

## **Agenda Supplement – Equality and Social Justice Committee**

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Meeting Venue:

**Committee Room 3 (Senedd)**

Meeting date: 12 May 2025

Meeting time: 13.30

For further information contact:

**Mared Llwyd**

Committee Clerk

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### **Hybrid – Supplementary pack**

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Please note the documents below are in addition to those published in the main Agenda and Reports pack for this Meeting

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#### **3.8 Correspondence from the Future Generations Commissioner to the Chair regarding Social Cohesion**

(Pages 1 – 7)

Attached Documents:

Correspondence from the Future Generations Commissioner to the Chair  
regarding Social Cohesion – 4 May 2025

Correspondence to the Future Generations Commissioner from the Chair  
regarding Social Cohesion – 27 March 2025

#### **3.9 Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government to the Chair regarding the Democratic Engagement Grant**

(Pages 8 – 13)

Attached Documents:

Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local  
Government to the Chair regarding the Democratic Engagement Grant – 8  
May 2025

Correspondence to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and  
Chief Whip from the Chair regarding the Democratic Engagement Grant – 29  
April 2025



**3.10 Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning to the Legislation, Justice and the Constitution Committee regarding the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department for Work and Pensions and the Welsh Government**

(Page 14)

Attached Documents:

Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning to the Legislation, Justice and the Constitution Committee regarding the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department for Work and Pensions and the Welsh Government – 8 May 2025

**3.11 Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education to the Chair regarding Free School Meals**

(Pages 15 – 18)

Attached Documents:

Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education to the Chair regarding Free School Meals – 8 May 2025

Correspondence to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip to the Chair regarding Free School Meals – 27 March 2025

**6 Disability and Employment: consideration of response and additional work**

(15:15– 15:30)

(Pages 19 – 26)

Attached Documents:

Draft letter to Department of Work and Pensions regarding Welfare Reform



By email

4<sup>th</sup> of May 2025

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter regarding the inquiry into Social Cohesion. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion, particularly as social well-being is one of the four dimensions of sustainable development, central to the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

As others have noted the Well-being of Future Generations Act provides a clear and ambitious vision for a Wales of cohesive communities—'communities that are attractive, viable, safe, and well-connected'. However, as highlighted by respondents to your consultation, achieving this vision requires a sustained commitment to long-term thinking, preventative action, and meaningful community involvement. I share the concerns raised by Carnegie UK regarding the need to empower public bodies with the skills and support necessary to embed this approach effectively.

In order to support public bodies to achieve the goal of a Wales of cohesive communities, my team and I regularly convene and advise public sector leaders and organisations on setting good well-being objectives and how to deliver on all the seven well-being goals. My team provides around 700-800 pieces of advice and assistance every year, the majority of which are to public bodies and Public Services Boards. My office also publishes detailed advice on the steps that public bodies can take. There is dedicated advice for each goal. This advice is available to see on my website.

I recently commissioned the Institute of Welsh Affairs to undertake an assessment of all public body well-being objectives and their corresponding steps in order to monitor progress. The analysis showed that of all five ways of working, 'involvement' was the least prevalent in the steps and we frequently hear from public bodies that resources (time and money) are a key barrier to meaningfully involving citizens and communities throughout policy, delivery, and evaluation. Disappointingly, the analysis has shown that just 14.7% of objectives spoke to the Cohesive Communities Goal. While we know that many public bodies value the role of their communities and the importance of involvement – action and future ambition is not necessarily aligning with these values.

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Future Generations Commissioner for Wales  
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There are excellent examples of projects that work with communities – as listed below – but it is not yet consistent in how public bodies are implementing the WFG Act. I have asked my team to give increased attention this year to supporting public bodies to implement the cohesive communities goal in our learning and development programme.

Another way in which I monitor progress is through the Ways of Working Journey Checker, which is a self-evaluation tool to understand how public bodies are delivering the five ways of working and provides guidance about what more they can do. The latest position shows that the majority of public bodies that have responded position themselves at level 3 of 5 in terms of implementing the involvement way of working.

My office is actively engaged in strengthening social cohesion across Wales, and this is a key area in my [Future Generations Report](#), which was published on 29th April. The report is an important part of my work to support and advise public bodies on how to implement the seven well-being goals. A central theme of my report is the power and opportunities within our communities. Whether it is through keeping people well, improving access to nature, investing in placemaking, or investing in sustainable and affordable local food systems, communities play a vital role in shaping our collective future.

