

Cross Party Group on Poverty

9th October, 12:30, Conference Room A Ty Hywel

Attendees

John Griffiths (Assembly Member, Welsh Labour), Chair Claire Cunliffe (Oxfam Cymru), Secretariat

Beth Thomas (Big Issue)

Cath Thomas (Save the Children Cymru)

Sarah Way (SRCDC)

Tom Davies (Childrens Society)

Carol Wardman (Church in Wales)

Michelle Lewis (Citizens Advice)

Susan Lloyd Selby (Trussell Trust)

Kerry Moore (Cardiff University)

Ben Lloyd (Save the Children Cymru)

Nick Ireland (USDAW)

Professor David Egan (Cardiff Met University)

Sarah Thomas (WI)

Lizzie Swaffield (Cardiff Met University)

Duncan Holtom (People and Work)

Mike Hedges (Assembly Member, Welsh Labour)

Cai Griffiths-Sturge (BASW)

Victoria Winckler (Bevan Foundation)

Apologies

Rachel Cable (Oxfam Cymru)

Sarah Germain (Fareshare Cymru)

Emma Holmes (PHW)

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and roundtable introductions took place.

2. AGM Core Business

The Chair informed members it was one year since the inception of the Cross Party Group on Poverty and therefore elections needed to take place in relation to the Chair and Secretariat roles.

It was proposed and seconded that John Griffiths (AM) remain as Chair and Oxfam Cymru continue on as Secretariat.

3. Reflections on previous year

Discussion took place on the activity of the group to date including reflections on the correspondence with the First Minister and the successful passing of the Individual Members Debate motion. The Chair noted that the group had made good progress in just a year and to open up such a dialogue with First Minister and official was positive, we just need to keep this momentum going moving forward. It was also noted that the Individual Members debate had been really useful in concentrating minds across political parties particularly when Brexit is dominating priorities. It was felt by all members that the group needed to keep up the momentum over the last year and maintain its critical voice in the continued absence of a strategy.

In the latest correspondence with the First Minister, members noted that a factsheet outlining government actions on tackling poverty was committed by the end of September 2019, yet this had not yet been published.

ACTION: Oxfam Cymru and the Chair to write to First Minister to ask for a copy of the action plan

It was also noted that two Ministers were referred to within the First Minister's letter as having responsibility for tackling poverty, these were Julie James, Minister for Housing and Local Government and Ken Skates, Minister for Economy and Transport. Discussion took place on members current engagement with these Ministers including the End Child Poverty Network's meeting with Julie James and Citizens Advice Cymru engagement with Lee Waters concerning job growth and valleys taskforce. It was highlighted that tackling poverty should be seen as an economic tool within foundational economy and budgetary planning discussions.

CC reported that the Minister for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates, had declined a meeting with Oxfam Cymru as Secretariat of the group following the Individual Members Debate;, and was offered a meeting with Maureen Howells, Director for Prosperity in the Welsh Government instead. Unfortunately Maureen was unable to attend the meeting at the scheduled time and date, but Oxfam Cymru met with other officials from her team.

It was agreed that both Ministers should be contacted with questions on the action they are currently taking within their portfolio and invited to future meetings.

ACTION: Oxfam Cymru and the Chair to write to both Ministers asking for updates on their actions and inviting them to future meetings

4. Next steps

Discussion took place on next steps and the government factsheet referenced in the First Minister's letter. It was felt that the content of the action plan would provide the group with its direction of travel and could form the basis of a thematic approach to future meetings.

It was agreed that once the factsheet was received, members would determine the themes for future meetings.

ACTION: A thematic approach will be taken to future meetings, so members can bring key reports and workstreams together. Members to decide on thematic areas once Welsh Government factsheet is received.

Discussion took place on the group's engagement with both the public and private sector. Nick Ireland noted that there is an important role in influencing the working practices and ideology of private sector employers. This was supported by Mike Hedges, AM who later spoke to the prevalence and impact of variable hour contracts and insecure working practices on poverty. Nick Ireland noted there was research which could be circulated in relation to this area and Claire Cunliffe also highlighted the recent Behind the Barcodes research by Oxfam GB.

ACTION: Nick Ireland to circulate research to Claire Cunliffe for circulation along with Behind the Barcodes research

It was noted that the Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee are finalising their report into Benefits in Wales: options for devolution of social security system which will include recommendations that have relevance to this group.

An update on the work of the recently formed anti-poverty coalition was also discussed and how it can be used to inform the future direction of the cross party group. For example, the Welsh Economic Doughnut 2020 which is being produced by Professor David Egan and Lizzie Swaffield for the anti-poverty coalition will provide valuable information and data. It was agreed that the draft Economic Doughnut Report will be presented on at the next meeting

ACTION: Claire Cunliffe to arrange for a presentation of the Welsh Economic Doughnut Report 2020 to be made at the next Cross Party Group meeting

Discussion took place on the role of the group as both a critical voice to government but also as an information sharing network to improve members knowledge of the different areas which organisations cover and where expertise is concentrated in the sector. To facilitate this, it was agreed that members would send Oxfam Cymru a short blurb on the areas of work their organisation covers

ACTION: Members to send Claire Cunliffe information on the different areas of expertise of their organisation for compilation into one document.

Kerry Moore noted that there are journalists who are interested in poverty issues but are not always aware of how to report on hidden poverty issues. There is an upcoming conference which will look at these issues and which may be of interest to members

ACTION: Kerry Moore to send Claire Cunliffe conference details for circulation to the group

Victoria Winckler highlighted that the welcomed commitments in the First Minister's manifesto in relation to tackling poverty, particularly child poverty, have yet to be translated into meaningful action. The big drivers of poverty are lack of decent work, high living costs and unfair social security system. It is not the case that Welsh Government doesn't have the levers available to tackle these areas and so we required a relentless focus on these drivers/challenges.

The Chair informed members that Labour backbenchers are due to have a presentation on the current Welsh Government interventions to tackle poverty. Discussion took place on the need for monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of such Welsh Government interventions to tackling poverty

5. A.O.B

None

6. Close

The Chair thanked members for their contribution and closed the meeting. The next meeting will take place in early 2020, date to be confirmed.