

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee – Inquiry into Poverty in Wales

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide evidence to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee in relation to Strand 1 – Poverty and Inequality.

The Impacts of Poverty on Different Groups of People

2. There are inextricable links between poverty and those with protected characteristics. The Welsh Government has a deep rooted commitment to tackling inequalities and tackling poverty.
3. It is understood persistent or extreme poverty is more likely to impact on disabled people, young people not in education, employment or training, lone parents (who are predominately women), ethnic minority groups and older people.
4. Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation identified disabled people are more likely to live in poverty than non-disabled people. This has been exacerbated by the UK Government's programme of Welfare Reform. The Welsh Government's research programme into the impact of Welfare Reform showed disabled people in Wales will be disproportionately affected. They are also more likely to be affected by cuts to local services as a result of cuts to Local Authority budgets.
5. Linked to the greater likelihood of living in poverty, we know particular groups with protected characteristics have disproportionately low educational attainment. These include some ethnic minority groups, e.g. Black and African Caribbean pupils and those with Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin, as well as those with Special Educational Needs and white boys from lower socio-economic groups. Ethnic minority pupils and white working class boys are also represented disproportionately in those permanently excluded. For pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN) this is even starker, approximately half of those excluded have SEN.
6. Women report their caring responsibilities for either children or parents are affecting their chances of working or progression in the workplace. Recent reports conclude caring pressures continue to prevent women from reaching their full potential and limit the role women can play in the Welsh economy by trapping them in lower paid, part time jobs. The Welsh Government Ministerial

Task and Finish group reported in July 2013, compared to men, women would be hardest hit. In November 2014, a Chwarae Teg report 'Women and Welfare Reform' outlined how Welfare Reform to date has disproportionately impacted women and how it will continue to do so.

Effective join up between the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and other Government Strategies

Effective Join Up

7. The Welsh Government considers the impact of equality and poverty in all policy areas, and advancing equality and tackling poverty is at the heart of our Programme for Government.
8. The Welsh Government policy and strategy documents form a coherent and consistent approach to tackling poverty. The Tackling Poverty Action (TPAP) sets the high level approach to addressing poverty in Wales, with specific and measurable targets. The themes it identifies as priorities are reflected and built upon in more focused and detailed documents.
9. For example, targets around breaking the link between educational attainment and poverty are included in the TPAP. The Rewriting the Future document, produced by the Minister for Education and Skills, refers to and builds on these targets. It provides a more thorough analysis of the approach and actions which are needed to affect the educational attainment of those living in poverty.
10. Similarly, the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework links directly to the targets in the TPAP, in respect of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). It sets out the actions needed to reduce the number of NEETs and the specific process which should be adopted. It is already making real progress and has been well received by Local Authorities.
11. Other documents, including the Early Years and Childcare Plan and Fairer Health Outcomes for All, also link directly to the objectives of the Action Plan.
12. It is clear one size does not fit all to tackle poverty. We know different groups are affected differently by poverty, particularly those with protected characteristics. It would be inappropriate to group people together and assume the same interventions will have the same impact on all. This is what necessitates the need for different policy responses and strategies to target different groups and aspects of living in poverty.

Strategic Equality Plan

13. There are a number of comparable objectives in the Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) and the TPAP. These include objectives around reducing the number of young people who are NEET.

14. Within the SEP our objectives on gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps, advice services, affordable childcare and helping disabled people to live independently also mutually reinforce the actions within the TPAP.

Child Poverty Strategy

15. The Revised Child Poverty Strategy highlights and strengthens the links with the TPAP, which is the key mechanism for delivering the objectives we have set to tackle child poverty. It includes a renewed focus on ensuring our strategies, policies, plans and programmes all link together, including with the SEP, to ensure a consistent and ongoing focus on children and young people.
16. The Strategy commits the Welsh Government to developing an integrated approach to assessing impact, considering poverty and equality together. This will enable Departments to consider impacts on those most at risk of living in poverty.

Coordination and prioritisation of legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality across Welsh Government

Tackling Poverty Implementation Board

17. The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty chairs the Tackling Poverty Implementation Board. The Board is made up of senior officials from across Welsh Government accountable for the targets and milestones in the TPAP. This is the Minister's opportunity to ensure policies, programmes, strategy documents and departments are working together to reduce poverty in Wales in a coordinated and coherent manner.

