

Committee of the Scrutiny of the First Minister

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The Welsh Government's approach to Tackling Poverty and Child Poverty

1. Cross-Departmental working and how tackling child poverty is mainstreamed across Welsh Government policy areas

In June last year we launched our *Tackling Poverty Action Plan*. This is an absolute priority for us and we will tackle poverty through everything we do as a government.

The *Plan* drew together contributions provided by all Departments and describes what the Welsh Government is doing to prevent poverty; to help people into work and to mitigate the impact of poverty.

The plan will be updated and refreshed this June and the Minister for Local Government and Communities and the Deputy Minister for Children jointly chair a cross-government programme board to take this work forward.

Tackling poverty remains a collective Cabinet responsibility across Government and I asked each Directorate to appoint a poverty champion or champions to work to their Director General to maintain momentum across all portfolios and to develop synergy in their work.

The Minister for Local Government and Communities has also written to Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executive Officers seeking local authority anti-poverty champions at a senior official and at member level. I see the anti-poverty champions being able to learn from each other as a group and also being able make a difference in Local Authorities by reinforcing the need to reflect tackling poverty in all the Authority's work. Single Integrated Plans at local level are an opportunity for more strategic thinking as well as simplification. Local Authority Champions at a senior and political level are one way of ensuring that the Child Poverty Duty is continually reinforced within local authorities and in Single Integrated Plans.

I also welcome the establishment of the Third Sector Anti-Poverty Programmes Taskforce, formed last year as a result of joint conference hosted by WCVA and the Bevan Foundation on meeting the growing challenge of poverty.

2. The inclusion of child poverty within the broader Welsh Government anti-poverty strategy;

Action to prevent child poverty lies at the heart of our *Tackling Poverty Action Plan*. Some of the main areas where we can have the biggest impact on poverty are educational attainment, childcare, teams which work with families and employment.

Our efforts to prevent child poverty start with targeting investment to give children the best possible start in life. From early in pregnancy through to early adulthood, our aim is to reduce inequality at the earliest possible stage and break the link between socio-economic disadvantage, educational under-achievement and the impaired life chances that flow from these.

3. How Welsh Government targets are being met

In the programme for Government we committed to tracking the progress the Welsh Government has made against big long-term challenges we face such as giving every child the best start in life, working with families to tackle health and educational inequalities and addressing worklessness.

I made clear when I launched the Programme for Government that I would not be setting new targets against the indicators of these long-term challenges. This reflects the nature of these challenges as complex and subject to policy levers which are not devolved to Wales, such as welfare benefits policy. I regard the approach we have taken as allowing a more mature understanding of performance by allowing comparisons with other jurisdictions and our progress over time. That is why I will continue to publish a rich set of information on these indicators in the annual report of the Programme this year.

In conjunction we will track performance annually on progress in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan. The Plan sets out in greater detail the key performance indicators of our programmes and activities which collectively contribute to these high level outcomes.

For example, Jobs Growth Wales aims to create 4000 six-month job opportunities every year for the next three years for unemployed 16-24 year olds and to see as many of those jobs as possible translated into sustained employment.

The programme is nearing the end of its first year of delivery and has already created well over 5000 job opportunities for young people in every area of Wales. Over 3000 people are now employed in jobs created through Jobs Growth Wales. The programme is on track to fill 4000 jobs by the end of March 2013.

We are also working on the expansion of Flying Start in order to double this number by the end of this Assembly term. We continue to work closely with local authorities to plan the delivery of Flying Start, and to ensure that the funding continues to be targeted at those areas which need it most. 145 projects have been agreed to date worth a total spend of almost £21 million. This will result in the delivery of additional services to approx 4,500 children aged 2-3.

The ability of our programmes to positively impact on our long-term outcomes will clearly be affected by other factors which are outside of our control. For example, the UK Government's tax and benefit reforms announced up until summer 2011 are estimated to increase relative child poverty in Wales by about 6,000 in 2012-13. Recently announced benefit changes in the Autumn Statement 2012 will mean more bad news for families in Wales. It is even more important therefore that we optimise what we can do and set out how we are measuring the impact of our actions in our Plan.

As a result of the Statutory Duty set out in the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services will in the autumn term 2013 lay a report before the National Assembly on the objectives and measures contained in the Child Poverty Strategy 2011. The report will demonstrate and evidence progress made towards achieving those objectives.

4. The role of the Welsh Government in relation to the UK Government

We will continue to work with the UK Government to reduce child poverty across the United Kingdom and we welcome the UK Government's continued commitment to maintain the targets set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010 ¹.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 required the UK Government to achieve the following poverty targets by 2020.

- Relative poverty: less than 10 per cent of children living in relative low-income poverty.
- Material deprivation: less than 5 per cent of children living in combined material deprivation and low income.
- Absolute low income: reduce the proportion of children who live in absolute low income to less than 5 per cent.
- Persistent poverty: percentage of children living in relative poverty for three out of four years (target level to be set by 2015).

We have also worked with the UK Government to establish the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission and to appoint an independent Welsh Member to the Commission.

5. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011

Our approach to tackling poverty prioritises the needs of children and is based on our overall approach to implementation of the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Since its inception, the Welsh Government has consistently made it clear that reducing child poverty is a fundamental element of its social justice agenda and also part of its key priorities to implement the CRC. Given this long standing commitment we would expect to see a continuity and a deepening of a rights-based approach over time rather than the development of new or different initiatives.

The practical ways this due regard duty is to be carried out can be found in the children's scheme

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/publications/rights/;jsessionid=36895688253DED60630F8A656BB096A6?lang=en>).

¹ Section 8B of the Child Poverty Act 2010 requires the UK Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission to publish its annual report (which includes a description of the measures taken by the Welsh Ministers) before each anniversary of the coming into force of this section, ie before 8 May 2013.

The children's scheme sets out 6 steps to the due regard process which include the UNCRC impact assessment tool.