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy to: 'challenge the stigma of poverty and ensure children, young people and their families are treated with dignity and respect by the people and services who interact with and support them' (Welsh Government, 2024a, p. 31).

Background

Poverty stigma definitions

There is no universally agreed definition of poverty stigma within the existing literature or in policy and practice. In this report, we draw on Inglis et al.'s (2019, p. 2) conceptualisation of poverty stigma as 'the collective forms of stigma that are experienced by people living on low incomes'. Inglis et al. (2024, p. 1) distinguish between four types of poverty stigma:

Received stigma: a form of discrimination directed towards a person because they have a low income. Examples include being disrespected or judged unfairly by others.

Anticipated stigma: an individual's concern that others will treat them unfairly because they have a low income.

Self-stigma: when people on low incomes internalise negative stereotypes and apply these to themselves. This form of stigma also has an emotional dimension and may be experienced as feelings of shame.

Perceived structural stigma: individuals' beliefs about how people on low incomes are treated by institutions, public services or policy makers.

Poverty stigma amplifies the effects of material hardship and makes it more difficult for people to move out of poverty. Our [previous work on poverty stigma](#) highlights that poverty stigma is associated with poor mental health, social isolation and reduced take-up of benefits and other support services (Morgan et al., 2024). This is not an isolated issue. A [YouGov survey](#) we commissioned with the Bevan Foundation in 2024 revealed the scale of the challenge in Wales, with 35% of adults on a low income, defined as an annual household income below £20,000, reporting that they experienced poverty stigma 'always', 'often' or 'sometimes' (WCPP, 2024).

Our process

As shown by the diagram below, in order to co-create evidence-informed actions for change, we brought together lived experience insights and evidence, professional insights, and international academic and research evidence.



Figure 2: Addressing poverty stigma in Swansea – our process

Firstly, we commissioned the Pont Collective, a research consultancy, to lead peer research into people's experiences of poverty stigma in Swansea and the role of local public services in both preventing and, at times, contributing to stigma. The Pont Collective worked with a team of community researchers to conduct qualitative research in Swansea to understand how poverty stigma affects people's lives and what actions can be taken to address it. Between February and May 2025, together with the Pont Collective, the community researchers held seven focus groups, speaking with 46 people across seven different community groups, and facilitated two workshops with professionals from local public services in Swansea. Detailed findings from this research are set out in a community report published alongside this policy and practice report.

Secondly, to draw on academic evidence of ‘what works’ to address and prevent poverty stigma, we commissioned the Poverty Alliance and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU) to deliver a rapid evidence review (RER) on how poverty stigma has been effectively prevented or addressed in policy and practice in the UK and internationally. Following a systematic search for relevant research, 23 papers were included. Only a small number of the interventions identified in the review had been formally evaluated, meaning that the review largely draws on evidence and insights relating to approaches that have not yet been robustly assessed. To bring the review findings together with the Swansea community research, we identified three overarching themes from the international evidence:

- Removing stigma from access to support
- Delivering services with dignity and respect
- Changing language, culture and systems

Finally, we sought to contextualise the academic evidence by bringing it together with the findings of the community research to better understand implications for policy and practice in Swansea. We held two workshops in June and July 2025, bringing together community researchers, policy makers and practitioners in Swansea to explore experiences of poverty stigma and to begin identifying pathways towards creating stigma-free policies and services in Swansea. This included integrating findings from the community research with international evidence to identify and examine potential actions for tackling poverty stigma in Swansea and beyond.

In the remainder of this report we explore:

- The community research findings
- The international academic evidence
- Implications of both for policy and practice in Swansea and beyond



Community research findings

The community research found that poverty stigma affects the daily lives of people experiencing poverty in Swansea through systems, spaces and relationships. Some of the key findings include:

Early experiences can have a lasting impact: Children experiencing poverty-related stigma, for example through accessing free school meals or because of the shoes they wear, can carry feelings of hurt into adulthood. This can shape how they perceive themselves throughout their lives. Such experiences can contribute to cycles of shame, mental health difficulties and social exclusion. Internalised stigma can also lead people to feel ashamed about accessing the support to which they are entitled.

