

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cyllid](#) ar [Cyllideb Ddrafft Llywodraeth Cymru 2024-25](#).

This response was submitted to the [Finance Committee](#) consultation on the [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25](#).

WGDB_24-25 31: Ymateb gan: Barnardo's Cymru (Saesneg yn unig)| Response from: Barnardo's Cymru (English Only)



Senedd Cymru Finance Committee – Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25 Consultation

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities. We currently run more than 60 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with local authorities. Each year we regularly support more than 10,000 children, young people and families. We aim to secure better outcomes for more children by providing the support needed to ensure stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work to campaign to improve the lives of children, young people and families by promoting positive change in policy and practice. We believe that with the right help, committed support and belief all children can fulfil their potential.

We are grateful to have the opportunity to respond to this consultation particularly in light of the increasing financial pressures felt by children, young people and their families.

We would urge the committee to note our key calls to the Welsh Government throughout this document and to consider raising them through their scrutiny processes. In setting out their 2024/25 budget we urge the Welsh Government to:

- Focus on poverty, specifically income maximisation for families and implementing a direct payment to support those who need it most.
- Support children and their families facing increased costs through the extension of free school meals to all secondary school pupils and free transport for children and young people up to 18 and to 25 for care experienced young people.
- Commit to sustainable funding of vital support services.

We have responded to the questions that are most relevant to both our organisation and the children, young people and families that we support across Wales.

Questions

1. What, in your opinion, has been the impact of the Welsh Government's 2023-2024 Budget, including funding related to the recovery of the pandemic? Have Welsh Government business support policies been effective, given the economic outlook for 2024-25?

There are endemic issues facing the social care workforce. The Bevan Foundation has previously highlighted some of the concerns around pay across the social care sectorⁱ. Firstly, social care pay can be lower within the voluntary sector which can result in a loss of colleagues to the statutory sector. There needs to be a standard pay rate across the social care workforce for particular roles, which would reduce the loss of well trained and experienced colleagues to the statutory sector. This would force the actual cost of contracts to be recognised, rather than the voluntary sector being seen as a cheaper alternative. At the moment it is often impossible to run commissioned services within the restricted and minimal contract value commissioned by the local authority. The management overhead and costs we can recover are often restricted to 10% and sometimes can be as low as 7%. Whilst we understand that budgets are stretched, we believe that there is a need for an uplift on voluntary sector contracts, to help nurture and protect the social care workforce, and to enable us to maintain delivery. There are some contracts which have not seen an uplift or only minimal uplift in over 10 years. Our costs increase, as they do for local authorities however, this shortfall needs to be met and this is sometimes through charity funds.

Funding is a continuous challenge and has a direct impact on the young people and families that we support. Recently, loss of funding has meant that long-standing services have had to close their doors. For example, we had to close a service, in operation for nearly 30 years providing housing and support for young families with a focus on helping young parents gain the necessary skills, knowledge and awareness to live more independently in their communities and manage a tenancy. The loss of this specialist, targeted service leaves a gap in provision that may contribute to the escalation of issues these young people face. Whilst the difficulty of closing a service is often understood, what can be overlooked is the individual impact of this uncertainty about the future for young people supported by the service, which can have a negative impact on mental health and the wellbeing and development of their children.

During the pandemic, our services were able to make use of Welsh Government's emergency Covid funding to help support families. However, this funding has now come to an end, and this is making it even more difficult for us to support people and their families. The demand for services and the complex nature of the support needed, has also grown due to both the impact of Covid and the subsequent impact of rising inflation and the cost-of-living crisis. This inevitably adds further pressure to services. Please see question 7 for further detail on this issue.

Since the pandemic, in one locality area, our Families First/Flying Start contracts have been subject to nil or 2% uplifts. These services provide vital support to

families across a local authority area including specific support to children in their early years. We have seen increasing demand for this service and increased complexity of issues since the pandemic. This is below the rate of inflation and necessary wage inflation. In this same locality area, we understand that Welsh Government uplifted the budget to Local Authorities for the Families First programme by 9%, a rate not then mirrored in uplifts to external providers. Whilst we appreciate the financial pressures faced by local authorities, we remain concerned about the viability of some of our commissioned services where the awarded uplifts are so low. In some circumstances we will be forced as a charity to decide that service delivery under these commissioned contracts is not possible.

