

END CHILD POVERTY NETWORK CYMRU RHWYDWAITH DILEU TLODI PLANT CYMRU

The End Child Poverty Network Cymru is co-ordinated by



Children in Wales
Plant yng Nghymru

Response to the NAFW Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee Inquiry into Poverty- Strand 1

Introduction

The **End Child Poverty Network Cymru** (ECPN) is a coalition focused on the eradication of child poverty in Wales, co-ordinated and managed on a day-to-day basis by Children in Wales. Its steering group includes representation from across the third and statutory sectors and the Network has an increasing supporting membership from a broad cross-section of agencies.

Steering Group members include Barnardo's Cymru, Children in Wales, Save the Children Wales, NEA Wales, Action for Children, NSPCC Cymru, WLGA (observers), Citizens Advice, Oxfam Cymru, Public Health Wales, Shelter Cymru, the Buttle Trust, Princes Trust Cymru, TUC Wales (observers), Welsh Women's Aid, Wales Migration Partnership and the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales (observers).

Operational since 2001, the ECPN Cymru is supporting the Government's vision that no child in Wales should be living in poverty by 2020, and is working to achieve this by:

- Increased public and professional understanding of child poverty in Wales
- Public and professional support for measures to tackle child poverty

- Ensuring that policies are in place at all levels of Government (local, Welsh Government, UK Government and parliaments – National Assembly and Westminster), which contribute to eradicating child poverty in Wales.

The ECPN Cymru published a manifesto in November 2010 ahead of the National Assembly of Wales elections in May 2011 and this was updated in May 2012. In it we welcomed the introduction of a Child Poverty Duty under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, and the Welsh Government's response to the UN Concluding Observations through their National Action Plan Getting it Right. The release of the revised Child Poverty Strategy in February 2011 reinforced the Welsh Government's intention that tackling child poverty remained a national priority and incorporated many of the key issues that the ECPN Cymru had been raising concerns about for many years.

However a new **2014 Manifesto** (attached) was published because the external landscape and situation for many children and families in Wales had changed considerably in recent years, with high levels of worklessness amongst young people, increased personal debt and much uncertainty characterising the lives of a growing number of our population. We believe that solutions can and must be found.

ECPN Cymru 2014 Manifesto Recommendations

- 1. Deliver on the cross party pledge to eradicate child poverty by 2020 through a joined up policy framework supported by appropriate resources**
- 2. Address the implementation gap between policy and delivery**
- 3. Adequately resource, protect and strengthen national programmes and services which have been effectively evaluated and which deliver positive outcomes for our poorest children**
- 4. Ensure that existing duties placed on public sector bodies are subject to robust scrutiny procedures to ensure the delivery of child poverty obligations**
- 5. Work with all sectors, including employers, in the national fight against child poverty**

- 6. Ensure that all national policies, services and programmes are developed and delivered within a child rights framework**
- 7. Engage effectively and consistently with the UK Government at all levels around child poverty matters that are non-devolved**
- 8. Provide Wales with an open, transparent and accountable government that ensures equality of opportunity and seeks to free all children from a life of poverty**

ECPN will be responding to the new consultation document from Welsh Government (November 6th 2014) on the Revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales.

Response to Consultation Themes

- ***how effectively the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and other government strategies work together;***

We remain profoundly concerned that the impact of the changes to the Welfare Benefit System, being implemented by the UK Government, pose a serious threat to the vision of eradicating child poverty. The Welsh Government must accelerate the opportunities at their disposal through the reconfiguration of the Communities First programme, alongside the enhancement of Flying Start and Families First. The current Tackling Poverty Action Plan with a stronger focus on child poverty and the Welsh Government Early Years Framework, should also provide clear roadmaps to help lift children and families out of poverty, if implemented effectively. The creation of a Welsh Government Early Years Partnership Board has been a welcome development although still in its early stages.

Whilst the Flying Start programme has been positively evaluated and benefits many young children in poor households, the visibility of children and young people in the Communities First programme and the Families First programme varies considerably. There is also confusion and duplication in some areas. We therefore welcome recent moves to have a more coherent approach to these three programmes.

Children are not protected under the Equality Act 2010 unless by virtue of protected characteristics – ie not by ‘age’ alone. The UNCRC and the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 are critically important and must be more closely linked to the Tackling Poverty Action Plan.