Pressures on families: Parents work hard to shield their children from poverty stigma, often at personal cost. However, children sometimes understand more than parents realise, with some young people describing feelings of guilt about their family's circumstances. For example, one young person reported that when excluded from school trips, they told their parents, *'I don't want to go anyway'* even when they did, in order to protect their parents from guilt and self-stigma.

Traditional and social media can reinforce feelings of self-stigma: Online platforms can create constant pressure to display a lifestyle that many families cannot afford, particularly around special occasions. Christmas can bring particular pressures when families see posts about 'everyone in matching pyjamas' and living rooms 'full' of presents. At the same time, traditional media can reinforce stigma through negative portrayals of people living in poverty. People may then internalise these stereotypes and apply them to themselves, contributing to self-stigma (Inglis et al., 2024).

Systems that blame rather than support: Poverty stigma intensifies when people are blamed for choices shaped by poverty and the systems surrounding them. People who face work incentive traps, where earning more results in reduced benefits, are sometimes labelled as lazy when making rational decisions to protect their livelihoods.

Accessing services can feel demoralising: Food banks, benefits assessments and other support systems can be experienced as retraumatising, particularly when individuals are required to recount personal experiences repeatedly across different services. Complex forms, assessments and the expectation to demonstrate need while feeling judged for doing so can create shame and reduce people's sense of being valued.

Compounded stigmas: For some individuals, including those from other countries, people with disabilities and those experiencing racism, poverty stigma can intersect with other forms of discrimination. Asylum seekers, for example, can face particular poverty stigma, including racial abuse, when using designated travel vouchers on public transport.

In addition, public services that exist to support people who need to access them, can actually exacerbate poverty stigma. Both community members and professionals that were engaged with identified the same issues:

- Frontline staff control access to services and decide who deserves help
- There was a perception that different response times and service quality depend on where you live / who you are
- Repetitive assessments across services can mean that people have to tell their story over and over
- Unwelcoming buildings, including the presence of security guards or aspects of building design, can create a perception that people that need to access services aren't welcome or valued

The community report emphasises that these experiences affect daily life through systems, spaces, both physical and online, and relationships, creating barriers that extend well beyond financial constraints alone.

The solutions identified through the community research are discussed later in this report, see 'Bringing together community research and international evidence' (p. 16).



What works to address poverty stigma?

International evidence

We commissioned the Poverty Alliance and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU) to undertake a [rapid evidence review \(RER\)](#) examining how poverty stigma has been effectively prevented or addressed through policy and practice, both within the UK and internationally (Robertson et al., 2025). Key findings from this review are summarised below in relation to three themes:

- Removing stigma from access to support
- Delivering services with dignity and respect
- Changing language, culture and systems



Removing stigma from access to support



International efforts to remove stigma associated with accessing support for those in poverty have focused on making processes more seamless, universal and sensitive to the experiences of those seeking help.

One key approach has been the automation of benefits and services by removing or simplifying application processes. For example, in 2017 Glasgow City Council automated the School Clothing Grant by linking eligibility to free school meals. Similarly, the Child Poverty Action Group highlighted the positive impact of automating free school meals during the COVID-19 pandemic (Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Poverty, 2023). Automation, including the passporting of entitlements, reduces the need for individuals to repeatedly demonstrate eligibility. This not only simplifies access but also mitigates stigma by reducing the burden of proving entitlement (Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Poverty, 2023).

The review also highlighted the importance of measures that avoid singling out or differentiating people experiencing poverty. Much of this evidence comes from practice in schools. Programmes run by the Child Poverty Action Group, such as the Cost of the School Day, and by Children North East, such as Poverty Proofing the School Day, demonstrate how initiatives including universal breakfast provision, emergency or recycled uniforms and reducing school-related costs for all pupils, for example clothing and school trips, make it less likely that disadvantaged pupils are singled out or excluded (Mazzoli-Smith and Todd, 2016; Laing et al., 2023). Another mechanism for avoiding singling people out is the universalisation of services and support. Universal provision normalises access, making support less visible as targeted assistance and therefore less stigmatising. In a review of national and international evidence on universal free school meals, James (2024) found that universal provision can reduce stigma by removing the association with means-tested welfare.

