

Minutes

Cross-Party Group on Poverty

15 July 2025, 9:15 am – 10:30 am

Hybrid – Conference Room A, Tŷ Hywel and Microsoft Teams

Attendees

John Griffiths MS (Chair)

Steffan Evans (Secretariat) (Bevan Foundation)

Andrew Bettridge (Office of John Griffiths MS), Sarah Taylor (Office of John Griffiths MS), Joel Davies (Bevan Foundation), Katie Till (Trussell), Thomas Weekes (Trussell), Vikki Baltzars (Trivallis), Isata Kanneh (Bevan Foundation), Buffy Williams MS, Davina Carey-Evans (Family Fund), Catherine Rees (Save the Children), Elinor Puzey (EHRC), Amanda Ellis (Senedd), Leo Holmes (Early Years Wales), George Watkins (Mind), Catrin Edwards (Carers Trust), Hannah Peeler (Care & Repair), Katie Palmer (Food Sense Wales), Bethan Webber (Cwmpas), Emma Österberg (IFAN), Duncan Holtom (People And Work), Christian Beech (BASW Cymru), Danny Grehan (Office of Heledd Fychan MS), Owain Williams (Purple Shoots), Niamh Salkeld (Plaid Cymru Senedd Group), Hannah Sorley (Citizens Advice), Cherrie Bija (Faith in Families), Lindsey Kearton (Citizens Advice), Ben Lejac (Mental Health Foundation), Lauren Cooper (Older People's Commissioner), Gemma Lelliot (Community Transport Association), Anna Westall (Children in Wales), Angharad Williams (Children in Wales), Angela Owen Griffiths (Plaid Cymru), Stephanie Whitehead (Cymorth Cymru), Jamie Insole (UCU), Glenn Page (Amnesty), Sarah Germain (FareShare Cymru), Pearl Costello (Food Sense Wales), Bethany Howells (Community Housing Cymru), Pat Dunmore (Citizens Advice SNPT), Ellie Harwood (CPAG), Izzabella James (Home Start Cymru)

Meeting note

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Thomas Weekes from Trussell delivered a presentation summarising the findings of Trussell's report 'The Cost of Hunger and Hardship'. Points raised in the presentation included:
 - Food bank usage is still significantly above pre-pandemic levels in Wales, and has become the new normal.
 - The project used a mixed-methods approach to understand the scale of hunger and hardship and solutions to it, incl. qualitative & participatory research alongside modelling.
 - Costs of hunger and hardship include economic (employment/productivity), fiscal, and to public services.
 - Hunger and hardship is estimated to add £3.6bn in costs to public services, the economy, and public finances in Wales. Modelling approach was cautious so these are likely an underestimate.
 - Further estimated wellbeing costs of hunger and hardship which are as significant (£3.7bn) but they are presented separately from the headline costings in line with cautious approach.
 - Large costs to the healthcare system – preventative spending is important.

- Hunger and hardship prevents children from getting what they need from the education system and adds costs in terms of social/care services.
- People have difficulties finding and maintaining employment, work clothes & other barriers – unpicking these challenges is important to think about supporting people back into work and the benefits of that.
- There is a large economic imperative to tackle hunger and hardship because of the costs it brings. The evidence shows that boosting social security in particular has a positive cost-benefit ratio and there are other levers available in the Welsh context.
- A Universal Credit essentials guarantee would benefit the public purse in Wales by £1.5bn.
- A Welsh child payment would have a huge impact on families with children and bring £605m in benefits to Wales.
- Need to boost social housing supply – ensuring temporary accommodation is of better quality and people spend as little time in it as possible.
- Need for further moves to strengthen provision of advice services and cash-first approach to support.

3. Steffan Evans from the Bevan Foundation gave an overview of the Bevan Foundation's research into what works in solving poverty. Key points included:

- Key messages in terms of the state of poverty in Wales: 1 in 5 people live in poverty in Wales and no progress has been made in 25 years. More details are available in the Poverty in Wales 2025 report produced by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- There is a question over how the headline rates of poverty can be flat while hardship is clearly increasing. The answer is that deep poverty is increasing – half a million people in Wales are now in deep or very deep poverty – a family with two primary school age children in very deep poverty faces an annual shortfall of £13,500 just to reach the poverty line.
- In the Welsh context we should be thinking about how it might be possible to reduce the deepest impacts of poverty.
- The Bevan Foundation worked with Policy in Practice to model the most effective levers to reduce impacts of poverty, looking at the breadth of the impact (who/how many) would benefit, depth of poverty (how much less poor would affected individuals/households become), and any change in the rate of poverty.
- Key messages – a child payment would be effective – would reach nearly 1/3 of households in poverty, reduce child poverty by almost 23%, and large families and households with young children would particularly benefit.
- Work – for those not in work and without barriers to work, supporting them into work would be massively beneficial, but the numbers affected are very small.
- Getting parents into work cuts child poverty by over 11%, lone parents benefit especially.
- Other interventions - e.g. removing housing support restrictions such as the Bedroom Tax and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) caps - have a wider reach, but the financial gains are modest because the increases in support are small and limited by the overall benefit cap.

