



# **CEREDIGION TACKLING HARDSHIP STRATEGY 2020 - 2023**

## **PROGRESS REPORT MARCH 2023**

## **Contents**

<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010</b> .....	4
<b>Pillar 1: Essential Living Costs</b> .....	5
<b>Pillar 2: Physical and Emotional Wellbeing</b> .....	7
<b>Pillar 3: Community Resilience</b> .....	10
<b>What the Data tells us - did we make a difference?</b> .....	13
Universal Credit .....	13
Claimant Count .....	13
Youth Employment.....	14
Median Annual Earnings by Residence .....	14
Physical and Emotional Wellbeing .....	14
Child Poverty.....	15
<b>Conclusion and Ongoing Challenges</b> .....	16
<b>Next Steps</b> .....	16
<b>Appendix A: Contributing Partners</b> .....	17

## Introduction

This report sets out the steps taken by Ceredigion Public Services Board (PSB) to tackle hardship in Ceredigion due to the impact of Covid-19 and, more recently, the increased cost of living. It outlines the work that Ceredigion PSB Poverty sub-group has delivered in 2022-23 to maximise support for those who are experiencing hardship.

This is the last annual report on the [Tackling Hardship Strategy 2020-23](#). From April 2023, tackling hardship in Ceredigion is a cross-cutting theme of Ceredigion PSB's Local Well-being Plan 2023-28. This new approach will enable a focus on poverty to be embedded in all aspects of the PSB's work programme for the next five years.

Three key objectives of Ceredigion Tackling Hardship Strategy are:

- To develop a **shared understanding** with partner agencies of the evolving impact of COVID-19 on hardship in Ceredigion through the collation and analysis of data.
- To co-ordinate and **consolidate collaborative efforts** with partner agencies in order to promote and take advantage of all available help and assistance.
- To **identify gaps** in support and evolving hardship needs in order to develop early effective intervention that will strengthen individual and community resilience as we adjust to the impact of COVID-19.

An action plan is being delivered by a range of partners and public sector teams, listed at Appendix B. The Action Plan is divided into 3 separate pillars for implementation:



We wish to acknowledge the commitment and support that colleagues and partners have demonstrated and thank them for their continued recognition of the importance of working collectively to tackle hardship in Ceredigion.

## The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010

Section 2 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 puts a statutory duty on Welsh authorities to prepare and publish a strategy that will contribute to the eradication of child poverty in Wales. The broad aims for contributing to the eradication of poverty are:

- to increase income for households with children.
- to ensure that children are not materially deprived.
- to promote and facilitate paid employment for parents of children.
- to provide parents of children with the skills necessary for paid employment.
- to reduce inequalities in educational attainment between children.
- to support parenting of children.
- to reduce inequalities in health between children and between parents of children.
- to ensure that all children grow up in decent housing.
- to ensure that all children grow up in safe and cohesive communities.
- to reduce inequalities in participation in cultural, sporting and leisure activities between children and between parents of children.
- to help young people participate effectively in education and training.
- to help young people take advantage of opportunities for employment.
- to help young people participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.

The Tackling Hardship Strategy aims to address these aims. Progress is monitored by the Ceredigion PSB Poverty Sub-group which meets four times per year.

Matters relating to Child Poverty are scrutinised by the Children & Young People Services Provider Forum that meets one week before the PSB Poverty Sub-group in order that issues can be escalated to the Poverty Sub-group immediately.

## **Pillar 1: Essential Living Costs**

Financial support was offered directly to families and individuals who were struggling. This included some support with training and employment, but the main focus was to make sure that people received the help that they are entitled to, in face of the rising cost of living. The section below provides examples of some of this work.

### **Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Early Intervention service**

The Carers and Community support team worked with 3,171 people in 2022-23. Extra Community Connector 'drop ins' were offered in more places across the County so that more people were able to access advice and support.

300 door draught excluders, 1,500 metres of heat reflective radiator foil, 60 energy saving long life bulbs, 50 blankets and 900 packs of seeds were distributed by the Community Connectors.