There is also evidence that **co-location of services** can help reduce poverty stigma. For example, one study found that when access to support is facilitated through existing trusted relationships, such as referrals from GPs or services embedded within community mental health or social work teams, individuals report feeling less stigmatised and experiencing a greater sense of self-worth (Carrick et al., 2017).



Delivering services with dignity and respect



Delivering support in ways that uphold dignity and respect is central to addressing and reducing poverty stigma.

The review highlights the value of embedding **cash-first approaches** within service delivery. These approaches are identified as a key mechanism for upholding dignity and respect by enabling individuals to make decisions that best meet the needs of their households and families (Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Poverty, 2023). Cash-first approaches focus on maximising household income, for example by ensuring access to adequate benefits or expanding access to the Living Wage, as well as providing direct cash payments as an alternative to in-kind support such as food parcels or vouchers (Birmingham City Council, no date; Independent Food Aid Network, no date).

Beyond financial support, services should be designed around **principles of dignity, empathy and respect**, ensuring that recipients feel valued rather than judged (Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Poverty, 2023). Evidence from community-based initiatives demonstrates that the presentation and delivery of services can significantly influence how they are experienced. For example, by designing facilities to resemble community spaces rather than traditional food banks, an independent food hub in the north-east of England helped to normalise access to support (Brennan-Tovey et al., 2023). Emphasising environmental benefits, such as reducing food waste, further positioned the service as a positive collective endeavour rather than a charitable intervention (Brennan-Tovey et al., 2023). Similarly, Brennan-Tovey et al. (2023) and Ranta et al. (2024) found that a welcoming atmosphere and opportunities for social interaction within food hubs and social supermarkets can foster dignity and respect. Carrick et al. (2017), in a review of the stigma-reducing impact of co-located advice workers and services in GP practices in Scotland, found that when services are delivered by non-judgemental advisers, individuals feel less stigmatised and report a stronger sense of self-worth.





Changing language, culture and systems



Addressing poverty stigma requires not only changes to service design and delivery but also broader shifts in language, organisational culture and institutional systems. A key element involves **meaningful engagement with people who have lived experience of poverty** to ensure that services are attentive to how their offer is received and experienced (Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Poverty, 2023).

It is also important to change how poverty and support are communicated by **promoting alternative, non-stigmatising language and narratives**. The adoption of a rights-based approach, for example recognising access to affordable housing as a human right, reframes support as an entitlement rather than a charitable act (Ejiogu and Denedo, 2021). Evidence suggests that even relatively small changes in language can have significant effects. A United States study examining a rental assistance programme found that reframing communications to emphasise fairness and inclusion led to a 36% increase in engagement and an 18% rise in applications (Lasky-Fink and Linos, 2023). Within schools, Children North East's Poverty Proofing the School Day programme encourages teachers to avoid discussing costs or debts with pupils and to eliminate debt-related correspondence being sent home with pupils, thereby reducing stigmatising practices (Mazzoli-Smith and Todd, 2016).

Sustaining these changes requires **greater awareness and training** among professionals and practitioners. Education and ongoing professional development should promote empathy, challenge assumptions about poverty and encourage reflective practice. Poverty simulation exercises and case-based learning, delivered with the involvement of people with lived experience, have been shown to increase understanding and compassion and to reduce negative judgements among practitioners (Beddoe and Keddell, 2016; Murray et al., 2022). Building this awareness among frontline staff and policymakers strengthens the capacity of systems and services to deliver support with dignity and respect.