These financial challenges are also against a backdrop of huge increases in both need and referral demand. Previously, Welsh Government recognised this and made a grant available, however that grant was not renewed for 23/24, despite the situation being worsened by inflation. Thus, there is a 'need demand' fuelled by both the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis at a time of budgetary constraint whereby statutory children's social services are thresholding at much higher levels, consequently Families First is picking up the significant complexity of cases it was not designed to meet.

Additionally, support was provided to families through the free school meals initiative, which provided free school meals during term and food during holiday time. This provided vital support for families on low incomes particularly through the school holidays, which can be a time that families struggle most to feed their children¹. Despite this, the support was not renewed in July 2023 ahead of the long summer holiday break, with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and very little notice to those who had previously been supported. We welcome Welsh Government's commitment to continue with the rollout of free school meals, however, we would urge this to be extended to secondary school pupils and to be continued through the school holidays.

2. How should/could the Welsh Government support the economy and business following the pandemic, Brexit and inflationary and other economic pressures? – How financially prepared is your organisation for the 2024-25 financial year, how will inflation impact on your ability to deliver planned objectives, and how robust is your ability to plan for future years?

¹ [Cost of living: Parents feeling the pressure brace for summer holidays - BBC News](#)

It is essential that specialist services for children and young people are properly funded and there must be a commitment to sustainable funding including longer-term contracts to allow organisations to embed into the community. This must also include a reasonable level of annual uplift enabling these contracts to be affordable for providers.

Inflation is having an impact on the services that Barnardo's Cymru provides across Wales and there has been sustained inflationary pressures on services. This includes a lack of any uplift in direct support for services some for as long as over 10 years. The consequence of such a long period without an uplift is that services have faced a real-terms cut as inflation has risen and the cost-of-living affects services the same time as the people we are striving to support which is also driving up demand for some services.

There is significant concern that continued depreciation of funding, due to high inflation and little to no uplift for services, will put the delivery of such service contracts at risk. This would be a crisis, not only for local authorities, who we recognise are facing their own difficult funding and workforce challenges, but for the children, young people and families we support. A risk to services may leave them without the vital support that they depend on and have significant short- and long-term consequences for individuals and communities across Wales.

In addition to this, tender opportunities are being commissioned for multiple years without any inflationary uplift being applied to the contract value beyond the first year. This means we either are not able to bid, or if it is an existing service, we have to make the difficult decision not to bid, or it means the provider sits with the risk of having to reduce staffing in future years. Sometimes commissioners will say they will have a conversation with the successful provider on an annual basis, but this does not give providers any security or assurance of an uplift. Commissioners need to either include an uplift in their tenders, and/or write into contracts that providers can negotiate on contract value and/or reduced reach/targets going forward, as well as ability to manage budgets over the life of the contract (e.g. we may have more costs in the first year due to setting up but less in year 2).

We are also seeing tenders that do not have enough funding attached to the specification requirements expected by the commissioner, some examples:

- A Family Support service where the annual contract value does not cover TUPE costs.
- A Young Persons service with 24/7 support required and the staffing alone totalled more than the available annual budget.

- Tenders (family support/wellbeing) where the budget and/or specification would require a high reliance on delivery via volunteers, but the level of work/risk would typically need to sit with paid professional staff and the expectation to recruit a large number of volunteers would make it difficult to achieve.
- A tender in a rural area where the budget did not factor in high mileage costs.

Often third sector delivery costs less for local authorities as they pay a lower management rate and do not have to cover their on- costs e.g. pensions, buildings etc. Therefore, in the majority of cases, if local authorities delivering these services 'in-house' it would ultimately mean higher costs for local authorities themselves which would impact their already stretched budgets even more. If there are funding gaps or reallocations to contracts, this poses risks to the continuation of the initial service but also potentially to other local authority provision.

3. What action should the Welsh Government take to help households cope with inflation and cost of living issues? – How should the Budget address the needs of people living in urban, post-industrial and rural communities and in supporting economies within those communities?

Through our services we understand the challenges that families face across Wales. These challenges have been exacerbated by rising inflation and the cost-of-living crisis. In May Barnardo's Cymru launched our briefing² on these issues highlighting the difficult choices made by parents and the role, we, as a third sector organisation are playing to support those who need it most.

We know that the current cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated the impact of poverty. In February 2023, Barnardo's conducted representative polling of 1000 parents in Great Britain with YouGov³. 61% of parents surveyed in Wales told Barnardo's that over the last four months their financial situation has declined and that they are struggling with the rising costs of energy and food bills.