### **Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme**

19 days was the average speed of processing new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction scheme. 5,482 people are currently in receipt of these benefits.

7,547 Winter Fuel Scheme payments and 21,367 Cost of Living scheme payments were made to households, totalling £4.7 million. £322,971 worth of Discretionary Housing Payments were made to top up rents and help safeguard tenancies during 2022-23.

### **Porth Gofal: Housing Services**

12% of those approaching the Homelessness team cited 'Financial Concerns' as one of their reasons for requiring assistance. 67% of households supported by the team were successfully prevented from becoming homeless.

The ECO4 scheme, aimed at low income, vulnerable and fuel poor households living in energy inefficient properties, was launched in October 2022.

A substantial increase in the budget to deliver affordable social housing is coupled with difficulties in acquiring contractors to undertake the work. There are also concerns that the impact of phosphates in the river Teifi will put new planning applications on hold.

### **Care Society**

Inflation and energy prices are creating new worries for vulnerable tenants needing support. People's lack of awareness of cost-of-living support schemes is a major issue. An acute lack of affordable accommodation in Ceredigion is creating problems for service users looking for options when leaving temporary or emergency accommodation. The new Renting Homes Act legislation has further complicated these issues.

## **Area 43**

Area 43's Youth Café – Depot - is now open in Cardigan where young people can access subsidised food and refreshments. Paid employment placements are available as well as free training for 14–25-year-olds in food preparation, nutrition, food hygiene courses and personal and social education in a live work environment.

Young People can access virtual and face-to-face support with budgeting, help to maximise their income, signposting to specialised services, support with applications for hardship grants, independent living skills and securing employment. 399 young people facing financial hardship were supported in 2022-23.

## **Ceredigion Family Centre Network**

860 families were supported by Ceredigion's network of Family Centres. 188 families were referred for further help with free Baby Bundles, clothing, food and book parcels, NEST warm home scheme, Women's Aid, Home Start, Citizens Advice, Dŵr Cymru, CREDU Carers, Team around the Family, Health Visitor support and Mind.

Warm Welcome Spaces were held in all six centres with hot food/snacks provided. 177 families benefitted from this as well as others from the wider community.

## **Schools**

An [Equity and Deprivation Strategy](#) was approved by Cabinet in February 2023. This offers guidance for schools supporting disadvantaged young people and sits alongside a body of wider work to better support our more disadvantaged learners. There is a key message at its core – disadvantaged learners need more support, more often, to have the same opportunities as their peers.

## **Childcare**

The current situation continues to impact on the sector. Energy costs are high and there is still no after school club provision in Penparcau and Cardigan due to recruitment issues; this is crucial for parents wishing to access employment and training. The number of registered childcare places reduced by 158 over the last 12 months.

However, free childcare is available for 2-4-year-olds in Flying Start areas and these will now be extended to more areas. 90 additional children benefitted from Flying Start Outreach provision and 354 children benefitted from the Childcare Offer.

## **Training and Employment**

Lifelong Learning and Skills, the Youth Service, Careers Wales and Job Centre Plus are all members of the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) panel. Taster sessions were offered in placements such as carpentry, mechanics, hairdressing, beauty, plumbing. 64% of learners supported by Porth Cymorth Cynnar gained qualifications in traineeships and 70% of learners gained qualifications in apprenticeships.



Jobcentre services are now fully operational with Work Coaches offering face-to-face support in all sites.

### **Citizens Advice**

One-to-one appointments for clients seeking detailed advice via phone and video calls continue. In-person appointments are available in Borth, Aberystwyth, Penparcau, Lampeter and Cardigan.

Following a successful bid to the National Lottery, Citizens Advice increased their face-to-face delivery at venues across the county including, where facilities allow, regular drop-in sessions as well as bespoke events for community groups and a cost-of-living zoom drop-in via their website. They would like to be able to offer support via video conferencing to vulnerable housebound clients but have not yet been able to do this since the clients need help at their end and this is not available.