Bringing together community research and international evidence

In June 2025 we held two workshops in Swansea to explore the findings of the local research conducted by the community researchers in dialogue with the international evidence, in order to co-create evidence-informed actions for addressing poverty stigma in Swansea. The workshops brought together people with lived experience, practitioners and local decision-makers to collaboratively develop practical approaches, grounded in evidence, to address poverty stigma in Swansea. The workshops were designed to build on one another (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Workshops overview

Sharing findings and creating a shared vision for stigma-free services in Swansea (Workshop 1)

Workshop 1, held in June 2025, brought together Swansea policy makers and practitioners with the community researchers to hear the findings of the research into lived experience of poverty stigma in Swansea and the role of local services in preventing and addressing stigma. After hearing these findings, participants explored how policy and public services in Swansea can prevent and address poverty stigma, co-creating a 'three horizons' road map for achieving this (Figure 4).

In developing the road map, participants drew on the community research findings and their own experiences and reflections. They shared their views on:

1. The current situation in Swansea in relation to poverty stigma
2. Their preferred vision for a stigma-free Swansea
3. Elements of services that should be phased out to reduce stigma
4. Elements of current provision that should be retained
5. Seeds of change already present that could be strengthened and expanded
6. Changes required to move towards the preferred future of stigma-free services in Swansea.

Reflecting on the research findings, alongside their own knowledge of current policy and practice, participants identified both challenges and examples of emerging good practice. There was a perception that services can feel fragmented and difficult to navigate:

- Participants felt that many frontline staff would benefit from training in poverty awareness;
- Individuals attempting to access services can at times feel blamed or judged for their circumstances; and
- Information provided by services can be overly complex, and repetitive assessments may retraumatise service users.

In developing their preferred vision for stigma-free services in Swansea, participants described a desire for services that are equitable, inclusive and trauma-informed, reflecting a culture of empathy and compassion. This vision was underpinned by a shift in public understanding of poverty, moving away from individual blame towards greater awareness of structural and systemic factors.

To achieve this vision, participants identified a range of transitional actions that would need to be implemented. These included:

- Involving experts by experience in service design and delivery;
- Mandatory training on poverty awareness for frontline and wider public sector staff;
- Simplifying and reframing language and communications; and
- Investing in community resilience and local capacity.

Figure 4: Creating our three horizons road map



Participants also highlighted that there are already examples of positive practice in Swansea that could support this transition. These include community-based models such as the [Phoenix Centre](#), which is an innovative community hub in the centre of Townhill, [community fridges](#), collaboration across some services, and the development of trauma-informed approaches.

Bringing together international evidence and local insights (Workshop 2)

Workshop 2, held in July 2025, built on the learning from Workshop 1 regarding poverty stigma in Swansea. It brought together the community research into the lived experience of poverty in Swansea with international academic evidence, summarised on p. X, on what works to prevent and address poverty stigma. The international evidence (RER) and the ideas for action generated in Workshop 1, set out in Appendix 1, were organised under three themes:

- Removing stigma from access to support
- Delivering services with dignity and respect
- Changing language, culture and systems

Participants were invited to reflect on the academic findings and the ideas for action generated in Workshop 1, and to suggest any additional actions that could be taken to address poverty stigma in Swansea, see Tables 2, 3 and 4 in Appendix 1. Participants then prioritised actions by reviewing the full list of proposed ideas and voting for the options they considered most important to take forward through policy and public services in Swansea, see Table 1).



Table 1: Priority actions for addressing poverty stigma in Swansea

Theme	Priority Action	Source
Removing stigma from access to support	Improve data sharing across departments to streamline access and support processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RER • Community research (report / Workshop 1)
	Eliminate repetitive assessments by integrating services and sharing information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RER • Community research (report / Workshop 1)
	Invest in community spaces that offer multiple services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community research (report / Workshop 1)
Delivering services with dignity and respect	Establish access to universally free poverty stigma training for professionals, particularly targeted at addressing stigma in service design and delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RER • Community research (report / Workshop 1)
	Ensure that services are convenient for people who need to access them, for example by maintaining physical access options to avoid digital exclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community research (report / Workshop 1)
	Explore ways of better supporting groups most likely to experience poverty stigma, such as asylum seekers and refugees, who often face worklessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community research (report / Workshop 1)
Changing language, culture and systems	Increase the involvement of people with lived experience in designing, delivering and evaluating services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RER • Community research (report / Workshop 1)
	Simplify and reframe language in communications, including official forms and letters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RER • Community research (report / Workshop 1)

More detail from participants' discussions about their proposed actions, and what implementation might look like in practice in Swansea, can be found in the 'Routes to implementation' section of the report below.

