

Cross Party Group on Women

Sponsored by Siân Gwenllian MS

29 April 2022

Zoom, 11:30 – 12:30

Attendees:

Sian Gwenllian MS (Chair)
Carolyn Thomas MS
Vaughan Gething MS
Hade Turkmen, Chwarae Teg
Nancy Lidubwi, Bawso
Jordan Brewer, Welsh Women's Aid
Nkechi Allen Dawson, Race Council Cymru
Rhian Connick, NFWI
Megan Thomas, Disability Wales
Dee Montague, FTWW
Claire Morgan, Carers Wales
Alison Parken, Cardiff Business School
Ele Hicks, Diverse Cymru
Jane Fenton-May, Women in Europe (Wales)
Kirsty Fox, Camlas
Domenica Hidalgo, LSE (Speaker)
Parbon Khan, LSE (Speaker)
Evelyn James, WEN Wales
Jennifer Ramsay, Office of Paul Davies MS
Jessica Laimann, WEN Wales (Speaker)

Apologies:

Sarah Murphy MS
Delyth Jewell MS
Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Debbie Shaffer, FTWW
Tomos Evans, Chwarae Teg
Frances Beecher, Llamau
Suzie Davies, Board Member, WEN Wales

<p>1</p>	<p>Welcomes, Apologies, Introduction – Chair</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone and advised that the purpose of the meeting was to hear about why we need a caring-focussed recovery in Wales and to hear a response from Vaughan Gethings MS.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p><i>Why we need a caring-focussed recovery in Wales – Jessica Laimann, WEN Wales</i></p> <p>Jessica Laimann advised that the presentation would bring together some key points from Prof Himmelweit's presentation at the last meeting as well as Wales-specific data.</p> <p>The pandemic had undone years of progress on gender equality with an especially stark impact on single parents, disabled women and Black, Asian and minority ethnic women. This was now worsened by the cost of living crisis with no end in sight. Jessica presented some key facts on the economic inequality of women in Wales that showed how this was crucially linked to their role in paid and unpaid care. Although the pandemic had shown that care was the backbone of society, the sector was in crisis, with poor pay and conditions and staffing issues leading to unmet care and support</p>

needs and poorer care outcomes. The workforce was 80% female and women from Black, Asian and minority ethnic background were overrepresented in the lowest paying roles. At the same time, Wales had the highest rate of elderly cares in Great Britain, which were overwhelmingly (96%) women.

These figures showed clearly that investments in care were urgently needed to improve women's equality and address the impact of the pandemic and cost of living crisis on women. This needed to include:

- Affordable and accessible childcare for all children from 6 months
- Improved pay, conditions and career structure in the care workforce through a sector-wide real living wage, better career progression, support for mental health & well-being of care workers
- Unpaid caring becoming a choice rather than a necessity, enabling more women to enter, remain or progress in paid employment
- Challenging existing gender and care norms

But the benefits of investing in care was not “just” a matter of gender equality. Such investments were also:

- Economically sound through improving resilience of the Welsh society and economy to further crises and reducing long-term costs by meeting care and support needs and improving well-being.
- In line with net-zero objectives, as jobs in care directly produced only a small proportion of the emissions of the average current job and used fewer imported inputs.
- An effective response to cost-of-living crisis by lifting those who had been worst affected, including care workers in low-paid, insecure employment, people with unpaid caring responsibilities, disabled and older people.
- A crucial step towards a well-being economy
- Reflecting core principles of the Social Services and Well-being Wales Act

In addition, investments in care were an excellent employment stimulus. Research by Prof Himmelweit had shown that, compared to similar investment in construction, investments in care would generate a vastly higher number of jobs for women while creating a similar amount of jobs for men. They would expand the supply of labour, not just its demand and recoupe more revenue through increasing overall employment.

This was especially true for Wales. Due to different nature of the Welsh economy, compared to the UK the relative employment benefits were likely to be higher. Wales was a smaller economy, very open to the rest of the UK, which meant fewer jobs generated in the supply chain and from additional spending would be realised in Wales. Compared to investments into “supply chain heavy” industries like construction, investments in care would generate even higher relative employment benefits in Wales than in the UK overall.

	<p>In summary, investment in care were urgently needed to address the impacts of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis on women. Spending on care needed to be recognised as a positive, long-term investment, not just a cost, as it would bring long-term benefits not just for gender equality but also in terms of reducing poverty and unemployment, improving economic and social resilience, supporting the net-zero transition and implementing Social Services & Well-being reforms.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Response from Vaughan Gething MS</p> <p>Vaughan Gethings advised that investments in the care sector were needed for a number of reasons, including an increase in care and support needs following the pandemic and demographic changes.</p> <p>He recognized that the workforce was mainly female and low paid, which was partly why Welsh Government had committed to the real living wage in the sector. It was working to ensure that the wage increase would actually end up in the workers pay packages across different providers in LAs, health boards, the third sector and housing associations. He was aware that many workers were already receiving the real living wage but there was still a large number who didn't and Welsh Government would work to ensure the money actually went into pockets of care workers not profits of employers. Having a proper bargaining and wage structure was important so that better employers would not be undercut by competitors who were investing less in their workforce.</p> <p>It was important to raise the status of the workforce, which would need to include more professionalization and qualifications. Care work required a lot of skills and the Welsh Government disagreed with the UK Government's approach of branding the care sector as low-skill. Making these improvements was also crucial for staff retention and recruitment, otherwise people would move into sectors like retails for better pay and conditions.</p> <p>There was wide agreement that these measures were needed, the question was how quickly the Welsh Government could get there. Care was an important foundation economy sector – if it employed more people on better conditions that would be beneficial because the money would be spent in local economies rather than disappear into the British Virgin Islands or money laundering. A challenge remained as to where to find money for investments in the budget, as the commitment had been made before the last budget settlement which was disappointing for Wales but the commitment remained.</p> <p>We needed to combat stereotypes and encourage women into traditionally male-dominated field like STEM as well investing into care it to address economic inequality.</p>

