

SP 48

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,
Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Priorities for the Equality,
Local Government and Communities Committee

Ymateb gan: Sefydliad Bevan

Response from: Bevan Foundation

1. The Bevan Foundation develops new ideas based on sound evidence to make Wales fair, prosperous and sustainable. It is an independent, non-aligned charity. In the last two years it has made a significant contribution to public policy in Wales on:
 - the outlook for Welsh society by 2020;¹
 - how to reduce poverty and inequality;²
 - devolving UK Government benefits and services for people of working age.³
2. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's forward work programme.

Local Government

3. Wales faces multiple, major challenges in the next five years as set out in our report 'The Shape of Wales to Come', including how to represent the interest of Wales' varied communities and improve public services.
4. We welcome the Committee's proposal to scrutinise the new proposals for local government reorganisation and reform anticipated in autumn 2016. However we consider that the scrutiny should be widened to include:
 - the role and purpose of local government;
 - ways of strengthening and supporting local democracy and accountability;
 - enhancing innovation in local public services;
 - reforming local government finances.
5. The Committee's scrutiny should recognise that local authorities are a separate and distinctive sphere of government with their own electoral mandate.

Tackling Poverty

6. Poverty in Wales is already at a high level and UK forecasts are that poverty is likely to increase in the coming years. Poverty blights lives and costs the public purse in Wales approximately £4.4 billion a year. Poverty is not inevitable – there is growing evidence on 'what works' to reduce it, and to this end the Joseph Rowntree Foundation with input from the Bevan Foundation will be publishing its anti-poverty strategy for the UK and its constituent nations shortly.
7. We welcome the Committee's proposals to scrutinise policy and legislation on poverty in Wales, and to hold the Welsh Government to account. In view of the importance of poverty in Wales and the damage and cost that it causes we urge that the Committee devote considerable resources to the issue. In doing so, we suggest that the Committee builds on the valuable work undertaken by its predecessor and we therefore welcome the proposals to consider the effectiveness of Communities First, in-work poverty and welfare reform. In taking these proposals forward, we would suggest:

- **Communities First:** the scrutiny of Communities First should include complementary initiatives such as Flying Start, Families First and Supporting People.
- **In-work poverty:** the scrutiny of in-work poverty should be a joint inquiry with the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, given the critical importance of the economy and employment to in-work poverty.
- **Welfare reform:** the scrutiny should focus on the Welsh Government's response to changes that have already been implemented and their impact on devolved matters, in particular housing. This is broader than the ending of the spare bedroom subsidy / bedroom tax and includes the benefit cap and the restriction of Local Housing Allowance for under-35 year olds.

The Committee should also consider changes which are ongoing or forthcoming e.g. the roll-out of Universal Credit, transition to PIP, the potential devolution of Attendance Allowance and changes to benefits for young people aged 16-24. It should also scrutinise the delivery of benefits devolved recently e.g. help with council tax and the discretionary assistance fund.

8. In addition, we suggest that the Committee scrutinises:
 - **the effectiveness of existing legislation and policies on child poverty (including the target to eradicate child poverty by 2020);**
 - **the impact and relevance of the Welsh Government's financial inclusion strategy in reducing poverty.**

Equality of opportunity and human rights

9. Our analysis of changes in equality and human rights for the Equality and Human Rights Commission⁴ showed that there had been very little improvement on most issues since 2010 and that on some key issues inequality and abuse of human rights had increased. The extensive analysis of statistical and other evidence means the findings are highly relevant to the Assembly's and Welsh Government's equality and human rights priorities. **The Committee might wish to scrutinise the Welsh Government's equality priorities in the light of the findings.**
10. Leaving the European Union and the UK Government's plans to scrap the Human Rights Act will have important implications for people in Wales, the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Government and other public bodies. **We recommend that the Committee scrutinises the likely impact of Brexit and changes in UK legislation for legislation and policy on human rights in Wales.**

Housing, community regeneration, cohesion and safety

11. The next five years is likely to bring increasing difficulty accessing suitable and affordable housing, and changes in the economy and employment are expected to pose significant difficulties for some communities many of which are already disadvantaged.
12. We welcome the Committee's proposals to scrutinise the operation of new homelessness duties and to revisit the question of housing supply. In doing so we would urge the Committee to recognise the very significant variations in housing markets within Wales,

from 'hot spots' to areas of low demand. In the light of migration, refugees and asylum seekers and the vote to leave the EU, **we would also suggest that the Committee considers the effectiveness of arrangements in place to support community cohesion and safety.**

13. We would welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee at any time.

¹ Bevan Foundation (2015) *The Shape of Wales to Come: Wales' economy, environment and society in 2020.*

² Bevan Foundation (2015) *Proposals for a National Programme to Spread Prosperity and Improve Life Chances by 2020*

³ Bevan Foundation (2016) *Making welfare work for Wales: Should benefits for people of working age be devolved?*

⁴ EHRC (2015) **Is Wales Fairer?**