In our latest Barnardo's practitioner survey, 73% of Welsh respondents⁴ said they were supporting a child or families experiencing poverty. Across the 3

² [Barnardo's Cymru briefing on the deepening impact of poverty and the cost-of-living crisis on children, young people and families in Wales - ENGLISH.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

³ [Barnardo's Cymru briefing on the deepening impact of poverty and the cost-of-living crisis on children, young people and families in Wales - ENGLISH.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

⁴ The number of respondents was 51

months between June – September 2023, 79% of 34 practitioners said that they had noticed a change to the support needs, with 59% of these citing increased financial support needs among those that they are supporting.

This is significantly impacting the children and young people that Barnardo's Cymru supports. 88% of practitioners who responded to the survey⁵ felt that rising costs were harming children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

To support those most in need we would encourage the Welsh Government to:

- **Focus on poverty**

We would urge the Welsh Government to continue to focus on tackling poverty and supporting those in our most under-served communities. This should be through a variety of targeted interventions, specifically focusing on income maximisation for families. We welcome the recent draft child poverty strategy but feel it must go further. Therefore, we would call on the Welsh Government to commit to a direct child payment. We know that families with children are more likely to be in relative income poverty than those families with no children⁶ and a direct child payment, similar to that being administered in Scotland, would go some way to mitigate against this.

- **Support children and their families**

Support children and their families through the extension of free school meals to secondary schools. We know that the costs associated with food poverty do not stop once a child makes the transition to secondary school and for families this can put even greater pressure on household budgets. We are encouraged by the Welsh Government's commitment to free school meals for primary aged children but urge them to go further and provide this at secondary level as well. We would also like to see free school meals during holiday periods reinstated. Whilst we understand the current economic pressures, we must ensure no child goes hungry during the school holidays.

- **Commit to sustainable funding**

Barnardo's Cymru works throughout Wales to support children, young people and their families but this is becoming more difficult. We have seen increased demand for services as well as increased complexity of support needs, which we

⁵ The number of respondents was 48

⁶ [Children in relative income poverty by family type and work status \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/children-in-relative-income-poverty-by-family-type-and-work-status)

have explained in more detail in answers to questions 1 & 2. To allow third sector organisations to meet these increasing challenges Welsh Government must urgently address the pressures on services and their budgets through sustainable funding arrangements in line with inflation.

Cost-of-living support

We know that this winter is unlikely to be better than the last for families who will struggle to heat their homes. It is thought that bills could rise by as much as £94 over the year for the average family.⁷

Across Wales, 26% of applications to Barnardo's cost-of-living fund between June and September were for clothing, 17% were to prevent hunger whilst 10% of applications were for access to warm spaces. We know that families are struggling, 45% of those applying to the fund were those being supported by a Barnardo's Cymru's family support service. We strongly encourage the Welsh Government to prioritise the right interventions that put money directly into people's pockets in the short and long term. Despite some reduction in the price cap, energy bills are not falling at a rate significant enough or fast enough to match their pre-cost-of-living crisis levels and as of January 2024 are set to increase again, adding to the financial burden already faced by families this winter. As it stands, the support in place last winter has not been renewed, by either the Welsh or UK Governments, leaving families to meet the difference. This presents further challenges for the most under-served communities across Wales.

There was no commitment to the Winter Fuel Support Scheme in Welsh Government's 23/24 Budget, and we would urge Ministers to consider how additional support can be targeted at those most in need this winter and next, to prevent further fuel hardship and difficult choices for families.

Transport

The cost of travel is high, and it is a challenge for young people to manage this when faced with so many other rising costs. Young people have told us they feel this is a barrier to meeting friends, accessing services and getting to college.

Earlier this year we were pleased to see the long-called for uplift to Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), from £30 to £40, However despite this uplift, young people have told us that they spend £20 of their EMA on travel⁸. They say

⁷ [Energy price cap will rise in January adding pressure on households - BBC News](#)

⁸ [Barnardo's Cymru briefing on the deepening impact of poverty and the cost-of-living crisis on children, young people and families in Wales - ENGLISH.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

that the cost of travel can be a barrier to opportunity. Young people have also told us they are noticing the increased cost of public transport and that this is causing worries and ultimately fewer opportunities to leave home, see friends and get out and about⁹. The transport strategy for Wales, Llwybr Newydd, aims to reduce the cost and improve the accessibility of sustainable transport for everyone in Wales, including students. However, it does not outline any support for travel costs for children and young people. This is disappointing and we would urge consideration of the impact of expensive travel for young people and the parents/carers who support them.