	<p>There was evidence that this would also benefit businesses as mixed gender workplaces provided better results.</p> <p>Over the Senedd term, Welsh Government would keep its promises and wanted to see more people in the sector which were better qualified and better paid, including the childcare workforce. Vaughan Gething MS advised that he would be happy to come back at a future meeting also share a written response outlining some of the activities that were already underway as well as the visions and expectations for seeing women play a greater role in other parts of the economy. He acknowledged that investing into care was a shared responsibility with the Minister for Health and Social Services and was keen to have those conversations.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Vaughan Gething MS for his positive response and suggested that the CPG write to him to ask for an overview of what is happening along the themes covered today. This could then be followed up by a deep dive into some areas where further work might be needed and ensure this was brought together and raised at a cross-government level.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p><i>Understanding and Shifting Narratives to Value Women’s Work</i> - Parbon Khan & Domenica Hidalgo, Joint research project from LSE Department of International Development and Oxfam</p> <p>The speakers thanked the CPG for the opportunity to present their work. Parbon Khan advised that the research was a joint project that aimed to contribute to Oxfam’s Valuing Women’s Work strategy by identifying and understanding the narratives that different audiences held on unpaid care and informal work. The research covered the UK, Palestine, Kenya and Zimbabwe.</p> <p>Domenica Hidalgo outlined the care landscape in the UK. There was a strong association between poverty and unpaid care, including those supporting older and disabled people, those caring for children, informal work and especially women from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. They had identified three problematic narratives that were perpetuating this situation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Unpaid care and domestic work are the primary responsibility of women 2) Women are “second earners” 3) Social security is a cost rather than an investment <p>But there was also the potential of transformative narratives that could help drive change, these were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Caring responsibilities should be equitably distributed 2) Investment in care is more beneficial than it is costly <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Investing in universal social care brings back autonomy and dignity to carers and those supported by them b) Shared childcare responsibilities lead to happier, healthier children

	<p>While the UK had advanced in many dimensions compared to other countries in the study, women continued to take on a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. There was therefore still a lot of work to do in policy and civil society to address these issues.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Discussion and questions from attendees</p> <p>Carolyn Thomas MS noted that building back through care was an excellent approach to generate employment across different areas, including those that relied on public sector employment. It was important to look at direct employment if possible. There had been a case of someone employed by agency as a manager for £9/h while the agency was being paid £30/h in a package from Cardiff Council, who said they could not employ people directly. The agency in question had won lots of awards yet speaking to the workforce showed a very different picture which was also reflected in a high staff turnover. She added that some good work on career progression was already underway as Grŵp Llandrillo Menai had been working with care workers on developing a career pathway into nursing.</p> <p>Alison Parken highlighted that the Mainstreaming equality and just transition to net zero pilot had created a typology of climate job, which included care in a category of low-emitting jobs.</p> <p>The Chair noted that it was clear that this was a cross-cutting issue and it would be useful to involve the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Minister for Climate Change. It was important to keep raising the profile of this issue and bring different portfolio holder together, and to ensure someone was leading the way on this, potentially through developing a cross-government strategy.</p> <p>With regard to welfare and second earners, Alison Parken noted that current thresholds for second earners caused dependency and suppressed women’s wages. Research on low-paid women in caring and cleaning showed that these would often be given 10-12 hour contracts and relied on their employer offering them additional hours but also had to stay below the threshold otherwise the whole household could lose more money than what they had earned in addition.</p> <p>This was echoed by Jane Fenton-May. As a GP employing people part-time, the threshold had meant hours would need to be juggled after annual pay increases and had caused great real difficulties covering sickness absence as people could end up making a net loss of household income from working additional hours. This was an ongoing problem.</p> <p>Evelyn James emphasised that we needed to ensure lived experience was at the heart of changing narratives and to challenge the myths that women were supposed to take</p>

	<p>on all these responsibilities. Both a policy change and a culture change was necessary to encourage shared caring responsibilities and women stepping into “men’s” roles.</p> <p>Carolyn Thomas MS highlighted that the former benefit system with family and child tax credit had been less difficult than the new universal credit system, as the previous system was based on yearly annual income and provided more stability. Expanding free childcare to two-year old in Wales would be an important step forward but really this was needed from when maternity leave ended, so a lot more had to be done.</p> <p>In response to the questions, Parbon Khan and Domenica Hidalgo summarized that secondary earning had emerged as a key issue of economic inequality in the discussion. It was important to recognize inequitable caring responsibilities were the driving behind this and to design policy with an intersectional lense that acknowledged the disproportionate challenges for Black and ethnic minority women.</p>
5	AOB
6	<i>Close</i>