Routes to implementation

Across the two workshops, participants drew on the findings of the local community research, in dialogue with the international evidence, to generate ideas for actions to prevent and address poverty stigma in Swansea. As part of the second workshop, they prioritised two to three ideas from their longlist against the three themes of removing stigma from access to support, delivering services with dignity and respect, and changing narratives, culture and systems.

During the remainder of the workshop, participants focused on these prioritised ideas to explore what would be required to make them a reality in Swansea. The outcomes of this work are outlined below.





Removing stigma from access to support

Improving data sharing across services and departments to streamline access processes



Participants noted that enabling services to share information more effectively would reduce the need for individuals to repeat the same information and would allow more seamless access to support. Both the community research and the international evidence highlight that repeated assessments can feel unnecessary and degrading, particularly when a service user's circumstances have not changed. Enabling departments to share information, for example to automate eligibility for support based on existing data and applications, could reduce the stress and re-traumatisation associated with repeated assessments. Greater integration of services, creating a no wrong door approach, would mean that people are believed once rather than repeatedly required to prove their circumstances. This aligns with the intentions of the Welsh Benefits Charter, which aims to facilitate data sharing for the public good and establish a single point of access for Welsh benefits (Welsh Government, 2024b).

There are, however, several considerations to address, including data protection and privacy requirements, the need to maintain accurate records, and potential resistance from departments with established working practices. Building trust and collaboration across departments would also be essential to enable effective information sharing.





According to participants, improving data sharing and streamlining processes would require:

- Conducting research to assess organisational appetite for integration and identify barriers
- Recognising that core factual information that does not change frequently may not require annual reassessment, and moving to longer assessment cycles, for example five-yearly in stable circumstances, where appropriate
- Establishing clear protocols to prevent misuse of data while enabling appropriate information sharing
- Auditing existing systems to identify compatibility gaps and mapping opportunities for integration across services
- Identifying key services to prioritise for initial integration, including housing benefits, free school meals, council tax reduction, Blue Badge, discretionary housing payments, food bank vouchers and social services)
- Configuring systems to communicate securely and implementing appropriate consent mechanisms
- Creating systems that allow professionals to access relevant and up-to-date resident information with appropriate safeguards
- Securing financial resources for cross-departmental staff training
- Obtaining political and stakeholder commitment at leadership level to ensure implementation

Removing stigma from access to support

Investing in community spaces offering multiple services



Participants noted that creating “one-stop shop” community spaces could significantly reduce barriers and increase accessibility by bringing services into locations where communities already gather. This reflects successful models such as the Phoenix Centre and, in principle, emerging initiatives such as Y Storfa¹. Participants recognised that hosting multiple services in one space requires more than co-location. It also requires genuine integration, effective data sharing and alignment of service objectives. Key considerations include maintaining service quality when multiple providers operate in the same space and securing sustainable funding for both capital investment and ongoing revenue costs.

Participants identified that investing in multi-service community spaces would require:

- Co-producing detailed service specifications with local authority partners, health partners and community representatives to determine which services are most needed and most appropriate for co-location
- Conducting public engagement to understand what communities want from shared spaces and where they would be most accessible
- Identifying and securing suitable properties, taking into account accessibility, transport links and levels of community trust
- Developing robust business cases and securing capital funding, for example through Regional Partnership Board funding, alongside sustainable revenue funding
- Building on existing initiatives such as Y Storfa, which opened in December 2025, as proof of concept and exploring co-location with schools and other community venues
- Commissioning experienced partners with a track record in community-led service delivery

¹ Y Storfa: ‘A new multi-purpose community services hub promoting community cohesion, opportunities for self-development and growth, digital inclusion, wellbeing, unity and strength across Swansea’s diverse communities’ (Swansea Council, 2025, para. 6).