Legislation

18. Most of the legislation introduced by the Welsh Government is making a significant contribution to this agenda. Beyond topic-specific legislation, the Welsh Government has underpinned its activities with a focus on tackling poverty and inequality. Equality and human rights is enshrined in the founding legislation and reflected in the guiding principles of the Welsh Government. The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 placed a statutory duty on Welsh Ministers (and other key public sector bodies) to publish a Child Poverty Strategy for Wales and to set objectives for tackling child poverty and improving the outcomes of low income families.
19. Moving forwards, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill will create a stronger framework for all subsequent legislation, strengthening governance and ensuring a coordinated approach to activity. The goals include "A more equal Wales" and "A Wales of cohesive communities". These goals demonstrate our commitment to achieving a society which enables people to fulfil their potential regardless of their background or circumstances. They will place sustainable development at the heart of all activity and ensure social issues, the economy and the environment are considered together.

Policy

20. Across the Welsh Government policies and programmes are aimed at supporting the poorest communities in Wales, and also target groups with protected characteristics in many instance. There is a focus on improving the lives of people living on low incomes through bespoke programmes and, importantly, through 'mainstream' policies.
21. For example, the Minister for Education and Skills has made tackling the links between poverty and low educational attainment a top priority, and allocated significant resources to help achieve this through the Pupil Deprivation Grant, Schools Challenge Cymru and a campaign highlighting the role of the family.
22. The Minister for Health has made his commitment to addressing health inequalities clear and committed to review the formula used to distribute resources to Health Boards to ensure allocation reflects need.
23. Within the Communities and Tackling Poverty portfolio we have made a strong commitment to strengthen and build on the (already strong) links between the Housing sector and efforts to reduce poverty. This includes through the regeneration of communities, maximising resources by embedding community benefits in procurement and strengthening links between social landlords and other partners.
24. Beyond this, the Tackling Poverty Division are working with external partners and colleagues across the Welsh Government to ensure tackling poverty is a priority for all, efforts are coordinated and there is a common approach to shared priorities.

Integration of Tackling Poverty Programmes

25. The principal programmes which are specifically aimed at reducing poverty sit within the Communities and Tackling Poverty portfolio, which are Communities First, Families First, Flying Start and Supporting People. Each is playing a vital role to help people on low incomes most at risk of poor outcomes, and those with protected characteristics. We have also recognised there are opportunities to improve the join up of these programmes, improve the coordination of our approach on the ground and maximise resources.
26. In 2013, the Supporting Resilient Communities project made recommendations to align the outcomes frameworks of Communities First and Families First projects and put them onto a common platform. This includes the development of semi-formal joint working patterns and communication routes in localities and increased thematic focus, working together and sharing best practice on common themes such as "parenting".
27. These recommendations are being taken forward by the Integration Project. Four Regional Integration Officers support 'Programme Integration' through facilitating collaborative approaches between the Communities First, Families First and Flying Start programmes.

28. A Task and Finish Group has been established to develop a Combined Outcomes Framework for Communities First, Families First and Flying Start. It is anticipated the use of this Framework will be tested by a number of “early adopter” areas in the New Year, before being rolled out across Wales. Since the inclusion of Housing within the Communities and Tackling Poverty Portfolio, consideration is now being given to whether the Framework needs to be expanded or reconsidered to include Supporting People Outcomes.

Links between Tackling Poverty Programmes and Equalities

Families First:

29. The programme is a key contributor to the aims of the Welsh Government’s revised Child Poverty Strategy and contributes significantly to our overall Tackling Poverty Action Plan.
30. A key element of the Families First programme is a ring-fenced sum to be spent on innovative ways of improving services for families with disabled children and young carers. Local Authorities are expected to provide for these families in all their services, however, the ring-fenced funding is provided to ensure their specific needs are catered for. This element of the programme has funded new services and led to better integration and co-ordination of existing services. Practitioners are now more aware of the range provision available for disabled people and the value of integrating disability services with mainstream and other provision.
31. The Families First Year 2 Evaluation Report, which was published in June 2014, suggests Families First has improved the capacity of local services and staff to deliver services for families affected by disability, particularly in areas where existing services were being adapted. In addition, 71% of Team Around the Family action plans specifically for families affected by disability, between April and December 2013, were closed with positive outcomes.
32. Families First also supports individual and population based interventions. Local Authorities are given a significant amount of flexibility to commission large-scale projects. Many of these projects are able to meet the needs of those with protected characteristics, including examples in Cardiff, Carmarthenshire and Anglesey.

Flying Start:

33. Flying Start is the Welsh Government’s flagship early years intervention. By the end of this Assembly term the reach of Flying Start will have doubled to 36,000 children and their families, in our most disadvantaged areas.
34. Evaluation data for the programme demonstrates evidence of the anticipated immediate outcomes for the programme. This includes language development, social and emotional development and cognitive development of children in the programme. Qualitative research also demonstrates impacts for parents in terms of parenting behaviour, health and well-being and their perceptions of the local communities where we offer Flying Start services.

