



Neuadd y Sir / County Hall, Llandrindod, Powys, LD1 5LG

## **QUESTIONS AT ANY TIME TO CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

Response by the Portfolio Holder:

We understand the stresses that can be brought on by financial worries. The Powys Mental Health Information service can support people with accessing the right information, advice and support through a variety of means.

A telephone support line Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. The number is 01686 628 300.

A dedicated website <https://www.powysmentalhealth.org.uk/home.html>,

Dedicated facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/PowysExpertsByExperience>

There are a number of third sector agencies that support people with Mental Health including:

Ponthafren - <https://www.ponthafren.org.uk/>

Mid and North Powys Mind - <https://mnpmind.org.uk/>

Brecon & District Mind - <http://breconmind.org.uk/>

Ystradgynlais Mind - <https://minditv.org.uk/>

Camad Pathways - <https://www.camad.org.uk/camad-pathways>

Powys Council itself also looks to support residents in many ways through the current mechanisms available through all the grants, awards and benefits support schemes that it administers (for example, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments, Free School Meals, Clothing Grants, Social Care Assessments etc). Through the pandemic we have amended some of these schemes where possible to help support those residents more financially vulnerable. For example, 1225 Housing Benefit customers had their rent allowance claims adjusted as the Local Housing Allowance increased, providing £181k of additional support to them. We amended our Free School Meal support and have been able to pay so far £1.2m out by BACS or Voucher to those families with children in need of help through this time.

It should be recognised though that the scope and funding of all schemes and any emergency changes to them to support residents through the pandemic are constrained by Welsh Government or UK Government funding and policy decisions. Accepting that limitation, we do though as Council look to ensure we support and help the customer where we are able. So, we have created a more joined-up approach to our benefit and grant administration to make it easier for a customer person to apply and contact and have mechanisms in place through that to maximise eligibility for them.

Powys Council is one of the few Local Authorities in Wales to invest and retain its own money advice and support team that provides free to Powys residents, income maximisation, budgeting & fuel support and qualified debt support either by phone or online or by visit to those residents that need help the most. The team's approach is quite unique in its holistic support that it provides. Each year the team sees approx.

500 residents and make income gains for them totalling between £1.5m and £2m each year. Also when we are aware of local companies going into administration, we offer the team to the employer to come in and discuss with employees in group or confidential one to one sessions options around money and debt. Through this key work the team is helping Powys achieve its Vision 2025 objectives to support local residents and communities.

I have been advised by the team that there has not yet been a significant increase in referrals as result of the pandemic as of yet but I would accept that this may be because the full impact of the pandemic has not yet been felt financially by Powys residents, due to furlough schemes etc delaying that impact and the potential resultant need when they do come to an end.