### **Age Cymru Dyfed**

Two part time Information and Advice officers, based in Aberystwyth, offer support and advice on eligibility and accessing welfare benefits. They also offer a specific Dementia Support Service which can be accessed via the Council's Housing Support Service. Appointments are offered in the office, virtually and by telephone. In exceptional circumstances, home visits are arranged. Staff find that the generation they support do not speak up or complain but urgently need their help to live comfortable and fulfilling lives.

Since April 2022 the team have dealt with over 690 referrals and assisted Ceredigion residents to access nearly £760, 000 of unclaimed Welfare Support.

## **Pillar 2: Physical and Emotional Wellbeing**

Physical and emotional wellbeing support was offered to families and individuals who may be experiencing stress, exhaustion, and anxiety. This included preventative actions, like exercise classes, community get-togethers, respite for unpaid Carers and counselling, as well as long-term planning for future provision.

### **Ceredigion Family Centre Network**

860 families enjoyed a range of activities aimed at improving physical and emotional wellbeing. These included messy play, sensory play, zumbini, cooking sessions, gardening, intergenerational gatherings, community art, theatre school, outdoor play, arts and crafts and barbecues. Staff are trained in Safeguarding, Suicide Awareness and Mental Health 1<sup>st</sup> Aid.

### **DASH Ceredigion**

DASH offer childcare and play opportunities for disabled children/young people and respite for families. The lack of out of school childcare provision led to a big decline in use of their support during the pandemic. School holiday playschemes and

weekends away are now up and running but requests from out of school clubs for 'helping hand' support via the Ymuno scheme remain low.

### **Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Support and Prevention**

Young people aged 16+ were offered 88 workshops, for example volunteering in the community, indoor bowling, gardening and Welsh culture and heritage discovery.

125 young people that worked with a youth worker demonstrated an improvement to their wellbeing and confidence, for example, a young person unwilling to leave the house who went on a wellbeing walk with a youth worker.

The mobile youth provision engaged with 10 communities and 176 young people. Free weekly football sessions were delivered with Dyfed-Powys Police and Swansea Football Foundation, one young person has been nominated as a young ambassador due to his commitment.

### **Area 43**

North and South Ceredigion GP Clusters commissioned Area 43 to provide a counselling service to young people aged 13-30. 193 Young People (N. Ceredigion) and 6 Young People (S. Ceredigion) accessed the service during 2022-23. This service is no longer funded and has stopped.

Area 43 also provided an emotional support service to 57 young people from their Cardigan Centre.

### **Porth Cymorth Cynnar, Well-being Centres**

The National Exercise Referral Service (NERS) is now very busy - 1,011 referrals were received in 2022-23. All referrals are followed up, although not all residents decide to start the intervention. 343 clients completed the 16-week programme during the year.

The NERS is one of a range of health intervention classes and activities, including Fit4Life and Wellbeing Walks. 424 classes and activities were offered each month in North, Mid and South of the county. All programmes are popular and well received by clients across Ceredigion.

### **Porth Gofal**

The Occupational Therapy team hoped to be able to carry out more assessments to provide appropriate equipment and therapy support for people. This reduces pressure on the unpaid Carer as the Cared for becomes more independent. However, the service is experiencing significant staffing challenges which has resulted in a waiting list.

### **Hywel Dda University Health Board and Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Carer support**

The Carers and Community Support team responded to 3,538 enquiries. These included requests for support, applications for Welsh Government unpaid carers low-



income payment and Ceredigion Carers cards enabling unpaid carers to have access to free membership of leisure centres and discounts across Ceredigion.

The team also dealt with 621 applications for the Carers fund. 1,970 unpaid Carers were registered with the Carers Information Service in March 2023.

### **Porth Cynnal – Mental Health & Substance Misuse Services**

Approved Mental Health Practitioner capacity has increased but the social work team is not yet at full capacity. School counselling capacity has increased but demand is high. The Substance Misuse team has also grown with 2 new workers now targeting homelessness and co-recurring issues. Substance misuse and mental health teams will be integrated from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

### **Policy and Performance**

Ceredigion's Assessment of Local Wellbeing was published in August 2022. The Assessment has told us a lot about the social, economic, cultural, and environmental well-being of people and communities in Ceredigion. It will be used to inform the next Local Well-being Plan 2023-28 and can be referenced by organisations when preparing bids for funding or demonstrating a need to focus on specific areas.