Delivering services with dignity and respect

Establishing access to universally free poverty stigma training, particularly targeted at public services



Establishing access to high-quality, universally free poverty stigma training, including life course understanding², targeted at addressing stigma in service design and delivery, could support frontline staff to recognise and challenge bias and promote respectful interactions. This training would focus on practical application within service delivery rather than general equality and diversity training. Participants emphasised that, consistent with the international evidence, such training would help staff develop a deeper understanding of people's life experiences and raise awareness of poverty and stigma across public services. It could also create space for a shift from demanding performative proof of need towards listening to and believing people accessing services. This, in turn, would help remove barriers and promote take-up of support.

Participants identified several risks that would need to be managed, including the potential for training to become tokenistic or a tick-box exercise, avoiding 'poverty tourism' that sensationalises lived experience, ensuring that staff engage meaningfully and understand that the training is mandatory rather than optional, and maintaining consistency and relevance across teams and departments.

To establish access to universally free poverty stigma training, participants proposed:

- Commissioning experts by experience to inform training design, including agreeing clear objectives regarding expected behaviour change)
- Reviewing and drawing on established, evidence-based training models
- Commissioning people with lived experience of poverty to co-facilitate and deliver training
- Collecting structured feedback from staff following training to assess understanding and behaviour change
- Communicating clearly that poverty awareness and stigma training is mandatory and relevant to all roles, not solely frontline staff
- Building in mechanisms to monitor implementation and changes in service practice following training

² A life course approach recognises that 'there are a wide range of protective and risk factors that interplay in health and wellbeing over the life span' (GOV.UK, 2019, para. 7)

Delivering services with dignity and respect

Ensuring that services are convenient for those who need to access them, including provision of in-person support to prevent digital exclusion



Participants noted that creating more open and welcoming physical environments for people seeking support, while ensuring provision of in-person access options alongside digital services, would significantly increase service accessibility and uptake. This approach recognises that not everyone has reliable access to digital technology or the confidence to use online services, and that in-person support can communicate important messages about whether people are valued and welcome.

Participants highlighted potential risks, including the significant resource and capacity requirements to provide multiple access options, potential creation or widening of inequality if implementation varies by area or if only some services provide in-person options, the need for a wider cultural shift in how services understand accessibility, and the requirement for supportive infrastructure such as accessible parking and safe lighting. Long-term sustainability beyond pilot stages would also need to be considered.

To ensure services are convenient and accessible, participants recommended:

- Conducting a detailed audit of current physical service environments to identify barriers and opportunities for improvement
- Co-producing solutions with staff, service users and community stakeholders to design environments that genuinely meet need
- Designing systems that combine face-to-face and other non-digital options alongside digital provision, ensuring that no individual or group is disadvantaged
- Removing security guards from service buildings where this is not essential for safety
- Investing in staff training to support delivery with dignity and respect, alongside efforts to diversify the workforce
- Ensuring services are convenient in practical terms, including consideration of transport costs, opening hours and appointment availability
- Working with communities to identify local assets and environments that are most likely to reach those who may otherwise struggle to access support

Delivering services with dignity and respect

Exploring ways of better supporting groups most likely to experience poverty stigma, such as asylum seekers and refugees, who often face worklessness



There are legal restrictions that prevent asylum seekers from working, which can push people into poverty. This represents a systemic policy issue that public services in Wales cannot address alone, but can advocate alongside others to change. Participants recognised that enabling asylum seekers to work would help to reduce poverty stigma by supporting economic independence and dignity. It could also reduce pressure on public services and contribute positively to the local economy.

Several barriers to this action were identified, including resistance to policy change at UK Government level, negative public perceptions and political rhetoric surrounding asylum, the fact that this issue sits outside the direct control of the Welsh Government and local services, and the difficulty of sustaining long-term advocacy campaigns while managing competing priorities.

