

SP 17

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,

Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau

Priorities for the Equality,

Local Government and Communities Committee

Ymateb gan: Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations

Response from: Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations

31 August 2016

PAVO is the County Voluntary Council (CVC) for Powys. PAVO has over 680 voluntary organisations and community groups as members and works with many more through its thematic networks. PAVO works to agreed minimum standards with the Welsh Assembly Government as part of the Voluntary Sector Scheme.

As a CVC, PAVO is actively engaged alongside local statutory agencies in the community development and economic regeneration fields, as well as an active participant in the local reshaping of public services for social care, health, children and families, and mental health and wellbeing.

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PAVO welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the Committee's proposed priorities for its longer term programme. We acknowledge that all the proposed topics for the Committee's work are of importance but particularly wish to comment upon the following:

### **EU Funding of Tackling Poverty Programmes**

This is clearly a topic of importance that the Third Sector would wish to see considered.

A key point from an East-Wales perspective is that post-EU funding arrangements could potentially offer scope to revisit the somewhat arbitrary geographical boundaries imposed by the current division of Wales into 'Competitiveness' and 'Convergence' areas. This is something we would hope the Committee could give regard to.

As poverty and deprivation do not necessarily follow regional boundaries, any steps that could be pursued to at least allow greater flexibility for funding of tackling poverty programmes for smaller pockets of geographically defined need in the current 'Competitiveness' area of Wales to a level akin to that in the 'Convergence' areas would be of value.

### **In-Work Poverty**

From a Powys perspective this is an important topic that we'd wish to see the Committee give consideration to and it would be of real value if a particular focus could be given to looking at this in terms of its dynamics and impacts within rural Wales.

As a county, Powys experiences a high level of employment but very low income levels. This difficult situation is potentially set to deteriorate further due to the (proportionally) high level of job losses being experienced in the public sector due to budget cuts (which represents a loss of what are in Powys' terms, well paid jobs).



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We also experience the dynamics of the agricultural sector which has a significant element of seasonally affected employment, but also often requires those who farm to seek additional part-time employment in order to make ends meet financially.

There is also the impact of rurality combined with sparse public transport services which typically requires families to run a car for each working member of the family for the purposes of accessing employment; something which adds significantly to family expenditure.

Clearly, none of the above are 'new' issues, however to date there is little evidence of government looking in detail in the dynamics of in-work poverty in rural Wales, and this has arguably resulted in a lack of targeted activity or resourcing to address what is a debilitating economic mix for many citizens and communities.

### **Poverty and Welfare Reform**

As part of its deliberations, PAVO would wish to see the Committee consider the impact that welfare reform has had upon stimulating additional demand for Third sector services.

The feedback shared with PAVO from local Third Sector organisations is that welfare reform has had a series of knock-on effects in terms of increased demand at a time of constrained resourcing. It would also be valuable if the Committee could also look at this topic from the perspective of impact upon the emotional health and wellbeing of individuals affected; again this something that Third Sector organisations have fed back to us as being a discernible consequence of welfare changes upon many vulnerable citizens.

It would be valuable for the sector across Wales if this dynamic could be explored by the Committee as if, as feedback suggests, welfare reform has had hidden consequences in terms of generating increased demand for other agencies and other negative impacts (aside from the purely financial) for individuals affected, then this would be important information to help shape future policy developments.

### **Local Government and Reform**

This would be a topic of particular significance for the Third Sector, as the current uncertainties about future local government structure hinders cohesive planning by county-level third sector organisations to meet the structural and service demands that may emerge from a reorganisation of local government.

### **Other Issues**





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a) Whilst not a topic in its own right it would be of value to know what regard the Committee will be giving in the future to the data gathered through local wellbeing assessments as part of the process of developing the Area Plans required by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

PAVO is mindful that these assessments should be gathering qualitative data about citizen experience as well as headline statistical data, and it is our view that it is only through consideration of such qualitative data that the real impact/evidence of many of the topics identified by the Committee can be fully understood.

b) PAVO would also suggest the Committee exercises some caution if making use in its deliberations of broad assessments of need drawn from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

It is felt by many operating in rural Wales that some of the headline indicators are flawed as they convey potentially misleading messages. One example of this is assessing the level of car ownership per household as being an indicator of affluence, when in reality within rural areas it is frequently an indicator of household poverty due to high level of expenditure it entails to access low paid employment (arguably a form of 'Transport Poverty' akin to 'Fuel Poverty').

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PAVO hopes these comments are of assistance. Please feel to contact us further if you require any further information in respect of the points we have raised.

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