### **Penparcau Community Forum**

The Hub is working on recruiting more volunteers to help with distribution of food parcels and for wider activities like gardening and litter picking. During the pandemic, food parcels were being delivered daily, now down to weekly deliveries. They also offer a Meals on Wheels service. The continued contact helps the coordinator really get to know people.

Some people continue to feel isolated, and some are not eating properly or don't have the facility to cook. A consultation was run in January/February to help review the services offered; this will feed into a new funding application which will probably focus on mental wellbeing and combatting isolation.

### **Coleg Ceredigion**

Learners can access a range of personal support services, including mentoring, counselling, and access to 24/7 support. The on-line systems for personal support are now embedded into the evolving college programme to promote learner well-being.

### **Age Cymru Dyfed**

The Befriending Life Links and Veteran Support services offer support to those who are experiencing loneliness and isolation. Befriending Life Links helps people to build confidence and re-join their communities, they also initiate local Social Groups and then step back once they are established. Veteran support officers offer one to one support for elderly veterans across the county.

## **Pillar 3: Community Resilience**

2022-23 saw more of a 'return to normality' after Covid as services returned to mainly face-to-face support. However, there is now increased reliance on digital connectivity and not everyone can access this. The section below highlights some of the work undertaken to ensure that people can access the services that they need.

### **Porth Cymorth Cynnar, Early Intervention and CAVO**

Lists of community support covering the whole county were developed during the pandemic to help identify areas that lacked support. The range of support offered changes quickly and people are now encouraged to use Dewis Cymru and Infoengine to promote the support available. In March 2023 there were 543 registered Dewis users in Ceredigion and 607 resources that covered the County.

There are 6 food banks and 2 food surplus groups in Ceredigion covering 98.9% of residential properties. Community Council wards not covered by food banks are Llandyfriog, Llanddewi Brefi, Tregaron and Ystrad Fflur. The food banks were able to cope with increasing demand during the year but are struggling to recruit volunteers.

### **Ceredigion Council Customer Contact**

Ceredigion libraries are now fully re-opened, and the mobile library is back on the road. There are plans to provide access to I-pads on all mobile library vans, but these are not yet available. Face to face customer service sites re-opened in January 2023 for 5 days a week, at a slightly later opening time. At the end of March 2023 there was no facility to receive cash payments face to face in Council offices, however, residents were able to continue to make cash payments at all Post Offices and in Payzone shops.

### **Ceredigion Family Centre Network**

Although some rural areas are still in need of better internet speeds and reliable phone coverage, none have been identified as being without internet at all. Services have now moved to face to face delivery, but social media continues to be an important aspect of communication. Families are engaging well with this and keep in touch with each other via groups chats, providing good peer support and also accessing staff support through individual messages.

All staff are continually developing new digital skills, and some have accessed formal training to increase their knowledge in this area.

### **Hywel Dda Health Board: Partnerships, Diversity and Inclusion**

The Community Outreach team engaged with 5,259 people. Over 50% of conversations were about prevention and wellbeing and referrals to smoking cessation, nutrition advice and accessing screening services. The team engaged with 538 Ukrainian refugees, 229 Gypsies, Roma or Travellers and 370 people who were homeless or in a vulnerable situation at home.

They also worked with community groups to set up local wellbeing walks for our diverse communities to encourage exercise, create friendships and engage with the health board in an informal way – 164 people have taken part throughout the year

### **Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Community Well-being & Learning**

Dysgu Bro is delivering courses in more community venues, including Bronant, Rhydypennau, Cwmystwyth and Devil's Bridge. Many of the sessions are free. IT equipment is offered to all new learners.

### **Care Society**

Care Society are working with Digital Communities Wales/CWMPAS with the aim of addressing local digital exclusion and improving digital confidence through essential skills training and online safety sessions. Connectivity is still a problem but the development of hubs, like Lampeter's Canolfan Dulais Enterprise Centre, where people can utilise computers and get online is helping.