While significant efforts are being made, I remain concerned that communities are not yet being meaningfully involved in decision-making processes. My report recommends that **public bodies increase public engagement** to build trust, strengthen consensus, and bridge the gap between policymaking and citizens. To further support communities, I am calling for the introduction of a **Community Right to Buy Act**, which would empower local people to take ownership of community assets and strengthen social ties. I am also advocating for all **public bodies to implement volunteering plans** that enable employees to actively contribute to their communities. This not only builds social capital but fosters a deeper sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

Whilst these recommendations provide a few illustrations of how I am taking action on social cohesion, I would strongly encourage the committee to take account of my full report.

I would also encourage the committee to draw on the Well-being of Wales Report, independently produced by the Welsh Government's Chief Statistician, which tracks

progress against each national goal and provides insight into the key milestones and indicators shaping our social fabric.

The majority of the public correspondence I receive is from people passionate about their communities and spaces, and range from concerns around community involvement in planning decisions and cuts to local transport services, to groups sharing how they're embedding the Act in local projects and asking for support in how they can go further.

These letters are particularly insightful in my monitoring and assessing of public bodies' progress and consistently show how people across Wales care about decisions being made by public bodies that impact our current and future well-being, including how they meaningfully involve people in decisions that affect them and how decisions are made with long-term impacts and trends in mind.

Additionally, my collaboration with the voluntary sector is deep and long standing as we seek to work together to build social capital. I hold regular partnership meetings with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and its members. I will be jointly hosting GOFOD3 this year, the main third sector annual conference in Wales and an important platform for sharing best practice and fostering collaboration on social cohesion across sectors.

My Future Generations Report is filled with case studies highlighting good practice in social cohesion, demonstrating how different communities and organisations are driving positive change.

- Case-study: **GwyrddNi** is a community-led movement, bringing people together from five areas in Gwynedd to take action on climate change. Delivered by [Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig](#), [Partneriaeth Ogwen](#), [Yr Orsaf](#), [Cwmni Bro](#), [Ynni Llŷn](#) and [Cyd Ynni](#), GwyrddNi has led community assemblies to co-produce local action plans; worked with more than 600 school children to bring their ideas for a greener, more sustainable future to life; and are supporting action around repair and re-use projects, active travel, community energy, retrofit, and nature restoration.
- Case study: **Well North Wales** - Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board's Well North Wales partnership is placing communities at the heart of health transformation. This multi-agency approach works to address health inequalities and the wider determinants of health, embedding prevention across

all planning and delivery. By taking a joined-up approach, Well North Wales is ensuring that services are shaped by and for the communities they serve, leading to better, more sustainable health outcomes.

- Case study: **Caerphilly's Vision 2035** - Caerphilly's [Vision 2035 Placemaking Plan](#) is placing community and culture at the heart of new developments. Key initiatives include:
  - Ffos Caerffili market, with over 20 independent traders, supporting small businesses and local food producers.
  - Affordable, energy-efficient housing and business spaces redeveloped from underused buildings.
  - Revitalisation of the Workmen's Hall, transforming it into a cultural centre for the community.
- Case study: **Beyond Recycling with Benthg Cymru** - Benthg Cymru is creating Libraries of Things across Wales, allowing people to borrow items instead of buying them, reducing both costs and environmental impact. Since 2020, Benthg Cymru has facilitated 18,000 'borrows', saving households £500,000 and reducing carbon emissions by 220,000 kg.
- Case study: **The Talking Shops** – Supported by cross-sector partners and funding, Omidaze Productions established The Talking Shops — public spaces designed for creative, cultural, and democratic discussion. Over 13,000 people, aged six months to 96 years old, have taken part, using the spaces to share experiences, learn new skills, and engage with their community and democracy. These spaces provide an accessible, inclusive setting for people from all backgrounds to connect and contribute to shaping their local communities.

These case studies will illustrate innovative approaches to placemaking, social inclusion, and community-led initiatives that align with the ambitions of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

I fully agree with the Committee that ambition must be matched with effective implementation. Government and public bodies must ensure that adequate resources and capacity are built into decisions to translate policy into practice. My office remains committed to supporting this process, advocating for stronger community involvement, and ensuring that Wales continues to lead the way in creating cohesive communities.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and look forward to continuing our dialogue on this crucial issue.