Finally it is important to recognise that Government ‘programmes’ are a small proportion of the funding that goes to public services and on to the front line. A major challenge is to ensure mainstream policies and strategies are coherent, joined up and address the issue of child poverty.

➤ ***the impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people;***

We believe that the programme of action for tackling child poverty in Wales must be underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and that delivery of the children’s rights agenda in Wales is key to success in tackling child poverty. Children and young people are disproportionately affected by the austerity measures and the impact of poverty on them is lifelong. This starts from a very young age because children under five living in poverty are less likely to be ready for school than their peers and this results in poor educational outcomes.

Member agencies of ECPN have numerous examples from their work of the major impact that growing up in poverty has on children and young people. Their health, educational outcomes and overall well-being are negatively affected.

Recent reports from members of ECPN such as Children in Wales’ – ‘*Child and Family Poverty in Wales - A snapshot of key issues raised by families*’ (attached) indicate that the combination of increased fuel and housing costs combined with welfare reform sanctions and payment delays, as well as the scarcity of legal aid in family breakdown situations, are causing particular distress and hardship. Difficulties in accessing food-banks in rural areas or to childcare, especially for families with disabled children are also frequently cited.

➤ ***How legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality are co-ordinated and prioritised across the Welsh Government.***

The statutory obligation to tackle child poverty must be observed and children, young people and families must not bear the brunt of austerity measures being imposed on the local authority.

Difficult times, difficult choices

We accept that public spending is under pressure and Welsh Government, local authorities and Local Health Boards are being required to make difficult decisions with consequences for other sectors, particularly the Third Sector, as well as for children, young people and families in the community. As austerity measures are biting even harder, efficiency savings alone cannot bridge the funding gap and hard choices are inevitably being made.

It is for this reason that decisions around cutting budgets and making savings must be informed by a robust evidence base. We all need to be satisfied that future resources are being targeted to their maximum effect based on sound evidence.

We also need to be assured that decisions are not being driven by economic considerations alone. The correct approach has to take into account the social dimensions and the direct impact on individuals, especially those most vulnerable. They also need to take into account the consequences for future generations.

Welsh Government, local authorities and other public sector bodies must meet their social obligations rather than solely focusing on their economic responsibilities. Though there may be economic savings, the potential negative consequences on the population in the medium and long term should be considered in advance of policy changes as well as the short term, with alternative solutions sought where services are being withdrawn.

Social impact assessments should be undertaken to inform the development and implementation of programmes. It is essential that this knowledge is captured in

advance so that decision makers have full knowledge and understanding of the consequences of their actions when either budgets are cut or programmes are implemented.

Equality Impact Assessments should also be undertaken in advance and made available to help inform the public's response to cuts. Ensuring that disproportionate cuts are not affecting particular groups in society is essential.

Finally, and most importantly robust **Children's Rights Impact Assessments** (CRIA) need to be made by Welsh Government in relation to policies and programmes.

The **European Commission Recommendation 20 Feb 2013 'Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'** reinforces the importance of ensuring that the well-being of children is prioritised. This is for their individual successful development, but also for society as a whole, as these children and young people will in time become the workforce who will be responsible for supporting the increasingly ageing population.

Impact on children, young people and low income families

We are especially concerned about the impact of budget reductions on services for children and young people, and the impact this will have on their overall well-being. In particular, we have concerns around the impact on children and young people in low-income families who may not have recourse to alternate support and services.

There is a growing independent evidence base which is showing that children, young people and their families are struggling the most in these times of austerity, with the impact of UK Government changes in respect of Welfare Reform is disproportionately hitting households with children the hardest. Yet, it is children, young people and their families who will shoulder the burden of many of the proposed cuts outlined here.

There is a statutory duty to tackle child poverty

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a duty on all local authorities to take action to tackle child poverty at a local level. This statutory obligation can be discharged through the local Single Integrated Plan. The SIP needs to explicitly address how authorities are tackling child poverty.

Tackling child poverty and narrowing the education attainment gap are two of the biggest challenges facing Wales and are being held up as key priorities for the Welsh Government.

The link between child poverty and education attainment cannot be disputed, with education having a major role in helping to break the cycle of disadvantage. School attainment levels can at best be described as 'mixed' with many schools showing good results and others less so. Wales has not performed well enough internationally and is behind in the UK. **Investing in children now** will not only serve to enhance their immediate well-being but also be an investment for the future community and economy.

Catriona Williams OBE
Chief Executive Children in Wales
on behalf of ECPN Steering Group