### **Penparcau Community Forum**

A few people go into the Hub in Penparcau to use the free Wi-Fi or to ask for help with phones and tablets. The Forum work with Age Cymru Dyfed who loan tablets to those who need them and offer 'getting online advice'; the Forum provides the venue and promotes the service for them.

### **Age Cymru Dyfed**

Through funding from CAVO, and more recently the Santander Foundation, the team works with partners like Penparcau Hub to get people online, learn digital skills and, through Santander, access online banking/shopping and price comparison services. The support is offered by staff and a team of dedicated volunteers via telephone, virtually, through home visits and group activities.

### **Mid Wales Growth - Digital Development**

Levels of broadband connectivity in Mid Wales have improved over the past 12 months, but the overall level of connectivity is still lower than some parts of Wales and the UK. Approximately 90% of premises in Mid Wales have the capability to connect to Superfast Broadband (30Mbps+), lower than that for Wales (97.1%) and the UK (97.6%) on average.

The Mid Wales region has seen an increase in those able to receive higher speeds with approximately 40% of the region now having access to Ultrafast Broadband (100mbps+), though this still falls behind both the Wales and UK average at 63.2% and 76.25% respectively.

7% of premises in Mid Wales cannot access a connection of more than 10Mbps compared to 2% for Wales and 1.8% for the UK. This is largely because Openreach was the main provider of broadband infrastructure services and they have

concentrated on fibre services. Other areas have seen various providers offering alternative technologies such as fixed wireless access (FWA), that can overcome the challenges of providing greater speeds. Providers are now engaging with Council teams around the deployment of FWA connections which could have a significant positive impact on broadband connectivity.

Despite this, Mid Wales currently has 40% coverage of Fibre to the Premises (FTTP), allowing download speeds of up to 1gbps (1000mbps), which again is lower than the Wales average of 47%, but greater than several of the more rural Local Authority, with the more densely populated Local Authorities receiving greater speeds (i.e Cardiff has 68% coverage).

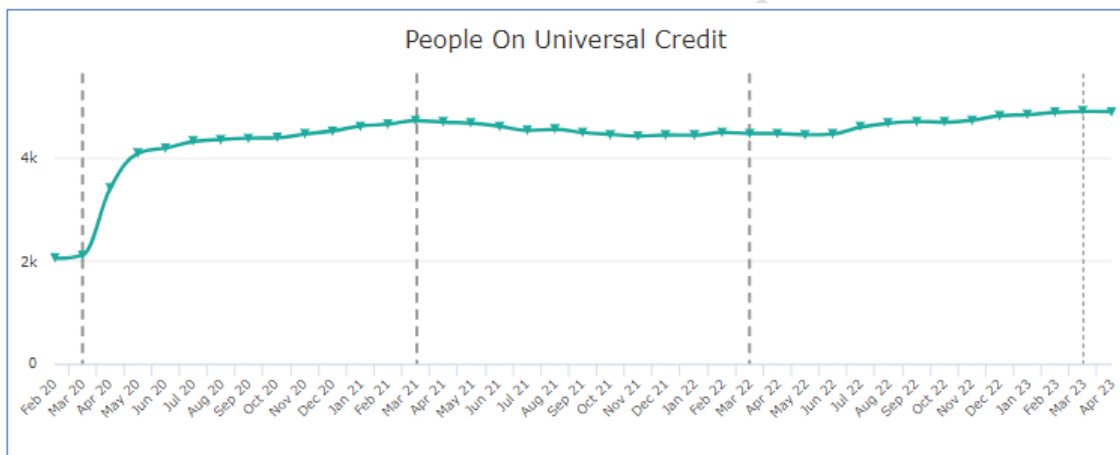
Mobile coverage also lags behind the Wales and UK average coverage with topography and the lower density of population posing particular challenges. Approximately 9% of premises within the region have no 4G services while only 51% of premises have 4G coverage from all four operators, this in comparison to an average 73% in Wales and 80% across the UK.