Yours sincerely,



Derek Walker,  
Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

Derek Walker  
Future Generations Commissioner for  
Wales

27 March 2025

Dear Derek,

### **Social Cohesion Inquiry**

During our inquiry into Social Cohesion concerns have been raised about current and future risks to social cohesion in our communities.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 national goals for 'A Wales of cohesive communities' is described as 'attractive, viable, safe and well-connected'. Several [responses to our consultation](#) referenced this goal in the 2015 Act specifically.

For example, Carnegie UK emphasised the need to empower public bodies:

*A significant amount of support is needed to equip people working in public bodies with the skills to think long term. Too often, legislation placing new duties on the public sector is passed without providing any support for the training, development and longer-term cultural change required to properly implement it. In a year where various implementation plans and strategies have been completed and published, the Welsh Government should not overlook the importance of ensuring public sector workers have the skills and knowledge to embed a preventative approach in practice.*

Similarly the [Welsh Refugee Council](#) highlighted recent incidents concerning refugees and asylum seekers where they claim the approach adopted by public bodies were inconsistent with the 2015 Act.

Therefore your views on this matter and any details you can provide on work to support this well-being goal is key. In addition to any views on [the Terms of Reference](#) for this inquiry, we would be grateful if you could respond to the following questions:

- What actions or workstreams are you currently involved in which seek to strengthen the goal of social cohesion? How is social cohesion reflected in your current or future work?
- How are you monitoring progress towards the national goal of a 'Wales of cohesive communities'?
- How are you working with public bodies to support them to deliver this goal?

- How are you working with other organisations such as the Welsh Government and voluntary sector to build social capital and social cohesion?
- What examples of good practice are you aware of, or are you involved in, that demonstrate progress towards this goal?

As the inquiry is already underway and we are taking evidence through March and April, an early response would help to inform these evidence sessions. To enable us to consider your response before our final evidence session with the Cabinet Secretary, we would be grateful if you could respond no later than 5 May 2025.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Rathbone', written in a cursive style.

**Jenny Rathbone MS**

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

# Agenda Item 6.9

Jayne Bryant MS  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Lywodraeth Leol a Thai  
Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref 20250429 Chair to CSSJTCW re  
democratic engagement grant

Jenny Rathbone MS  
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee  
Senedd Cymru

8 May 2025

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter of 29<sup>th</sup> April requesting information about the Democratic Engagement Grant (DEG), which arose during your Committee's evidence session on democratic health. As the grant falls within my portfolio, I am responding on behalf of the Government.

I am glad to hear the Grant mentioned in Committee as an example of the positive steps the Welsh Government has taken to encourage democratic engagement in Wales. The Committee might be interested to know that the Scottish Parliament has legislated (the [Scottish Elections \(Representation and Reform\) Act 2025](#)) to give Scottish Ministers powers to fund activities to increase democratic engagement. The Scottish Government cited our grant scheme and projects we have funded as examples of what they would look to carry out in introducing the legislation.

I have been pleased to talk about the grant several times in the Siamber, highlighting how work funded by the grant is helping to remove barriers and encourage participation in democracy in Wales. Since the launch of the DEG in February 2022 and up to 30 June 2025, we have allocated £657,093.85 of Welsh Government funding to support democratic engagement activity in Wales. This funding supported 22 organisations to deliver 27 projects across Wales, reaching a diverse range of people and communities, including young people (in school and out of school settings), adults with Additional Learning Needs, foreign-national communities, the gypsy and traveller community and disabled people. For your reference, I have attached a list of the projects funded to date.

In March I agreed the continuation of the Democratic Engagement Grant for a further 3 years from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2028, funded at £400 000 per year. Further information is available at <https://www.gov.wales/democratic-engagement-grant>, and Officials are currently managing the application process for the next cohort of projects.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.


As part of our consideration of whether to continue, we commissioned an evaluation by Welsh Government researchers into the Grant and its operation of the grant during its first full financial year (2023-24). In that year, sixteen organisations were delivering projects, including four organisations with multi-year projects. The evaluation aimed to review the Grant's design and delivery, understand its perceived impact of the DEG, and understand how monitoring and evaluation could be improved. The report is being translated and will be published soon on the Research and Statistics pages of the Welsh Government's website.

As a condition of receiving DEG funding project leads must attend meetings of the Welsh Government's Democratic Engagement Partnership. The Partnership brings funded groups together alongside others active in the democratic engagement space like the Electoral Commission, Senedd Commission, local authorities, civil society groups and third sector organisations. Grant holders are invited to report on their work at these meetings which actively seek to encourage collaboration to reduce duplication, overcome barriers with collective problem and share best practice within the democratic engagement sector in Wales.