35. There is also some evidence parents of children in the programme benefit from opportunities available to learn new skills and therefore improve their employment prospects. In particular, the ability to access free childcare has enabled parents to access training and employment. This is particularly important for lone parents.
36. There is a range of data collected in respect of children with protected characteristics. Disaggregated data collected for the 2013–14 financial year for the children on the Health Visitor caseload is available.

Communities First:

37. Communities First Clusters are required to outline in their Delivery Plans the activities will take place to ensure delivery is responsive to the needs of people with protected characteristics. Clusters must actively promote principles of equality, diversity, inclusion and human rights. Under-represented groups should be involved in the decision-making and management of the work of Clusters, as well as being beneficiaries of the programme. Clusters should also demonstrate in their Community Involvement Plan how local people, particularly the most vulnerable are represented and included at every level in the programme.
38. There are also a range of Shared Outcomes Projects which aim to address the issues in poverty, inequity and inequality. Projects such as StreetGames, funded through Communities First, are supporting young women and girls, particularly from minority ethnic groups, to become more active and involved in physical activity. This project improves the health of young women and promotes social inclusion, improves confidence levels and teaches new skills.
39. “Add to Your Life” Health and Wellbeing Check for the Over 50s, funded through Communities First and Department for Health and Social Services (DHSS), has strengthened the link between Departments. This is providing support for implementation in all Communities First areas.

Supporting People:

40. The Supporting People programme is making an important contribution to help some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, providing housing-related support to help people live as independently as possible. It is being used to specifically target some groups with protected characteristics, including older people, young people, single parents and ethnic minorities.

European Funding

41. Across all European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-20 (through the European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund and Rural Development Plan) tackling poverty and equality are separately identified as Cross-Cutting Themes. This means all funded programmes must include a consideration of these themes.

Budgets

Assessment of Budgets

42. The Welsh Government is committed to assessing the impact of its spending decisions on the people of Wales. At the outset of the spending review in 2010 a comprehensive Impact Assessment of spending plans was published alongside the Final Budget 2011-12. The Welsh Government was the first UK administration to do so and have continued to lead on this work and build on it each year.
43. Each year, Welsh Government supplements the detailed report by assessing the impact of significant budget decisions made each year. This assessment includes considerations of key policy areas such as Tackling Poverty and Equality and feedback from key stakeholders.
44. This commitment to continuous improvement is one of the key reasons the Minister for Finance established the Budget Advisory Group for Equality (BAGE) in 2012, in order to improve quality of information provided to the Impact Assessment. BAGE has a key role in supporting the continuous improvement of the Impact Assessment and provides a forum for sharing and discussing the nature of inequalities in Wales. It is a valuable source of advice and a key channel for engagement.
45. This year, Welsh Government published its Strategic Integrated Assessment of the Budget, along side the Draft Budget in September 2014 and the report specifically considers equality, tackling poverty and socio-economic disadvantage, children's rights and Welsh language.
46. This approach reflects the importance of considering the sustainability of decisions as well as complementing the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill. This approach also recognises the relationship between different Welsh Government priorities and the cross cutting impacts of budgetary decisions.

Funding for groups with protected characteristics to tackle poverty

47. Through various programmes the Welsh Government is supporting people with protected characteristics, seeking to lower their risk of living in poverty and reduce inequity. The Equality and Inclusion Grant is awarding £4.9 million over a the three year programme period to 16 third sector organisations contributing to the delivery of the Welsh Government's strategic equality priorities, in particular the equality objectives within the Strategic Equality Plan (SEP). The grant supports people across different protected characteristics.
48. The Homeless Grant supports organisations such as Welsh Refugee Council and Shelter Cymru to work with Refugees and Asylum Seekers and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Groups respectively. Whilst the Housing Policy Development Grant funds organisations such as Tai Pawb, who promote equality and social justice in housing in Wales with the aim for all

people to have the right to access good quality housing in cohesive and safe communities.

49. Women Adding Value to the Economy (WAVE) is funded by the European Social Fund and project partners until June 2015. The primary aim of the project is to better understand, and tackle, the ways in which gender pay inequalities are reproduced through factors such as occupational segregation and part-time and contract work.
50. Communities 2.0 is providing advice and support to help build skills so vulnerable people can be digitally included.
51. The Welsh Government is supporting a range of Third Sector organisations through core and project-based funding. This includes organisations focusing on protected characteristics, including Disability Wales, Chwarae Teg, Age Cymru, the Black Association of Women and Barnardo's Cymru.

Conclusion

52. Welsh Government are working hard to ensure the cross cutting themes of tackling poverty and inequalities are joined up in their approach to each other and are embedded in policy and legislation decisions across Welsh Government.