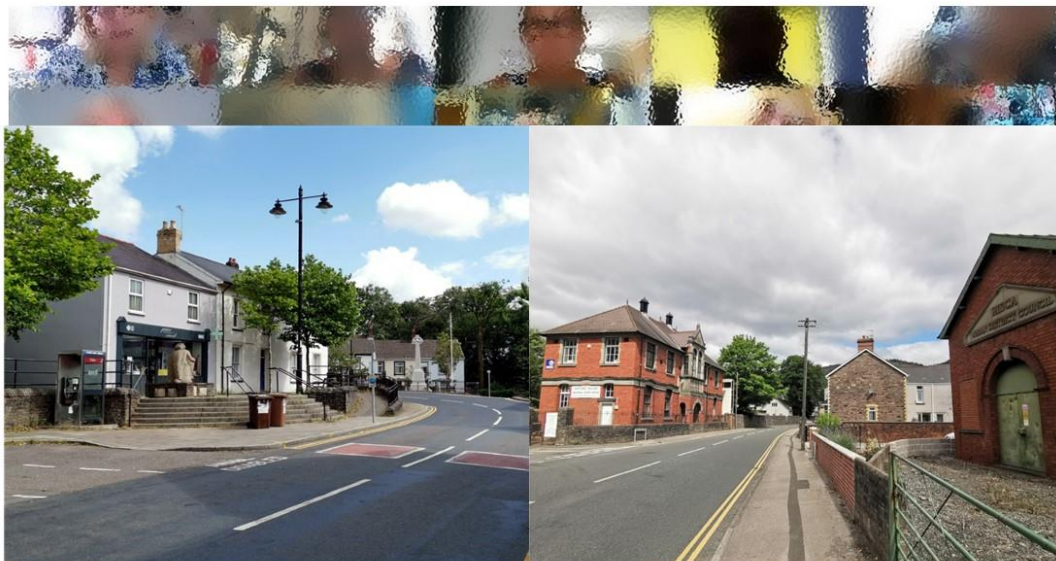




**SUSTAINING AND STRENGTHENING
COMMUNITY WELLBEING
TOGETHER IN THE COVID ERA**



**IWN Caerphilly
Community Discussions Summary
AUGUST 2020**



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INTRODUCTION

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

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

The meetings were interactive with attendees fully encouraged to participate. Transcripts were gathered to produce this report, together with the comments in the chat boxes where participants provided additional information.

Individual reports from each meeting have been sent to their participants. This report summarises the main collective findings to help inform the ways in which services and communities can respond together to sustain and strengthen wellbeing in the COVID era, to support further joint exploration, and, importantly, to enable practical actions which the IWN can help facilitate.

BRIEF IWN BACKGROUND AND UPDATE

In the Caerphilly CBC area, prior to COVID-19 outbreak, the IWN focused on the Neighbourhood Care Network (NCN) north, primarily the upper Rhymney valley. Using an asset-based approach, through work in the second half of 2019, place-based wellbeing collectives were in development in Rhymney, New Tredegar and Bargoed. Networks and wellbeing asset maps were created in those locations along with developing plans for collective wellbeing initiatives based on agreed priorities- see www.cwtsh.wales for details.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, in mid-March 2020, the focus of the IWN programme switched to work with Aneurin Bevan Health Board Public Health on its COVID response. This initially focused upon community information and mobilisation, followed by development and delivery of the Test, Trace, Protect programme with partners. The original IWN work in Caerphilly restarted in late July beginning with the discussions covered here. As the COVID-specific work demonstrated, there is a need to extend IWN activities to the other NCNs in the Caerphilly CBC areas as appropriate. This was catalysed in part by the community-based activities in the Risca area that emerged during the lockdown.

¹ Recovering from Emergencies; UK Government 2010

Thematic structure of the meetings

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

MAIN FINDINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BRIEF CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The above findings are clearly not exhaustive since the number of communities and groups involved in discussions to date has been necessarily limited. However, there were clearly common messages and opinions across the discussions, and the findings capture many of those.

There are opportunities to re-examine how services and activities are provided, which will be crucial should further restrictions or lockdowns occur, particularly in the winter months. There have been tremendous efforts under difficult circumstances to adapt and provide services across sectors; the continued challenge is to ensure they are as inclusive as possible, especially in reaching the most vulnerable in our communities.

Services, and activities even, will undoubtedly be a mix of real and online for the foreseeable future. Digital exclusion has been a problem and needs to be addressed where possible.

Services and activities provided by and at community and other centres are crucial to supporting wellbeing. At present, there is a lack of clarity over what is permissible, with many community groups and organisations unclear as to the regulations, and how they can recommence their activities safely. Moreover, those centres often depend on volunteers, often many of whom have themselves been vulnerable during the pandemic, which has impacted on any restart plans. Clear advice and practical (and, in some cases, financial) support are undoubtedly needed to enable community facilities to start and continue their activities safely before winter.

The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated **existing** wellbeing inequalities and challenges. Enhanced mental health and wellbeing services will be crucial moving forward and advantage must be taken of the emerging Foundation Tier activities developed by the health board, along with practical measures being taken by the NCN primary care services. Isolation especially amongst older people in our communities remains an issue.

The prospect of looming unemployment will exacerbate wellbeing issues in our communities. Working effectively with employment and support agencies will be hugely important as the economic impacts of the pandemic worsen. Clear, effective support is needed for people who have not previously encountered such issues.

The pandemic crucially highlighted the need for place-based approaches to wellbeing and support for community groups and organisations involved in wellbeing activities in their areas will be crucial going forward, ensuring they work appropriately and effectively with services. The IWN assets-based approach to enabling wellbeing collaboration and planning in localities should help maximise opportunities. Participatory budgeting to catalyse and start wellbeing initiatives will be vital. However, there are some undeniable constraints in that the IWN will have to continue to work largely online, which can exclude key groups. Moreover, the need and desire to extend IWN activities across Caerphilly CBC area, as opposed to the initial NCN north area, will stretch resources. In those respects, ensuring enhanced working across partners and developing an effective Community Wellbeing Champions network will be crucial.

Finally, an effective TTP programme is vital to addressing the pandemic. There is acceptance of that in the discussions to date. Accessibility to testing, along with clear TTP communications and support for those undertaking isolation where required, is needed. Certain sectors of our communities will need targeted, effective approaches aimed at them, for example young people, older members, and the BAME community. Indeed, in the post COVID era, clear effective messaging and communication to support wellbeing more widely is vital, building on the work undertaken to date.

Appendix – example of Wellbeing Assets Map



Integrated Wellbeing Network

- KEY**
- Community 'Hub' or Amenity
 - Cafes, Pubs, Restaurants
 - Green Space or Outdoor Activities
 - Primary Care Services
 - Other

BARGOD - BARGOED : GILFACH : ABERBARGOD - ABERBARGOED