I think it is helpful that the committee recognises the importance of democratic health as part of its consideration of social cohesion. As highlighted by Professor Matt Ryan, Mick Antoniw MS, my predecessor as Elections Minister, asked the Wales Centre for Public Policy to explore how Wales's democratic health can best be defined, measured, and monitored. This was with a view to helping focus efforts on increasing participation and engagement in national and local democratic processes in Wales, especially among under-represented groups. Following that report we have commissioned work to identify options for specific measures and indicators to track, monitor and assess different components of democracy in Wales. The outcome of this work will be options of five or six indicators and a series of recommendations that the Welsh Government can use to measure and monitor democratic health in Wales. We expect the study to be finalised by the end of this calendar year.

I will be happy to write to the Committee again to provide updates on any of the issues raised in this letter and I am copying this to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jayne Bryant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Jayne Bryant AS/MS**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Lywodraeth Leol a Thai  
Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government

## ANNEX

### **DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT GRANT**

Below lists the organisations who were successful in bidding for funding via the Democratic Engagement Grant. Funding figures shown represent the total amount of funding they were awarded, not actual expenditure.

No project has exceeded its budget allocation.

#### **2022-2023 Projects**

1. The Politics Project (**£208,125 – 2 year & 1 month project, ends 31 March 2025**) will continue to run their successful Digital Dialogue Sessions in schools across Wales. The sessions allow young people to ask questions and discuss issues of importance to them to their elected representative. Throughout the life of the project, the aim is to deliver 160 engagements between young people and politicians, working with 80 schools in total from 2022-23 through to the end of 2024-25.

#### **2023-2024 Projects**

2. Ceredigion County Council (**£10,000**) will create content specifically designed to reach out and engage with qualifying foreign nationals in their communities.
3. City of Cardiff Council in partnership with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and Vale of Glamorgan Council (**£6922**) are creating digital content (videos) in multiple languages focusing on what to expect at a polling station.
4. City of Cardiff Council (**£984**) have been awarded funding for a second, separate project which is focused on engaging and working with members of the Gypsy and Traveller community on the importance of democracy through workshops.
5. Democracy Club (**£35,000**) will look to expand their poll station finder's capabilities to include more accessibility information about the buildings that host polling places.
6. I Have a Voice (**£11,763**) will train and support young people studying in colleges in the Colleges Wales network to deliver voter registration drives in their college.
7. Innovate Trust (**£27,811.60**) will raise democratic awareness, increase voter registration and participation amongst people with learning disabilities in Wales.
8. Llanelli Town Council (**£1000**) will produce materials and run sessions in local schools focusing on good citizenship, the role of the Mayor in Llanelli, why we vote and the history of voting and democracy.
9. Llansteffan and Llanybri Community Council (**£940**) will establish a Youth Forum, encouraging young people to be involved with local issues and have a strong link with the Community Council (YF reps will attend meetings and cover topics of interest).

10. PLANED (**£15,000**) will hold activities centred around connecting young people to elected officials from town and community councils in west Wales.
11. South Riverside Community Centre (**£1000**) will support the democratic engagement of foreign nationals living in Cardiff - specifically asylum seekers, refugees and migrants for whom English is a second language.
12. Tenby Town Council (**£1000**) will establish a community forum to increase participation in their community on local matters.
13. *Vocal Eyes (**£3625.20**) project ended early due to the company informing officials of their inability to continue delivery in line with their grant award letter.*
14. Y Ty Gwyrdd (**£1600**) will hold a 'People's Assembly' focusing on how to make a community more sustainable, involving people in deliberative democracy and look to help people not normally engaged and vocal in local democratic processes, to find their voice.
15. Boys & Girls Club Wales (**£109,684.95 – 2-year project, ends 31 March 2025**) will continue to run their Pizza and Politics workshops and Raise your Voice Projects, with an emphasis on those who are marginalised. Including: people from ethnic minority backgrounds, LGBTQ+ young people and disabled young people and those with poor mental health.
16. British Deaf Association (**£33,165.96 – 2-year project, ends 31 March 2025**) will run in-person and digital workshops to their stakeholders on how democracy works to empower Deaf people.
17. Swansea MAD (**£44,886.90 – 2-year project, ends 31 March 2025**) will facilitate activities with young people/adults in Swansea (who are underrepresented and/or newly enfranchised), supporting them to engage with the democratic process; promoting/increasing meaningful/sustainable voice/participation and ensuring every citizen in Swansea can play their full part in democracy.

