Case Study

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board - Embedding an Anchor Strategy (2022–2025)

Introduction

In 2022, Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTM) set out its first formal Anchor Strategy. The strategy established clear objectives and accompanying goals across five key areas of focus: employment; procurement; capital, estates and facilities; environment; and corporate.

The strategy was developed in collaboration with health board staff across multiple directorates and wider partners, and involved a combination of mapping existing activity and horizon scanning for best practice nationally. The full strategy can be viewed here.

By 2025 (the end of the strategy period), progress has been significant - however lots has changed in the interim. Some ambitions have been fully realised, others have evolved, and some have proven more complex than anticipated. Along the way, the Health Board has gained valuable insight into what it means in practice to act as a locally rooted anchor institution.

Impact Headlines

In this section we highlight some of the impact highlights from the last 3 years of anchor action across CTM, before we explore some of the key learnings in the final section.

1. Estate & Infrastructure: Powering Hospitals Locally

Private wire solar partnerships with local authorities

Working in close partnership with its three local authorities, CTM has invested in a range of flagship renewable energy schemes that demonstrate what anchor collaboration can achieve in practice. This has included:

Rhondda Cynon Taf solar energy scheme

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council invested in a 1MW private wire connection, which began generating power in September 2025. CTM has agreed a Power Purchase Agreement with the Council, which is a long-term contract and sets out a dedicated section of the farm that is solely for CTM use. On a bright summer's day, the system is expected to meet 100% of the hospital's electricity needs. Taking into account the cloudier Welsh months, it is anticipated that the farm will supply between 10-13% of the hospital's annual electricity consumption.

This creates a genuine public-sector win–win:

- Clean, affordable, carbon zero electricity for the NHS
- Income generation for the local authority
- Greater local retention of public value

Merthyr Tydfil – Pen Y Dre High School

A second private wire partnership with Merthyr Tydfil Council connects a 1.4MW solar array at Pen Y Dre High School to Prince Charles Hospital, offering the same benefits as those listed above. The Health Board will utilise excess energy the school does not utilise, both in and outside school hours, maximising the scheme's viability and environmental benefit.

These schemes demonstrate how anchor partnerships can retain environmental and financial value within the local economy.

2. Environment: Decarbonisation with Social Value

In addition to the solar energy schemes, CTM has delivered on its climate action goals across a range of wider projects, including:

Circular Economy & Clinical Plastics

Through the Feedcycle Project, CTM diverted theatre and pathology plastics from waste streams to create 12 chairs in partnership with Elite Paper Solutions and Pulse Plastics. The project:

- Diverted nearly one tonne of clinical plastic
- Supported local employment, including people with learning disabilities
- Sustained local social enterprise capacity
- Was shortlisted for 'Social Value' at the National Recycling Awards

The initiative demonstrates how environmental action can simultaneously generate social and economic benefit.

Food Waste & Energy Recovery

Since 2016, CTM has diverted over 250 tonnes of food waste to anaerobic digestion via Olleco in Newport - more than seven years ahead of the Welsh ban on maceration to sewer. Energy generated contributes to powering Arla Foods' net zero dairy operations.

3. Community Engagement: From Transactional to Relational

CTM Community Leaders Network

Since 2022, CTM has convened the CTM Community Leaders Network which has grown from 30 organisations at the start to having over 130 community and third sector organisations attend

recent meet ups. The network meets quarterly across different locations in the Health Board footprint.

The model intentionally shifts away from “transmit and inform” engagement toward:

- Listening to lived experience
- Gathering community insight
- Co-developing solutions
- Building long-term relationships

Attendance has grown organically through word of mouth, suggesting genuine value for partners.

Appreciative Inquiry & Hyper-Local Development

As a result of appreciative inquiry training for CTM staff, as well as partners such as the registered social landlord, CTM has been able to listen to and work with the local community in new ways. This has led to a range of unexpected but impactful stories of community-led initiatives supported by local anchor organisations.

For example, as a result of an appreciative enquiry process, local partners have seen a massive increase in the use of a local community centre, which has been used to set up a range of initiatives such as a bingo group and a men's club which are helping to build community connection and reduce isolation.