While local government and public services have limited direct influence, participants suggested that collective action within the community could include:

- Identifying relevant policy makers, decision-makers and influential advocates at local, regional and national levels
- Researching, collecting and documenting compelling case studies that demonstrate the impact of work restrictions on individuals and families
- Organising community forums that invite policymakers, elected representatives and community members to hear directly from people with lived experience
- Securing dedicated campaign funding and building partnerships with advocacy organisations experienced in policy change
- Developing evidence-based recommendations that highlight the economic and social benefits of reform



Changing language, culture and systems

Involving people with lived experience in service design, planning and evaluation



Participants suggested that greater involvement of people with lived experience in planning and designing services would help ensure that policies and provision better reflect people's needs and do not inadvertently reinforce poverty stigma. Authentic lived experience insight was seen as essential to designing services around the realities of those who use them, consistent with Swansea Council's [Co-production Strategy](#). This approach could improve the relevance of services, provide grounded insight into the challenges people face and reduce the risk of implementation problems arising from a lack of first-hand perspective.

Participants highlighted several risks to this approach that would need to be managed. These include tokenism, where people are invited to contribute but their input is not acted upon; power imbalances between professionals and people with lived experience; the risk of re-traumatisation if individuals are repeatedly asked to recount difficult experiences without adequate support; institutional resistance to genuine co-design; and the potential for raised expectations that cannot be fulfilled. The importance of appropriate payment and recognition for people's time and expertise was also emphasised.

To encourage and support meaningful involvement of people with lived experience in service design and planning, participants recommended:

- Paying people with lived experience appropriately for their contributions, rather than relying on voluntary or token payments
- Running small-scale pilot projects with diverse communities to test different co-design approaches
- Using multiple engagement methods, including questionnaires, forums, community listening events and formal co-design groups, to reach a wide range of participants
- Developing a clear framework for co-design that defines roles, decision-making authority and accountability
- Securing budget and policy approval to embed co-production approaches
- Building relationships and trust over time, recognising that effective co-design requires sustained engagement
- Refreshing engagement groups regularly to ensure diverse representation and avoid over-reliance on the same individuals
- Ensuring diverse representation across age, background and experiences of poverty

Changing language, culture and systems

Ensuring non-judgemental and accessible language



Ensuring language in official communications is non-judgemental and accessible would benefit everyone, not only people on a low income. Clearer and more accessible language can help overcome language barriers, improve understanding and reduce confusion. Simpler communications are less intimidating for people accessing services and can support increased uptake. Participants noted that this is an area where relatively modest investment could deliver significant gains in accessibility and dignity.

However, several risks require attention. These include the challenge of simplifying language while still conveying necessary legal or technical information. There is a need to ensure that simplification does not become patronising or appear to talk down to people, to maintain consistency across different letters and services, and to recognise that some correspondence may be prescribed by external bodies, such as government departments, which may limit local flexibility.

Participants suggested that simplifying language would require:

- Auditing council letters and forms to identify those most frequently used and those where language is particularly complex
- Reviewing and revising communications in line with established plain language standards, such as GOV.UK guidance
- Providing clear templates and guidance for staff and offering training in plain language principles
- Co-producing revised letters and forms with people with lived experience to test clarity and accessibility
- Offering choice in how communications are received, including email, text, letter, large print, easy read, audio and other languages
- Where appropriate, incorporating visual elements such as QR codes linking to explanatory videos or support resources
- Avoiding stigmatising visual cues, such as certain envelope types or overly formal presentation that may signal negative outcomes
- Ensuring that easy-read and accessible versions of documents are readily available for those who need them

Conclusion

The findings presented in this policy and practice report draw on community research into the lived experience of poverty and poverty stigma in Swansea, international evidence and the expertise of practitioners and policy makers. In partnership with a team of Swansea-based community researchers, the project convened local policy makers, practitioners and people with lived experience to co-create actions to address poverty stigma in Swansea. In total, eight priority actions were identified, alongside suggested approaches to implementation and next steps (Table 1). These actions will now be considered by Swansea Council as part of its ongoing work to promote inclusion, belonging and dignity for people experiencing poverty and hardship.

Although grounded in the Swansea context, the insights presented here are largely applicable to local authorities and public services beyond Swansea.



