

National Assembly for Wales - Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into Equality Considerations in the Welsh Government's Budget

For more information contact: Rhian Croke, Children's Rights and Policy
Officer, Save the Children
02920396838| r.croke@savethechildren.org.uk

About us

Save the Children works in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives. We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.

In the UK Save the Children works to ensure that the rights of children are protected, promoted and respected in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In Wales, Save the Children chairs the UNCRC Monitoring Group and the Participation Consortium¹.

We believe no child should have their childhood experiences or life chances damaged by living in poverty. Save the Children is campaigning for an end to child poverty in the UK. We believe that action is needed now if we are to meet the 2020 target.

Introduction

Save the Children welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry into Equality Considerations in the Welsh Government's Budget. Given the broad scope of the Inquiry and the breadth of the equalities agenda our response will focus on where our expertise lies in relation to children's rights. This response will make the case for consideration of children's budgeting to form a central part of the Committee's Inquiry into Equality Considerations in the Welsh Government's Budget.

Importance of children's budgeting

"No state can tell whether it is fulfilling children's economic, social and cultural rights to the maximum extent of available resources' as required under article 4 (United

¹ Save the Children chairs the UNCRC Monitoring Group in Wales. The Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group is a national alliance of non-governmental and academic agencies convened and chaired by Save the Children's Wales programme. The MG is tasked with monitoring and promoting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Wales.

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child² ***unless it can identify the proportion of national and other budgets allocated to the social sector and, within that to children, both directly and indirectly”...***

Children's rights budget work provides a way of looking closely at government budgets to see what they reveal about the implementation of children's rights. By examining the nuts and bolts of government budgeting alongside information on outcomes and performance, children's rights budget work helps to sketch a detailed picture of how and how well a particular children's right is being implemented. This in turn makes it all the more possible to identify a specific intervention and changes that are needed to speed up the delivery of this right to children and improve outcomes.

Children's budgeting is important for a number of reasons. Routine analysis of public expenditure on children is a powerful tool for understanding and monitoring what national and local governments and their partners are doing to promote rights and improve the well-being of children. Information on public expenditure on children needs to be considered alongside government policies, strategies and information on the outcomes of these policies for children and young people. More transparency is needed to improve understanding of the link between policy intentions, public expenditure (both allocated and spend) and improved outcomes for children and young people.

The way in which budgets are currently constructed in Wales and indeed across the UK makes it very difficult to identify what is actually spent on children and also on particular groups of vulnerable or disadvantaged children. It is important to understand the proportions of money allocated and spent on children (and on different groups of children), whether they represent the '*maximum extent of available resources*'; to monitor how allocations are changing over time and whether the money allocated is reaching the intended beneficiaries of particular policies or initiatives and having the desired effect.

Children's budgeting benefits governments by enabling them to demonstrate the link between policies, outcomes and resources. The processes of identifying spend on children raises the profile of children's issues and of vulnerable and marginalised children. Compliance with the UNCRC requires that State parties have to be able to demonstrate that the overall proportion of national and local budgets allocated to programmes is adequate with sufficient budgetary provision to protect and promote children's rights.

Background to children's budgeting in Wales

In 2006, following a review of public expenditure on children in Wales commissioned by Save the Children 'A Child's Portion',³ WG acknowledged the importance of being able to identify how much spending was allocated to children in Wales.⁴ It subsequently commissioned an analysis of financial provision for children within its budget for 2004-5⁵ in "response to a requirement to understand the resources which are spent on children, in order to inform policy development and to comply with a responsibility under the United

² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003), General Comment No.5. General Measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Children (art, 4, 42 and para 44.6)

³ Sefton, T., (2003) Save the Children, A Child's Portion: Public Spending on Children in Wales.

⁴ Cited in Save the Children (2007) Stop, look, listen: the road to realising children's rights in Wales, Wales NGO Alternative Report.

⁵ Financial provision for children within the Assembly Government Budget: a technical note

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to report on the amount and percentage of national budgets spent on children".⁶

Though the analysis was described by the NGO Alternative report to the UN Committee as "fairly rudimentary" it also acknowledged that this is the first time the WG had attempted to identify spending on children⁷ or indeed any government in the UK, dispelling the myth that it is impossible to do.

A further analysis was carried out for the 2006-7 budget and in March 2009 a statistical bulletin was published which presented estimates for the proportion to be spent on children in the period 2007-08 to 2010-11⁸.

