

SUBJECT: Funding and proposal for a local marketing campaign to support residents experiencing financial hardship

MEETING: Abergavenny Town Council Policy and Resources Committee Meeting 13th October 2021

1. Purpose

- To develop a marketing campaign across Monmouthshire (with elements and information specific to Caldicot), designed to:
 - Raise awareness of the range of help and support that is available to people who may be struggling financially
 - Encourage people experiencing financial difficulties to take the step of seeking help
 - Reassure people experiencing financial difficulties that it is never too late to seek help.
- To identify suitable funding to develop this campaign for the benefit of local people.

2. Recommendation

- 1) That Abergavenny Town Council agrees to partner with Monmouthshire County Council and the other partners from the county Tackling Poverty and Inequality Steering Group – with the option of town council members sitting on the project steering group.
- 2) Develop a promotional campaign to support people experiencing hardship, directly or indirectly, because of the Covid pandemic.
- 3) That Abergavenny Town Council contributes funding towards supporting the implementation of this campaign, with a recommendation of £5000

3. Background

The South Wales Tackling Poverty Alliance has identified that knowledge and awareness of the range of support available to people in financial difficulties is a key barrier to people accessing any support that would help them. They have lobbied for public awareness-raising campaigns in order to support people knowing about and accessing sources of support.

The intention in Monmouthshire is to develop a campaign through social media, posters and leaflets, local newspaper editorials, radio advertising and articles and through local community engagement opportunities. In addition, it is intended to develop a short animation that will outline the messaging mentioned here (much like this one from Doncaster Council <https://twitter.com/MyDoncaster/status/1402254906543722496>). The central messaging of any campaign would be

- sharing the many different opportunities for support for local people

- encouraging people to seek help, advice and support as early as possible
- that it is never too late to seek help, advice and support

4. Outline of issue

The covid crisis has amplified many of the underlying issues - social, financial and mental health - affecting people in our local communities. During covid, Monmouthshire has seen many of its key employment sectors (retail, leisure, tourism, hospitality) particularly badly affected. The number of Universal Credit claimants in the county more than doubled. We know a significant number of local people received support through furlough during the crisis and consequently received lower wages. RSLs in Monmouthshire have reported increased use of their hardship funds and Gateway Credit Union have also advised that an increased number of Christmas savings accounts were being closed and drawn down early. In addition, we know that the largest group of people in poverty across Wales are the working poor.

On top of this, we know that this autumn will bring further hardship for local people. The furlough scheme ended last month; the £20 uplift to Universal Credit ended at the beginning of October ; and the ban on evictions that has been in place during the crisis has also ended. It is anticipated that these changes will bring a surge in need from local people, many of whom have not had to negotiate the benefits system before, nor had to go to the foodbank to ask for food to feed their families.

As a part of the MCC Tackling Poverty and Inequality Action Plan, we have been working in partnership with many local organisations (see list below) from across Monmouthshire to address this concern and to plan how we, as a group, support our local communities through this period. As a group, we are aiming to develop a campaign to let people know that there are many sources of support available across the county (financial, debt, mental health, advice and so on – many listed here <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/money-advice/>), much of which is hyper-local. We want to sell the message that it is key to seek help/advice from these sources as early as possible and that it is never too late to seek help and support.

As mentioned, much of this support is hyper-local, and the campaign will be tailored to fit each of our main towns in Monmouthshire. For instance, in Abergavenny this could include reference to the Abergavenny Community Centre Community Kitchen, to the support provided by Cwtch Angels, or to very local debt counselling services such as that provided by Christians Against Poverty. We would also like this campaign to be an ongoing project, with special dates (Christmas spending, January difficulties etc.) factored in to an annual calendar of support advice events.

We would like to work with all the town councils across Monmouthshire to develop this campaign, and for each area, there can be a clear focus on each area's opportunities for support. Part of this can be a specific space on the overall campaign information offer (for example <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/support-thats-local-to-you/>)

Chepstow and Caldicot Town Councils have recently committed to this partnership and pledged funding of £5000 each towards the campaign (to support those elements focused on Chepstow and Caldicot respectively). We are approaching other Town Councils, including Abergavenny and Monmouth. MCC have been able to contribute some funds to the campaign. Other partners in the steering group have placed this campaign on their team meeting agendas and we expect some funding to be made available from them in due course.

Essentially the campaign would comprise of branding and key messaging that is common across Monmouthshire (to enhance the impact) with content that is highly local in nature (e.g. Cwtch Angels, ACE, Abergavenny Foodbank etc).

5. CONSULTEES:

Partners involved in the Poverty and Inequality Task group include

Citizens Advice
Department for Work and Pensions
Gateway Credit Union
GAVO
Melin Homes
Mind Monmouthshire
Monmouthshire County Council
Monmouthshire Housing
Pobl Housing
Public Health Wales
Town and Community Councils from across Monmouthshire

6. Ryan Coleman

7. CONTACT DETAILS:

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