DRAFT

## What the Data tells us - did we make a difference?

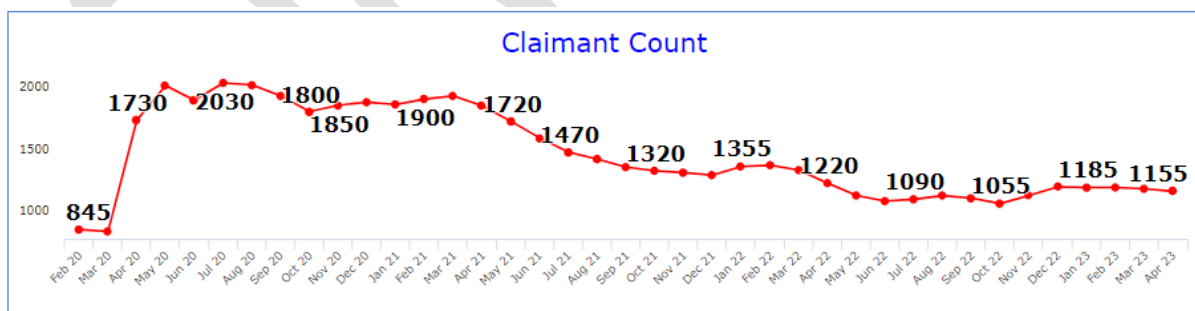
A lot of support has been provided over the past 12 months. We must however rely on hard data to tell us if we are making a difference. Our data dashboards help the PSB Poverty sub-group to monitor the efficacy of the support provided. These capture live data from websites such as DWP and Office for National Statistics and were developed further during 2022-23.

### Universal Credit



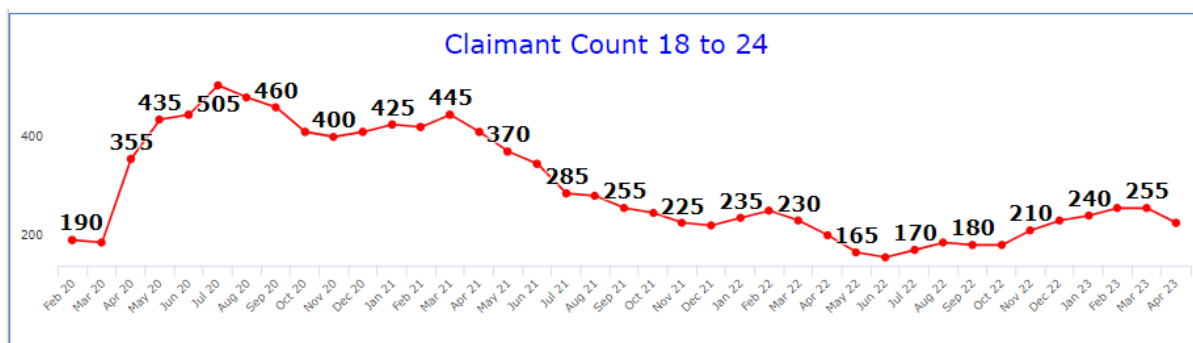
The number of people on Universal Credit in Ceredigion saw a sharp increase in March/April 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic. They started to level around the 4,500 mark between July 2021 and July 2022 but then started to increase. The figure at March 2023 was 132% higher than at March 2020.

### Claimant Count



The Claimant Count is a measure of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed. This figure also increased from March/April 2020. Although it hadn't returned to pre-pandemic levels by March 2023, it was just 42% higher than in March 2020. This implies that although people are now working, they are still eligible for Universal Credit. It's likely that this is due to in-work poverty.