As part of WG Getting it Right National Action Plan on children's rights WG has committed to "improving the transparency of budgeting for children and young people" at national level as one of its 16 priorities.⁹

In 2009 the National Assembly Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee carried out an inquiry into Children's Budgeting¹⁰. The Committee acknowledged that producing children's budgets for children is challenging but acknowledged that it is absolutely necessary. The report made 11 recommendations to the Welsh Government to improve children's budgeting. In response to the Inquiry the Welsh Government set up a National Task and Finish Group to examine the recommendations of the Committee. Since 2009 apart from some work on child participatory budgeting few of the recommendations of the National Assembly Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee have been progressed.

Moving forward

We are concerned that although there has been some progress in the area of children's budgeting this progress has stalled and most significantly there is still a lack of visibility of children in the Welsh Government budget which, as it stands, make no specific mention of children. We would urge much greater detail on specific areas of spend (for example on health) and on how the budget will translate into delivery on the commitments included for example in the Child Poverty Strategy at local level.

The lack of transparency in public expenditure on children means that it is currently not possible to tell without more detailed analysis, whether the Welsh Government is using available resources to the "maximum extent to fulfil children's rights" under the UNCRC and whether for example there are sufficient levels of expenditure to achieve the laudable aim of ending child poverty by 2020. We urge detailed analysis of the budget so that its full impact on all children can be properly understood. Transparent data on expenditure on children needs to be collected and published. This approach will encourage development of

⁶ Statistics for Wales and Welsh Assembly Government (2009) Financial Provision for Children within the Welsh Assembly Government Budget.

⁷ Save the Children (2007) Stop, look, listen: the road to realising children's rights in Wales, Wales NGO Alternative Report.

⁸ Statistics for Wales and Welsh Assembly Government (2009) Financial Provision for Children within the Welsh Assembly Government Budget.

⁹ Welsh Assembly Government (2009) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. A 5 year rolling Action Plan for Wales setting out key priorities and actions to be undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government in response to the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2008.

¹⁰ National Assembly for Wales Children and Young People's Committee (2009) Children's Budgeting in Wales

indicators to monitor if spending is reaching and benefiting the poorest children and families. The information should be used to inform future rounds of budget allocation.

The Rights of Children and Young Persons Wales Measure 2011 places a legal duty on Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the UNCRC in making new laws, policies and policy reviews. Under article 4 of the CRC, Ministers have a clear obligation to demonstrate whether it is fulfilling children's economic, social and cultural rights 'to the maximum extent of available resources'. We believe that the preparation of a children's budget for 2012-13 is an essential tool in both meeting this duty and evidencing how planned spending cuts are impacting on the outcomes for children and young people in the enjoyment of their rights.

Decisions relating to government budgeting should be the subject of manageable yet robust and relatively detailed record of how the 'due regard' duty of the Rights of Children and Young Persons Wales Measure 2011 is compliant with the requirements. Standard questions relating to children's budgeting should be included within the impact assessment process, however, this must not be a limited 'tick box' exercise. Questions should prompt both due consideration and a narrative record of the thought process. For example

- What impact, if any, will the budget have on the rights of children and young people under 18 (if appropriate specify age groups within 0 – 18 range who will be affected and affected groups of children)?
- If any impact, is that positive or negative in terms of the requirements of the UNCRC? (regard should not only given to the CRC itself but also the jurisprudence of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UK Concluding Observations).
- If positive, in what way is it positive?
- If negative, in what way is it negative?
- Could any alternative approach increase the positive or decrease any negative impact? (Explain how)
- What are the disadvantages to any such alternative approach (For example: cost, impact on other persons, services, rights, obligations or other policy considerations).
- How could further or greater effect be given to the relevant articles of the UNCRC?
- How will the budget help promote knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC?
- What consultation on the budget and alternatives has been carried out with children and young people, NGOs or statutory bodies with responsibilities for children (e.g. Children's Commissioner for Wales) (N.B. Zero can be perfectly appropriate!)
- If any such consultation has taken place, what are they key relevant messages that need to be taken into account?
- What are the overall conclusions reached?
- What recommendations should be made?
- Has the impact assessment been placed in the public domain?
- Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the proposal

Finally we welcome the inclusive policy-making practice adopted by the Welsh Government however we must emphasise the right of children and young people to have their views taken into consideration under article 12 of the CRC. In particular participation of children and young people is recognised as crucial in the process of tackling child poverty in Wales and we would wish to see the views of children regarding their priorities for the budget and the impact of spending/ cuts on their own lives routinely sort in the preparation of budgets in Wales. To this end we would like to see a child friendly version of the Welsh Government's budget proposals to help engage children and young people with the consultation process.