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Appendix 1: Ideas for action

Table 2: Areas of action identified in relation to removing stigma from access to support

Areas of action identified in international evidence	Ideas for change identified by participants
Automate access to support or entitlements	
Expand universal provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate, lobby and campaign for universal free school meals for secondary as well as primary school pupils • Advocate, lobby and campaign for transport justice • Address the postcode lottery in service provision, including differences in eligibility criteria, by moving towards a more universal access model
Reduce or remove eligibility assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create space for a shift in services from 'demanding performativity' to listening to and believing people accessing services • Make support discreetly and freely available where possible rather than requiring people to ask or apply for it
Co-locate services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in community spaces that offer multiple services
Enable access through trusted relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support local community-led initiatives that are already working • Work collaboratively with communities to co-produce solutions • Learn from successful models in which communities deliver services within their own areas • Scale up successful community models, such as the Phoenix Centre approach

Table 3: Areas action identified in relation to delivering services with dignity and respect

Areas of action identified in international evidence	Ideas for change identified by
Create welcoming and dignified environments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create more open and welcoming physical environments for people accessing support 2. Remove security guards from service buildings where they are not essential for safety 3. Take action to diversify the workforce across services 4. Ensure that services are convenient for people who need to access them, for example by maintaining physical access options to avoid digital exclusion 5. Provide pre-packed food parcels to reduce the need for people to wait in long queues 6. Work with communities to identify local assets and environments that will reach those most in need who may struggle to access services
Enable autonomy and choice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish access to universally free poverty stigma training, particularly targeted at addressing stigma in service design and delivery 2. Explore ways of better supporting groups most likely to experience poverty stigma, such as asylum seekers and refugees, who often face worklessness 3. Provide greater choice and more inclusive options, for example halal and fresh food in food banks, and a wider range of appointment times 4. Build on the COAST and holiday food programme 5. Address practical needs when providing services, for example offering both digital and in-person support to provide genuine choice 6. Introduce shadowing schemes to improve understanding of service processes
Cash-first approaches	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue working with the Independent Food Aid Network, including promoting cash-first leaflets 2. Promote the use of food poverty grant funding to offer vouchers to people accessing food banks 3. Roll out Money and Pensions Service money guidance training 4. Ensure equitable delivery of empowerment approaches, so that if cash-first principles are adopted, they are applied consistently
Ensure dignity and respect	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct poverty-proofing audits of schools and other public services 2. Remove processes that single out people experiencing poverty, for example specific bus passes that identify individuals as receiving support 3. Measure how schools are addressing poverty 4. Embed choice and universalism in support where possible

Table 4: Areas of action identified in relation to changing language, culture and systems

Areas of action identified in international evidence	Ideas for tackling poverty stigma in Swansea
Increase awareness and understanding, and challenge bias	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide poverty awareness training for public services 2. Implement mandatory “believe people” training for all frontline staff 3. Implement the Charter for Rehumanising Systems and Services developed by the Swansea Poverty Truth Commission / review current charter
Change language and narratives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the name and/or branding of anti-poverty initiatives 2. Develop a shared understanding of inclusive language among service providers, for example through a language handbook 3. Avoid labelling people who need support, for example using terms such as ‘poor’ 4. Simplify language in communications, including official forms and letters
Involve people with lived experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase the involvement of people with lived experience in service planning 2. Invite people with lived experience to audit services 3. Employ people with lived experience in frontline roles across services 4. Organise projects or events that bring together community members and service providers to hear directly from people with lived experience, for example using a human library approach 5. Recognise and fund informal peer support networks
Advocate wider system change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deliver shared training across partnerships 2. Include action on poverty stigma as a Key Performance Indicator 3. Build and share evidence on what works to address poverty stigma with other areas and policy makers 4. Develop measurable targets to address poverty stigma 5. Lobby and campaign for changes to the welfare system and challenge aspects of national benefits policy 6. Develop an anti-stigma campaign to shift public attitudes 7. Involve third and private sector partners in ongoing activity 8. Develop a Swansea-wide strategy for co-production and involvement

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