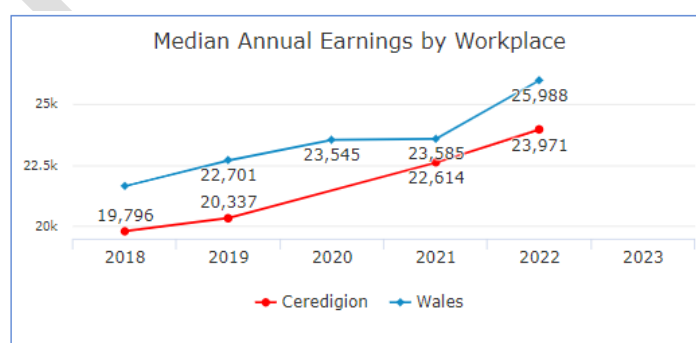
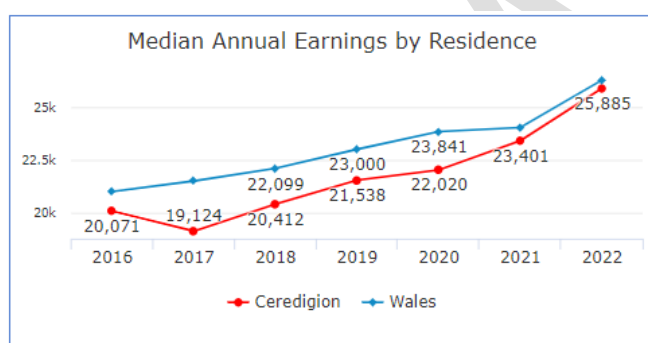
## Youth Employment



The impact of Covid on young people has been of particular concern and we monitor the number of 18–24-year-old claimants. This cohort was following the same trend as the overall claimant count and started to show a faster recovery rate in June 2022. However, figures started to increase and in March 2023 there were 255 claimants aged 18-24, 38% higher than pre-pandemic rates.

## Median Annual Earnings by Residence and by Workplace

The average earnings gap between people who live in Ceredigion and people who live in the rest of Wales appears to be narrowing. However, the average earnings gap between Ceredigion and the rest of Wales by workplace has not. This trend will be explored further.



## Physical and Emotional Wellbeing

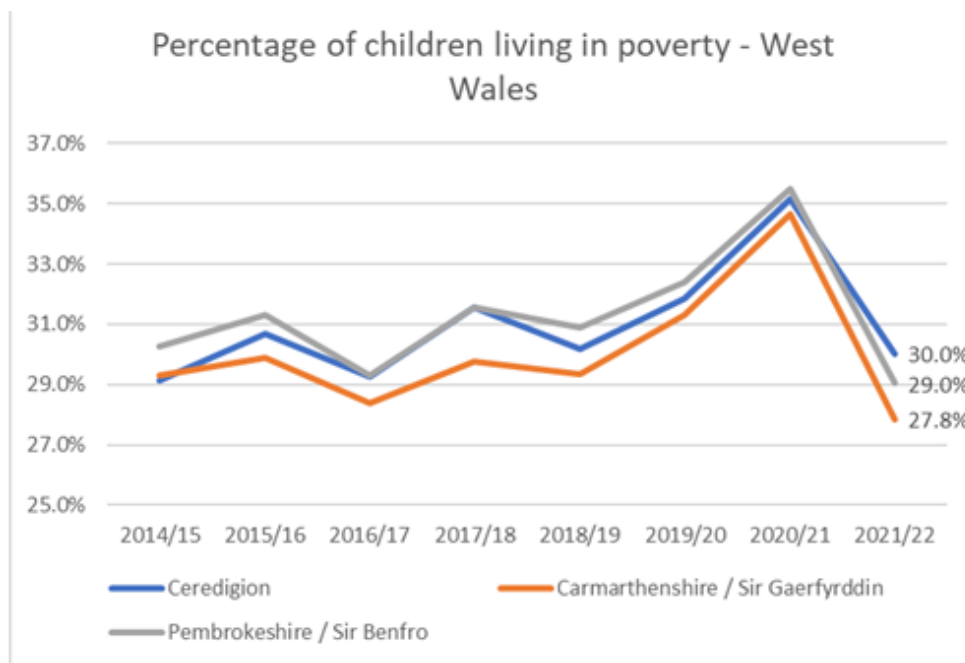
The average healthy life expectancy for Males in Ceredigion is 68 years, and for Females it is 70 years. The gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas in Ceredigion is 10.2 years for Males and 11.8 years for Females. Cardigan Teifi and Rhyd y Fwch areas are the most deprived in Ceredigion.