### **2024/25 Projects**

18. Scouts Cymru (**£17,720**) will strengthen their Democracy Challenge Badge, creating an engaging programme to involve young people in the democratic process of Wales. It will create a blended approach combining existing activities for the challenge badge with digital resources, working with the Electoral Commission and participatory events with the Welsh Centre for International Affairs.
19. Elect Her (**£53,534.88**) aim to help women to engage with democracy, designing and developing and develop a series of digital resources for grassroots women's community groups to host democracy circles, demystifying democracy and supporting women to develop action plans for engagement. Alongside this, digital resources will be created, and training courses delivered specifically for Welsh women including self-led downloadable resources, video recordings, blended learning courses to equip them to move through the journey towards elected office.
20. Eco Hub Aber (**£11,490**) will enhance a popular existing community App to promote greater understanding of democracy and easier pathways for engagement. The grant will fund an additional democratic engagement section on the app to allow users to easily access information about democracy and be directed to relevant websites.

21. Aberystwyth Students Union (**£23,870**) aim to increase student participation and engagement with the democratic process in Wales, including creating content tailored towards the interests of students, holding voter registration drives and supporting students to engage with elected officials.
22. Aberystwyth Students Union (**£7130**) This separate project utilising the same activity but allows for a coordinator specifically focused on engaging and supporting international students with their democratic rights in Wales.
23. Shout Out UK (**£15,583.86**) will deliver media literacy training directly to young people in via schools on drop-down days, with a specific focus on students in years 11, 12 and 13, aiming to reach 330 students' total. The training will equip students with the knowledge and skills to identify various forms of misinformation, disinformation and extremist content, understand the motivations behind their dissemination and critically evaluate information sources in line with the Digital Competence Framework of the Curriculum for Wales.
24. Tenby Town Council (**£984**) will continue with their youth and community forums which were created in 2023/24 with support from this grant, with the aim to continue increasing participation in their community on local matters.
25. Boys & Girls Club Wales (**£9497**) assemble a diverse steering group consisting of marginalised young people who are care-experienced, LGBTQ+, homeless, adopted, travellers, ethnic minorities, and have disabilities from their partnerships and clubs. The steering group will collaborate in selecting impactful clips, drafting educational content, and providing personal insights to ensure the toolkit accurately reflects their experiences and needs. This toolkit will include guidelines, tips, and real-life examples to help politicians engage effectively with young people facing trauma and life challenges.
26. City of Cardiff Council (**£3775.50**) will hold their 'Democracy in Action' workshop. The workshop will allow Democracy Ambassadors from the 7 partnering schools to see what activities they could do in their setting. The workshop will contain 4 different activities: different governments lecture, a mock election, local ideas workshop with councillors and meet the lord mayor.

*To note: The Politics Project, Swansea MAD, Boys & Girls Club of Wales (2023-24 multi-year project), Scouts Cymru, Elect Her, Eco Hub Aber, Aberystwyth Students Union, Shout Out UK, Tenby Town Council and City of Cardiff Council had their projects extended beyond their original end date of 31 March 2025 to 30 June 2025.*

### **2025/26 Projects**

27. Llanelli Township (**£1000**) will run a series of public engagement sessions across Llanelli, targeting a diverse cross-section of the local population. Activities will include interactive displays, workshops, and informal open consultations hosted at accessible community venues. Sessions will be designed to demystify governance structures, show how community benefit societies and community interest companies interface with public authorities, and provide practical ways people can get involved.

**Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb  
a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol**

—  
**Equality and Social Justice  
Committee**

Jane Hutt MS  
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd  
and Chief Whip

**Senedd Cymru**

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29 April 2025

Dear Jane,

**Social Cohesion Inquiry**

During an evidence session on democratic health the 28 April, reference was made to the annual £400,000 Democratic Engagement Grant available to improve democratic engagement.

Members would appreciate further information on which organisations and projects have previously received grants, how their work was evaluated, reported and shared in order to learn and improve democratic engagement across Wales.

We look forward to hearing from you and would appreciate if you could provide a response prior to appearing before Committee on 12 May.