Young people have also told us¹⁰ they are feeling the pressure of bus service cuts, making it more difficult for them to get to college on time. Overcrowded buses make them feel unsafe and expensive costs are pushing them to stay home. We would strongly recommend the Welsh Government introduce free bus and train travel for young people up to 18 and up to 25 for care experienced young people, to support their educational, social and work prospects and to ensure that transport costs are not holding them back. We believe this could mitigate against the proportion of EMA being used solely for travel, mirror the good practice seen in Scotland, whilst also encouraging sustainable travel and ensuring that any further EMA uplift is available to support young people where they need it.

Young carers

Through our work in Wales, we know that young carers take on huge amounts of responsibility when caring for a relative but receive no financial support to do so. Young carers who support a family member with a disability are often unable to access paid work which can add further to the financial challenges of the family.

In families where a household member has a disability child(ren) are more likely to be in relative income poverty. In the year 2020 to 2021, the risk of being in relative income poverty was 31%¹¹ for children in a family with a household member with a disability compared to 26% of children in a household where no one has a disability.

Young carers' contribution to the economy and society is immense, and yet they often report feeling forgotten and unseen, whilst facing significant financial

⁹ [Barnardo's Cymru briefing on the deepening impact of poverty and the cost-of-living crisis on children, young people and families in Wales - ENGLISH.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ Evidence from a consultation session with young people in one of our services.

¹¹ [Children in relative income poverty by whether there is disability in the family \(Equality Act definition\) \(gov.wales\)](#)

challenges. Using the Young Carers ID scheme, we would urge Welsh Government to explore how a one-off young carer's payment of £500 (to match the unpaid carer's payment) could be introduced to support these young people.

Baby bundles

Several of our services offer family support and we understand the costs associated with a new baby for families. We were pleased that the recent draft child poverty strategy included the commitment to a universal rollout of baby bundles, in line with the Programme for Government¹². Following on from a successful pilot¹², we know that the introduction of baby bundles will go some way to ensure that all babies begin their life with the essentials they need, creating a baseline and ensuring that new parents are supported. However, despite assurance in May 2023 that a supplier would be procured¹³ we are concerned that the current financial deficit highlighted by Welsh Government over the preceding months may stall this vital progress. We strongly urge the Welsh Government to fully commit to funding this in the 2024/25 budget and beyond.

Mental health support

We know that poor mental health and poverty can be interconnected¹⁴. Some of the challenges associated with living in poverty, worrying about the cost of heating, eating and affording the essentials, can exacerbate poor mental health.

Our young people tell us¹⁵ that there needs to be better access to mental health support. They worry about being able to afford transport, food and housing and this exacerbates their mental health challenges. They face long waiting lists for support and when it comes, in some cases they are having to go out of their county to access this support.

Young people we support told us that every time they ask for help with their mental health it should be treated as an emergency, they do not want to feel forgotten while waiting and they want to be supported more quickly.

Barnardo's Cymru offers a holistic approach to supporting children and their families through our Cardiff Family Wellbeing Service which provides emotional and therapeutic support for families and children to improve their wellbeing,

¹² [Evaluation of Baby Bundles Pilot | GOV.WALES](#)

¹³ [Plenary 17/05/2023 - Welsh Parliament \(senedd.wales\)](#)

¹⁴ [Facts and figures about poverty and mental health - Mind](#)

¹⁵ From a consultation session with young people in one of our services.

mental health and relationships. Please see question 7 for more detail on this service and its impact.

7. The Committee would like to focus on a number of other specific areas in the scrutiny of the Budget. Do you have any specific comments on any of the areas identified below?

– Is enough being done to tackle the rising costs of living and support those people living in relative income poverty?

We know that the cost-of-living has significantly impacted people across Wales. For our most under-served communities this impact has been even greater and the people we support are often in desperate need. Barnardo's Cymru practitioners are incredibly anxious about the families that they support and are struggling with how to support them. One member of staff said:

'This is not something families can budget their way out of, it has become a way of life. Even the smallest treats – such as a magazine for children – don't exist anymore. We are trying to help people stretch their money as far as possible, all to cover just the most basic of needs. It isn't good enough.'