This work highlights how different ways of working with communities can trigger wider social ripple effects that traditional metrics might miss.

4. Health & Housing: A First-of-Its-Kind Partnership Role

Elsewhere CTM appointed Wales’ first jointly funded Health, Housing and Innovation Manager in partnership with the registered social landlord.

Key impacts that have emerged as a result of this dedicated role have included:

- Development of a health–housing data linkage project to inform targeted place-based interventions - for example, using data to support insulation interventions for residents with respiratory conditions
- Supporting increased uptake of Pension Credit within the region

This role demonstrates how shared investment across sectors can unlock preventative, place-based action.

5. Workforce & Employment: Opening Pathways into Work

As one of the largest employers in the region, Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board recognises that its anchor role includes shaping who can access employment and whether local people see the NHS as a place for them.

A strong example is the launch of Project SEARCH at Prince Charles Hospital, delivered with a local college and Elite Supported Employment Agency. The supported internship programme helps young people with learning disabilities and/or autism gain structured workplace experience through three rotations across the academic year. Outcomes have been significant: 100% of participants progressed into positive destinations, with 29% securing employment within CTM, 58% employed locally, and 13% moving into volunteering or further education. The programme demonstrates a willingness to redesign employment pathways to be genuinely inclusive.

Internally, the Apprenticeship Academy, established in 2022, has expanded opportunities for career progression. Since its launch, 571 staff have started or completed apprenticeship qualifications, with 193 currently in training - a marked increase on previous years.

CTM has also broadened access to entry-level roles by introducing fully bilingual recruitment advertising, using social media and community partnerships to widen reach, and piloting same-day recruitment events to reduce barriers to application. Since launching a centralised work experience programme in 2022, 339 placements have been supported across the locality.

Together, these initiatives reflect a shift from simply filling vacancies to actively creating inclusive, locally rooted employment pathways.

Key Learning & Reflections

1. Measuring anchor impact is complex

One of the most persistent challenges has been evidencing impact.

Traditional NHS metrics capture activity well - but not necessarily relational or system-wide ripple effects. Tools such as ripple effect mapping have helped surface wider social outcomes that might otherwise remain invisible.

2. Bringing it together matters

The formal Anchor Strategy has helped move activity from piecemeal initiatives to a more coherent narrative about CTM’s reach and influence.

However, despite this there is more work to be done moving forwards to ensure that anchor initiatives across CTM are less siloed and more integrated.

As partners look to build on this strategy moving forwards, there is a desire to:

- Integrate different anchor streams more explicitly
- Focus first on desired outcomes and working backwards from there - rather than identifying all the actions that might be done first by the Health Board
- Strengthening cross-team ownership

3. Appreciative Inquiry works - but can be resource intensive and requires a new mindset from anchors

Appreciative inquiry is a model of community engagement that seeks to engage stakeholders in self-determined change, rooted in locally identified strengths and assets. Doing this work, at a hyper-local level within CTM has:

- Generated deep insight
- Shifted relationships with communities
- Triggered unexpected positive impacts

But at the same time it is:

- Time-intensive
- Relationship-heavy
- Dependent on skilled facilitation
- Requires genuine openness to challenge

As a large statutory body, this also requires cultural adjustment - particularly around letting go of control and responding authentically to feedback.

4. Opportunities can also bring new challenges to work through

Working with its Charity, Grounds & Gardens and Facilities teams, CTM has secured capital funding to support the redevelopment of underused courtyards to support staff and patient wellbeing.

While the investment represents an opportunity for CTM, the programme has surfaced practical challenges around resourcing, volunteering capacity and long-term sustainability, regarding the ongoing maintenance of these spaces.

Looking Ahead

CTM's first Anchor Strategy has laid important foundations. While not all ambitions were realised as originally planned, the strategy has demonstrated the breadth of influence a health board can exert through its estate, workforce, procurement and partnerships. CTM is now considering how it further embeds and measures it's role as an anchor within it's day to day strategy delivery, so that it moves beyond being a separate strategy and becomes part of 'the way we do things around here'.