- The idea that we should look just to single interventions to solve poverty is not sensible – the solutions need to boost employment **and** ensure people have adequate support from the social security system – e.g. childcare.
 - All modelled interventions make a difference – clear that we shouldn't feel like there is no point – reducing impact of e.g. welfare reforms in Wales massively impacts people's lives even if it doesn't reduce the headline rate of poverty, and if the UK Government then makes decisions in the interests of those on low incomes the situation becomes even better and multiplies those benefits to people's lives.
4. The Chair thanked the presenters for their contributions and opened the discussion to attendees. The discussion included the following points:
- DH noted the complexity of getting people into employment and that often there are multiple barriers for people, asked if a range of other policy interventions might not be needed to reduce those levels of hunger and hardship. TW noted that social security is clearly not the only answer, housing and employment support boosts the impact of income boosting policies. When Trussell looked at people who fell into deep hardship, the effects on their employment were very marked over the 5-10 years following – people may indeed need support to enter employment. SE noted the difficulties in looking at discrete groups and limitations in modelling. DH said that while raising employment is clearly important but the income-based interventions are possibly simpler to effect, given the complexity and challenges of getting those who are long-term unemployed back into work. Made the point that reducing levels of hunger and hardship now would prevent that group from growing into the future.
 - LH asked if Trussell's research was able to include the perceptions of children of the effects on their parents. TW said they were unable to talk directly to children but talked with people working with children of secondary school age. Some of the stories were horrific, in terms of stigma around free school meals, not being able to go on school trips. Noted that some of the mitigations the Welsh Government (WG) have put in place are really important.
 - EH noted that the competence of the WG is limited and the need for the UK Government to take up the challenge of ending the need for food banks and destitution. Suggested if it might be productive to press the WG to take more ownership of ending destitution through expanding the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) for example. KT said that in theory the DAF should prevent people from needing to access a food bank so really thinking about what the DAF is for and who it is for is really important. It should be able to help addressing that need to access 3 day's worth of emergency food. Whether the WG should have a plan to end the need for food banks is a key issue, and there are questions over whether a plan itself would be helpful.
 - JG noted Trussell's position that there should not be a need for food banks and that their work tries to move to that position. TW added that it is also that people should have enough basic income to not have to access them, and it is about ensuring people have enough cash and dignity. SE said that noting the depth of poverty below the poverty line is really important because it highlights the WG's power to mitigate destitution, beyond the obvious need to

bring people out of poverty. Noted that it is possibly less of a simple message than ending poverty but it is more reflective of the reality.

- JG noted that WG has long resisted targets around reducing poverty because the levers lie with the UKG but that there probably are targets which could be devised which the WG would have control over. KT noted that this has been the subject of discussion at recent gatherings of anti-poverty sector in Wales and that the responsibility does not lie solely with the UKG but falls at the WG's feet as well.
- KP raised the question of whether it is right to be pushing for more parents to work when they have young children. TW said they have focused the work on the economic side to support the moral case for people not being in hunger and hardship – the wellbeing impacts are huge beyond the economic case. SE said that poverty work is inevitably often focused on finances & if you are a government looking to demonstrate that you've made progress you will want to look at the numbers of people who have been brought out of poverty. TW noted Trussell is increasingly looking at food insecurity which could be a useful measurement.
- IK asked if WG should have a strategy which specifically looks to reduce poverty amongst migrant groups given it is easy for these groups and the specific challenges they face to be overlooked when looking at the overall/bigger numbers. SE said that there is work that needs to be done to improve understanding and the ability to notice which groups are missing out. This speaks to the urgency of simplifying access to support for the majority through the Welsh Benefits System so that resources can be freed up to focus on the groups which have more complex challenges accessing systems.
- GM noted that measuring the impacts of different choices is very complicated and we don't have the resources to do it properly – it would be useful to compare the impact of the proposed changes to spending the same on increasing advice services. A large and comprehensive economic modelling project would be useful.
- BW noted the lack of progress and the demoralising effect that it has on people working in the sector trying to improve things. Raised the question of whether it is the overarching economic model that is the barrier, and the danger that comes with increasing numbers of people reaching the end of their tolerance for a system which offers no change, living standards not improving etc. The economic plans proposed by governments tend to be stuck on extractive investment models. Asked if there is a need to be braver and empower people to create growth for their communities, with the looming danger that there is an extreme shift in the political landscape in upcoming elections which will certainly not help people in poverty. TW said he shares some of these concerns, and that there is now clear knowledge of what works – advice works, and we know that people are not receiving all the help they are entitled to – cash-first approaches work – the effect of Scottish Child payment is bedding in – when the cost of living payment scheme was introduced we saw a marked drop in the numbers of people coming to food banks. We need to continue getting these messages across to governments. SE said that the idea that there is no cost to solving poverty is unrealistic. There are choices which have to be made, but the impact of those choices

will be financial benefits down the line if we make sure there is investment in preventative work.

5. The Chair brought the discussion to a close and thanked attendees for their contributions. Noted that finding the answers in terms of policies that are effective and achievable is no easy task. Suggested that the CPG could send a joint letter to the political party leaders in Wales detailing the discussion and seeking details of their commitments to taking action on poverty in the next Senedd term. The Chair then closed the meeting.

Action Point: Write a letter from the CPG to all Welsh political party leaders to inform them of the actions discussed for reducing the impacts of poverty in Wales, and asking them to detail their plans for taking effective action on poverty in the next Senedd term (JG's office)