We recognise that many of the levers to address poverty sit with the UK Government and that Welsh Government has had to make difficult decisions in the current economic climate. However, we believe more could be done to reduce the number of children and young people living in poverty in Wales; ensuring funding is better targeted towards those who need it most.

It is important that the Welsh Government prioritises spending to support children, young people and their families, focusing on income maximisation, funding support services and implementing a direct payment. Previously we have set out key elements of support that we would urge the Welsh Government to focus on. Barnardo's Cymru has supported families across Wales through this cost-of-living crisis. Our internal support fund¹⁶ has seen increasing applications from struggling families. Most notably, families have applied for money to purchase clothing, food and access to warm spaces. Some families we support have been struggling with very poor home environments including broken furniture, mouldy or insufficient, and practitioners have helped them with urgent access to furniture, including beds and bed linen. We are concerned that some of this hardship could be interpreted as neglect due to the limited funds available to

¹⁶ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/child-poverty/get-support>

families and we repeat our call for no child to be removed from their family for the principal¹⁷.

– Is the Welsh Government’s approach to preventative spending represented in resource allocations (Preventative spending = spending which focuses on preventing problems and eases future demand on services by intervening early).

Preventative spending is key to supporting families in Wales. Investment in this area can prevent problems from escalating, keep families together and subsequently reduces spending in other areas, particularly in the social care and health sectors. The services Barnardo’s Cymru offers can range from parental support to a whole family approach to mental health, supporting children, young people and parents to work through challenges particularly those on the edge of care. Welsh Government has repeatedly expressed hope and commitment to safely reduce the numbers of children entering the care system. Whilst we support this vision, without sustainable and committed funding to preventative, edge of care services across Wales, we fear this won’t be achievable. These are some examples of preventative projects Barnardo’s Cymru delivers:

Baby & Me

Funding edge of care services can lead to better outcomes for families such as through our Baby & Me service, a health and social care collaboration developed in partnership with Newport City Council through the Newport Strategic Partnership. This innovative work follows the evidence to work in trauma-informed and relationship-based ways with parents at risk of losing care of their infants in public family law proceedings. A service evaluation highlighted a 48% reduction in the number of babies entering care in Newport in the first 14 days after birth. Preventing babies from entering the care system, where safe and appropriate, can be better for the child as well as providing cost savings to the local authority over the lifetime of the child. Baby & Me has been highlighted as a best practice model for early prevention and recommended for rollout across Wales by the Senedd’s Children, Young People & Education Committee. Welsh Government has accepted this recommendation in part, subject to evaluation. We have this evaluation; and our evidence highlights the benefits for families and the cost benefit for wider services.

¹⁷ [Barnardo’s Cymru briefing on the deepening impact of poverty and the cost-of-living crisis on children, young people and families in Wales - ENGLISH.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

We urge the Welsh Government to consider the evaluation that has already taken place¹⁸, the potential lifetime cost savings and prioritise the rollout of the Baby & Me service across Wales when considering its 2024/25 budget.

Reflect

Barnardo's Cymru's Reflect service aims to break the cycle of repeat removals and provides holistic, intensive support at an extremely difficult time in people's lives. Parents that have experienced the loss of a child through statutory intervention express feelings of guilt, trauma and loss and stigma. When the judgement to remove a child is made and proceedings close, many women are left on their own with little or no support. Most of the women that we work with have experienced domestic violence, been themselves the victim of abuse and/or neglect as a child and have suffered from mental ill health for periods during their adult lives. Reflect supports women and their partners that have themselves experienced trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Some of these women, or their partners, are care experienced.

Research shows that women who have a child removed are more at risk of becoming pregnant within the next 12 months, yet the provision of sexual health education and support through the service has meant that 100% of women who received a service from Reflect in 2022/23 remained pregnancy free during and by the end of their support. Recent analysis of Reflect found that for every £1 invested in the service, the benefit to local authorities is about £4.10, and is equivalent to net local authority savings of about £497,000.

We know that the Welsh Government previously provided funding to local authorities to rollout the Reflect service across Wales. However, with no uplift or ring-fencing of funding, and with funding being amalgamated into core budgets this could result in delivery of the service not being implemented as intended.

Children's services staff within local authorities have been clear that they value the provision of Reflect that we offer however they are also facing increasing financial challenges, and this often means trying to do more with less.

