

DRAFT MINUTES of the CPG on CHILDREN and LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN
The Impact of Welfare Reform in Wales

February 12th 2014

12:15-1:25 pm

Media Briefing Room

Sponsored by Julie Morgan AM

AGENDA

Chair: Julie Morgan AM

12:15-12:20: Welcome and Introduction: Julie Morgan AM

12:20-12:40: Presentation by Fran Target, Director of Citizens Advice Cymru

12:40-1:00: Presentation by Dr. Liz Jones, Development Officer, Children in Wales.

1:00-1:25: Discussion

1:25: Close

PROCEEDINGS

- Julie Morgan AM opened the meeting.
- Julie Morgan thanked everyone for attending and introduced Fran Target, Director of Citizens Advice Cymru.
- Fran Target discussed two main issues: the nature of the changes to specific welfare payments and the changes to the way that benefits are now being administered.
- Specific benefits discussed: ESA (biggest enquiry rate), Council Tax support, Housing Benefit cap, Universal Credit, Social Fund.
- Concerns about the changes in the way benefits are administered:
 - Universal Credit is now a single payment and this makes it harder for a lot of people to budget/administer.
 - Child Benefit now clumped into Universal Credit – no separate income for mothers. Concern about the link between financial difficulty and domestic violence.
 - It's digital by default – 90% of clients who are migrating are not in a position to manage migration to Universal Credit digitally.
 - If have no access at home, concerns about internet security.
- People who will lose most under welfare reform will be families. According to the Treasury's own figures, there will be a disproportionate impact on the poorest.
- Julie Morgan introduced Dr. Liz Jones, Development Officer, Children in Wales.

- Liz Jones discussed her research on the key issues identified by families in Wales in relation to poverty, particularly the impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms. She made the following points:
 - The impact of the economy on labour market opportunities and wage levels means that more and more working families are struggling to meet living costs. At the same time, the UK Government's Welfare Reform Act 2012 has introduced the greatest changes to welfare benefits in 60 years,
 - The reforms announced in 2010 are estimated to save over £18 billion by 2014-15; additional cuts announced in 2012 amount to £3.7 billion by 2015-16.
 - The welfare reforms are hitting families with dependent children particularly hard – the biggest average losses are experienced by low-middle income households and non-working families with children.
 - Children in Wales is conducting a pilot research project investigating key issues that are raised by families in Wales regarding poverty. Interviews are being conducted with AMs, MPs, and constituency caseworkers across Wales.
 - Preliminary findings show the impact on single mothers (particularly in the Cardiff area), an increase in rent arrears, an increase in demand for food bank stamps, difficulties resulting from the 'bedroom tax'.
 - Interviews are on-going and key findings will be reported to the CPG, Welsh Government, AMs, and members of Children in Wales.
- Discussion:
 - The impact on care leavers.
 - Best practice needs to be shared across local authorities.
 - The problems with transitional payments.
 - Concerns about the normalisation of food banks – institutionalising lack – sufficient income is what is needed.
- Julie Morgan AM closed the meeting.