

Senedd Cross Party Group on Human Rights

13th March 2024, by zoom, 10 am – 11 am

Minutes

In attendance:

- Sioned Williams MS (chair)
- Professor Simon Hoffman (secretariat)
- Dr Victoria Winckler (Bevan Foundation, speaker)
- Altaf Hussain MS

The meeting was also attended by interested persons. The CPG is open to interested persons and organisations. As the meeting is held via zoom with a large number of attendees (20+) it is not possible to keep a record of all attendees.

Exceptions:

- Officers.
- Speakers.
- Members of Senedd.
- Anyone requesting their name or organisation be expressly noted.

Matters Arising from previous meeting (October 2023)

The Chair confirmed she will prepare and send a letter to university Vice Chancellors in Wales as agreed by the previous meeting. (**Action: SW**)

Presentation

The Group received a presentation on poverty and the Welsh government budget by Dr Victoria Winckler, Direct, Bevan Foundation. Dr Winckler introduced the discussion by reference to data which confirms poverty as a chronic and corrosive problem in Wales. Headlines included: 21% of people live in poverty in Wales; there has been an increase in 'in-work' poverty; 56% of people out of work live in poverty; there has been an increase in destitution; the causes of poverty are primarily policy choices in relation to the economic and social system. Dr Winckler noted that while many policy levers which influence poverty are not devolved (e.g. welfare, taxation), this does not mean the Welsh government has no influence over policy that impacts on poverty in Wales. For example, the Welsh Government has control over: housing, childcare, devolved grants and aspects of the economy and labor market.

Commenting on the 24/25 Welsh Government budget Dr Winckler noted this amounted to £23 billion, of which £11 billion is allocated to health and £5.9 billion to local government. The remainder is available for other costs such as promoting social justice. Dr Winckler commented that between the draft budget and the final

budget there had been some positive adjustments, including uplifts and some reinstatement of funding in areas likely to impact on those living in poverty, but that overall the budget is 'not a poverty reducing budget' with many areas 'squeezed'. Dr Winckler commented that the outlook remains challenging as the priority for the main UK political parties remains tax cuts with the consequence of low revenues to support social programs, the legacy of a decade of under-investment and the fact that many key services affecting people in poverty are now outside public control.

The Chair thanked Dr Winckler for her highly informative presentation. Several participants commented and asked questions and the presentation was followed by a robust discussion.

During the discussion there was interest in developing a common understanding of what Wales should anticipate as a 'minimum standard' for the provision of key public services to meet basic needs: drawing on the concept of a 'minimum core entitlement' which applies to rights such as the right to an adequate standard of living in international human rights law. It was agreed that the Chair would write to the Minister for Social Justice to express concern at the level of poverty in Wales and to ask if steps might be taken, in cooperation with civil society, to develop an understanding of what communities in Wales might anticipate as a minimum level of provision in order to promote a civilized life for all in Wales. **(Action: SW)**

Report of the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales

Item deferred to next meeting due to lack of time.

AOB

Elinor Matthey (Bevan Foundation) referred to the recent (February 2024) Bevan Foundation report on 'What am I Supposed to Do? Living with No Recourse to Public Funds in the Nation of Sanctuary'. One finding from the report is that where local authorities are given discretion to provide support to people who have no recourse to public funds they do not always use this discretion to provide support.

The meeting agreed that the Chair would write to the Minister for Social Justice to ask that Ministers remove the discretion to support children from households with no recourse to public funds so that local authorities have to provide support for free school meals by applying eligibility criteria which secure entitlement by reference to low income. **(Action: SW)**