Whole family approach to mental health

Our work with families in Wales has shown us that improving young people's mental health often requires an understanding of their whole family dynamic to bring about sustained change. Working in this way ensures that the network around the child or young person also embraces change, making families more resilient in the long term. We also recognise the long-term effects of poverty on

¹⁸ [Baby and Me Evaluation Executive Summary.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

health outcomes including the impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and their families.

Cardiff Family Wellbeing supports young people and their families who present with emotional challenges and need support. The service can be part of a multi-disciplinary, early intervention strategy to support families and adopts its support based on child and family assessment. Aimed at early intervention, and prevention, the service supports the reduction in risk of developing enduring wellbeing related issues and thereby the numbers of families who may need statutory interventions. This is a crucial element of promoting good mental health across Wales.

We know that funding services that support families at the earliest point that issues present can prevent further escalation and the need for involvement from additional services which in turn can increase savings over time.

– How can the documentation provided by the Welsh Government alongside its Draft Budget be improved?

We would recommend that the document provided by the Welsh Government is accessible to children and young people. It is important that children and young people understand the financial impacts of the decisions the Welsh Government is making and how this will affect their lives.

We would like to see a young person's version of the final documentation.

It is important that there is meaningful engagement with children and young people when considering the draft budget and ultimately, the final budget. There should be a children's rights impact assessment to accompany the draft budget to ensure that the impacts and consequences of financial decisions are considered through a children's rights lens.

– Is the support provided by the Welsh Government for third sector organisations, which face increased demand for services as a consequence of the cost-of-living crisis and the pandemic, sufficient?

We believe that Welsh Government needs to urgently address the pressures on third sector organisations and budgets across Wales. As previously highlighted, many of our services and practitioners are supporting increasing numbers of children, young people and families. This, coupled with a rise in more complex needs and little uplift to funding are adding to our ability to support the high number of children, young people and families in need.

Families First is an area where pressures are building significantly. As Welsh Government's draft child poverty strategy states that the intention of Families First services is to 'offer early support with the aim of preventing problems escalating'. However, due to rising statutory thresholds, increasing demand and the complexity of need which families are experiencing, in many places Families First now effectively occupies an edge of care role. This potentially leaves a gap where there should be support for families who require an early intervention or prevention response. However, Families First services continue to have to respond to early intervention/prevention cases, a demand that has increased severely through the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. Added to this, the impact of inflation on the delivery of Families First provision is also having a severe impact on the ability of teams to meet high levels of need in the community. With no uplift to many contracts for several years, services are seeing real term cuts.

As an example, Barnardo's Cymru is the sole agency delivering the Families First team around the family co-ordination/response across one local authority area. Whilst we have seen an increase in complex cases (mental health issues and issues of domestic violence primarily), this service to a large degree, continues to be preventative. Nevertheless, referral demand for this service increased by over 40% in 2022/23, inflationary costs equated to approximately 8% for service, yet the Families First uplift for 2023/24 equated to less than 2%. In addition, Welsh Government additional funding to meet 'pandemic waiting lists', which provided two extra workers was withdrawn from April 2023. In 2022/23 the service had to access more than £90k from internal crisis funds and grants as well as other grant making bodies in order to help families and children in crisis – particularly with food and energy. However, we are very concerned that these additional grant making funds are reducing or being removed altogether.

Barnardo's Cymru calls on the Welsh Government to review Families First provision, the stress points most acutely affecting delivery, and how provision can be invested in for the future.

To conclude

We thank the committee for setting out this opportunity to put forward Barnardo's Cymru's key calls and concerns on the future Welsh Government budget for 2024/25. As set out in this document, we are increasingly concerned about the children, young people and their families we work with. The cost-of-living crisis and rising inflation are continuing to push our most at-risk families to make choices between food and fuel, a warm bed and a warm coat. We need to see strengthened investment in supporting families facing poverty including the recognition of the impact of poverty on mental health and wellbeing. We would urge the committee to keep the concerns outlined in this document in mind

throughout the scrutiny process and ensure that access to support for the most under-served communities is highlighted at every opportunity.

As an organisation, Barnardo's Cymru services and practitioners work hard to support children, young people and their families, to continue to do this we call on the Welsh Government to fully commit to longer term, sustainable funding of services and the workforce to ensure we, and others like us, can continue to meet this urgent increasing need.

ⁱ <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Fair-work-in-the-FE-social-care-final.pdf>