Yours sincerely,



**Jenny Rathbone MS**

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref:  
Ein cyf/Our ref:

Mike Hedges MS  
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee  
Welsh Parliament  
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8<sup>th</sup> May 2025

Dear Mike,

In accordance with the inter-institutional relations agreement, I am writing to notify you that a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department for Work and Pensions and Welsh Government was published on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2025. It can be found [here](#).

This Memorandum of Understanding sets out a clear set of conditions and principles for joint working between the Department for Work and Pensions and Welsh Ministers for the overall delivery of the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer in Wales (**the “Trailblazer”**) and covers the following:

- Aims of the Trailblazer
- Funding/Payment Schedule
- The principles of collaborative working

I have also copied this letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt MS, and the chairs of the Equality and Social Justice Committee, and the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee.

Yours sincerely,

**Rebecca Evans AS/MS**  
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Ein cyf/Our ref: PO221

Jenny Rathbone MS  
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

Copied to: Buffy Williams MS, Chair of the Children, Young People, and Education Committee.

8 May 2025

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter dated 27 March 2025 to Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chef Whip, Jane Hutt MS. As the issue relates to Free School Meal policy, it has been transferred to the education portfolio for a response.

As you are aware our Programme for Government commits us to continue to meet the rise in demand for Free School Meals resulting from the pandemic and review the eligibility criteria, extending entitlement as far as resources allow and at least to all primary school children.

Whilst the commitment of providing a free school meal to all primary school children was fulfilled in September 2024, I recognise that there are secondary aged learners who are living in socio-economic disadvantage that are currently excluded from receiving free school meals based on their parents' immigration status irrespective of household income.

This is why I wrote to local authorities in November 2024 to remind them of the vital role they play in meeting our shared commitment of tackling child hunger and to consider how they can use their discretionary powers to provide meals in secondary schools without charging – specifically targeting those children from low-income families with No Recourse to Public Funds whose immigration status means there is no automatic entitlement. I have also raised my concerns about this issue directly with the WLGA.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.



Extending eligibility to free school meals to include learners from low-income households with no recourse to public funds would require primary legislation, and whilst the Department of Education has indicated that it plans to legislate for the changes it has made, currently their extension of free school meals to learners from households with no recourse to public funds has been achieved through issuing non-statutory guidance only.

In adopting this approach, the Department of Education has not been able to accurately monitor the impact of the policy in terms of its efficacy or cost and given the very difficult decisions that have been made in setting the Welsh Government budget for 2025-26, pursuing a similar policy position in Wales in the absence of reliable data about the potential impacts, is not under consideration at this time.

However, I am aware that my recent communication to local authorities on the use of discretionary powers to provide meals without charging may not be having the desired effect. I am deeply concerned about this.

I have therefore asked my officials for urgent advice on what more can be done to support local authority efforts to identify and support NRPF learners in need of a meal, to understand and remove barriers that may be preventing these learners from accessing support, as well as maximising opportunities for the collection of data that can be used to reliably inform and monitor future policy decisions about support for NRPF learners in the longer term.

I will provide a further update to the Committee as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

**Lynne Neagle AS/MS**  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

**Jane Hutt MS**

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief

Whip

Welsh Government

27 March 2025

Dear Jane,

**Social Cohesion: eligibility for free school meals**

We held a stakeholder session on 17 March as part of our inquiry into social cohesion. We discussed a range of matters including the relationship between the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy, the attainment gap and free school meals.

We understand that in England, the Government has extended free school meal eligibility to children in all households with NRPF, subject to maximum income thresholds. In Wales, however, local authorities are “encouraged to use their discretion to provide free school meals to any child who is not automatically entitled due to their parents’ immigration status.”<sup>1</sup> We heard fears that the discretionary approach adopted in Wales risks widening the attainment gap and exacerbating inequalities in educational and health outcomes. We would be grateful if you could please explain

1. Why the Welsh Government believes a discretionary approach is preferable to an automatic entitlement;
2. Detail of how the Welsh Government is encouraging local authorities to provide free school meals;
3. Detail of how the Welsh Government is monitoring the local authority response including levels of take-up to ensure that the guidance is being interpreted fairly and consistently.

I would welcome a response within usual timescales; I am copying this letter to Buffy Williams MS, Chair of the Children, Young People, and Education Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government, [Free school meals: information for local authorities and schools](#)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jenny Rathbone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'J'.

**Jenny Rathbone MS**

Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee



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