It is more difficult to measure impact on well-being locally. Since March 2020, the Welsh Government funded a survey of public views on the coronavirus (Covid 19). One of the questions asked was how concerned people were about being able to pay their bills one month from now. This survey ended in May 2022, and it would be useful to identify another method of measuring how happy people are in Ceredigion.



## Child Poverty

Finally, 2021-22 child poverty figures for Ceredigion showed a big decrease from their high in 2020-21. Nevertheless, 30% of children in Ceredigion were living in poverty in 2021-22. 2022-23 figures are not yet available, and these will show the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. It is very likely that we will see an increase.



Using data in this way is an ongoing journey. As we research more into the causes and impacts of poverty, our level of understanding of the issues affecting Ceredigion continue to increase.

This can be seen in the work around digital exclusion which has also been highlighted on a national level by Audit Wales, Digital Communities Wales and others.

This means that we can target our activities to where they are most needed and where they will have the biggest impact.

## Conclusion and Ongoing Challenges

Inflation and energy prices are creating new worries for vulnerable tenants. People's lack of awareness of cost-of-living support schemes is a big issue.

An acute lack of affordable accommodation in Ceredigion is creating problems. The new Renting Homes Act legislation has further complicated these issues.

A substantial increase in the budget to deliver affordable social housing is coupled with difficulties in acquiring contractors to undertake the work. There are concerns that the impact of phosphates in the river Teifi could put new planning applications on hold.

The childcare sector continues to struggle with the cost of heating and with recruitment. The number of childcare places has dropped again. This impacts on people's ability to access work and training.

Food banks cover 98.9% of residential properties in Ceredigion. They coped with increasing demand during the year but are struggling to recruit volunteers.

It's likely that in-work poverty remains an issue because the number of people in receipt of Universal Credit remains high, but the number of people claiming benefits for the reason of being unemployed has reduced.

The average earnings gap between people who live in Ceredigion and people who live in the rest of Wales has narrowed. However, the average earnings gap between people who work in Ceredigion and people who work in the rest of Wales has not.

Child Poverty rates have decreased but remain very high, at 30% in 2021-22. The 2022-23 figures have not yet been published and these will show the true impact of the increased cost of living.

Levels of broadband connectivity in Mid Wales are improving but little has changed in terms of mobile phone coverage. The Mid-Wales area lags behind the rest of Wales and the UK in terms of both these methods of communication.

## Next Steps

1. Continue to develop the data dashboards to ensure we have a shared understanding of the evolving impact of hardship in Ceredigion through the collation and analysis of data.
2. The PSB Poverty sub-group will develop a workplan which ensures that combating poverty is maintained as a cross-cutting issue across all areas of work undertaken to deliver Ceredigion PSB's Local Well-being Plan 2023-28

## Appendix A: Contributing Partners

- Hywel Dda University Health Board, Partnerships, Diversity & Inclusion
- Ceredigion County Council, Porth Cymorth Cynnar, Community Wellbeing & Learning
- Ceredigion County Council, Finance & Procurement
- Area 43
- Ceredigion County Council, Porth Cynnal
- Plant Dewi, Family Centre Network (Borth, Llandysul, Aberaeron, Cardigan, Lampeter and Tregaron)
- Ceredigion County Council, Porth Gofal
- Cymdeithas Gofal The Care Society
- Ceredigion County Council, Policy, Performance & Public Protection
- Ceredigion County Council, Economy & Regeneration
- Ceredigion County Council, Schools & Lifelong Learning
- Ceredigion County Council, Customer Contact
- Ceredigion County Council, Highways & Environmental Services
- DASH (Disability and Self-Help)
- Department of Work & Pensions (DWP)
- Coleg Ceredigion
- Ceredigion Citizens Advice
- Penparcau Community Forum
- Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations (CAVO)
- Age Cymru Dyfed
- Aberystwyth University