

PIW 26

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Poverty in Wales: Strand 1

Response from: Welsh Local Government Association

Inquiry into Poverty in Wales: Strand 1

September 2014



WLGA • CLILC

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1. The WLGA represents the 22 local authorities in Wales while the three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities are associate members. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
 2. We would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit evidence to its Inquiry. Tackling the causes and consequences of poverty is at the heart of what local government and other public service partners are seeking to achieve and has been identified as a priority both locally and nationally. Moreover it is clear that, while poverty is a longstanding problem, it has been exacerbated by current pressures. Therefore, reflecting on the current situation and the progress we have made nationally will be a valuable undertaking.
 3. This evidence relates to the Inquiry's first 'strand', which will explore the links between poverty and equality. Previous WLGA evidence to this Committee's Inquiry into the Future of Equality and Human Rights has emphasised the importance of recognising and strengthening the links between these two inter-related areas of work (see <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/equalities-publications/wlga-l-nhs-cehr-evidence-national-assembly-for-wales-inquiry-future-of-equality-and-human-rights/>).

How effectively the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and other government strategies work together

4. The WLGA recognises that the Welsh Government is making efforts to align their Strategic Equality Plan and their Tackling Poverty Action Plan. In addition to ensuring these documents 'dovetail', it will be crucial that the relationship between poverty and equality is fully explored within research so that the inter-connected relationship is understood and informs policy.¹ One example of where this has been achieved is Welsh Government's report [*Analysing the impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms in Wales – Stage 3 analysis Part 1: Impacts on those with protected characteristics*](#).
5. Similarly, efforts have been made at a local level to make the connections between equality and poverty work by aligning Single Integrated Plans (undertaken through and owned by the Local Service Board) and Strategic Equality Plans (owned by the local authority or other listed bodies). The WLGA produced [*Equality and Integrated Planning: An Advice Note for Local Authorities in Wales*](#) to support this. (See Appendix).

¹ Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives 2012-2016 (2012) Welsh Government

6. Importantly, the Committee's own inquiry into the Future of Equality and Human Rights in Wales recommended a lawyers group and a policy group be established to consider the prospect of commencing a socio-economic duty in Wales as part of and complementary to existing equality legislation. The WLGA was invited to join this group and participated in the first meeting (8th January 2014) and will continue to do so as required.
7. The Future Generations Bill presents an opportunity to explore how equality and anti-poverty work can be effectively woven together, both in terms of understanding need and developing a more integrated approach to planning.
8. The alignment of equality and tackling poverty under the portfolio of the former Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty had presented an opportunity to bring these areas of work together but this is now a missed opportunity under the current allocation of portfolios.
9. The alignment of Communities First, Families First and Flying Start is welcomed and could also include Community Cohesion. Our understanding is that the alignment is focussing on a joint outcomes framework rather than merging the programmes or the funding. While it is recognised that the Welsh Government is now making efforts to ensure these programmes are joined-up, don't duplicate or overlap a significant amount of effort has been put into making sense of these different strands and ensuring they align for the benefit of communities at a local level. A significant amount of time and effort could have been saved if WG had made these connections at a strategic level, from the outset.

The impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people

10. There are a range of national research reports, including publications by the EHRC, Welsh Government, universities and third sector organisations which evidence the undeniable connection between the socio-economic disadvantage and the disadvantage associated with an individual's protected characteristics. The EHRC's Triennial Reviews *How fair is Britain?* (EHRC, 2010), and *How fair is Wales?* (EHRC Wales, 2011) provide comprehensive reviews of the available evidence, and in particular draw upon findings from the National Equality Panel (2010) report *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK*, WISERD's (2011) *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in Wales*, and the Marmot Review (2010) of health inequalities *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*.
11. This evidence emphasises that, while a person's socio-economic status may have the strongest association with their key outcomes, such as educational attainment and health, a person's life experiences are also strongly mediated by their protected characteristics. Indeed the two are interwoven. For example, certain groups- disabled people, Bangladeshi

and Pakistani people are most likely to have low or no educational qualification. Lower levels of educational attainment will 'clearly effect the positions they [protected groups] achieve in society and the resources and opportunities that these positions confer'.² Indeed, the under 25s, Asian people, disabled people are most likely to live on the lowest incomes. Conversely, white men in non-manual occupations, working full-time, with an A level or more advanced qualifications, not disabled, 40-44 years of age, Christian and living in a house with a mortgage are most likely to be the least disadvantaged in society.³

12. It can be unhelpful to seek to address these issues by looking through an 'equality' lens or a 'poverty' lens in isolation and makes more sense to look at the needs of individuals and communities in totality, recognising the nature of their experiences. As the EHRC put it, ;

'... efforts to reduce socio-economic inequalities need to take account of other aspects of inequality – and vice versa. It is not sufficient to focus on lower socio-economic groups without recognising that the position of women and men, white and ethnic minority, and disabled and non-disabled people may be very different within them. Similarly, it is not sufficient to focus solely on protected groups, irrespective of their socio-economic circumstances.'

13. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) qualitative study, *Poverty and Ethnicity in Wales* (2013) stressed that there is little evidence that 'ethnicity caused poverty' per se and emphasised the need to look beyond outcomes to underlying causes linked to people's experience.⁴ Consequently, their 'overarching recommendation' was that;

'Schemes to reduce poverty within particular ethnic groups need to be part of population-wide anti-poverty strategies'.⁵

The report also advocates 'greater analysis of the impact of general policies on specific ethnic groups'.⁶ This similarly highlights that poverty and equality should not be seen in isolation and a more nuanced understanding is required.

14. Furthermore, similar comprehensive pieces of research have been undertaken at a local level, such as '[How Fair is Powys](#)' and '[How Fair is Swansea](#)'. Local authorities and their partners are using the broad range

² Davies, R et al (2011) Anatomy of Economic Inequality in Wales A report prepared on behalf of the Wales Equality and Human Rights Commission. Available at http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/files/1813/6551/9593/WISERD_RRS_002.pdf

³ Ibid

⁴ Holtom D and Bottrill I (2013) Poverty and Ethnicity in Wales. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/poverty-and-ethnicity-wales>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

of data available to them, drawing on these national reports, Census information, other national statistics and local data to understand how and why different groups might be disproportionately disadvantaged and their nature of need in their communities.

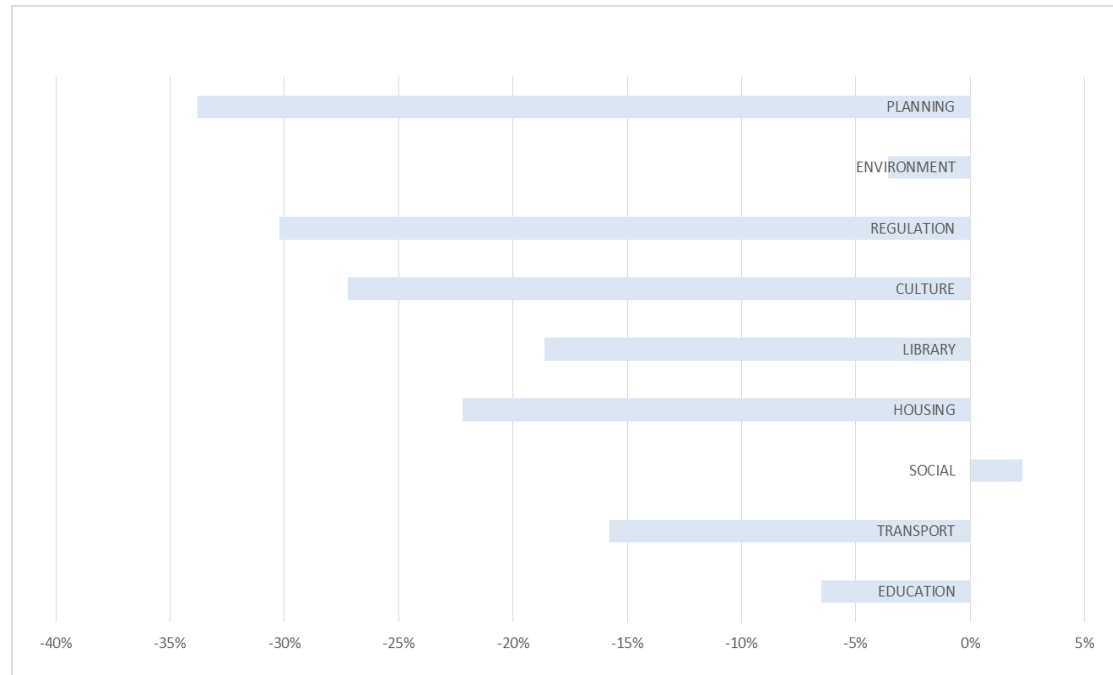
How legislation, policy and budgets targeted at tackling poverty and reducing inequality are co-ordinated and prioritised across the Welsh Government.

15. The Welsh Government has taken positive steps to support the tackling poverty objectives across a ranges of programmes. This is further reinforced through the Programme for Government where the tackling poverty agenda is clearly recognised as one of the Government's three key priorities and underlines the importance of measuring impact.
16. The prominence of tackling poverty can be seen at the level of increased emphasis on the agenda in Welsh Government departments, new programme design, and outputs being generated by programmes. However unless we can create (sustainable) jobs and growth we are not addressing the most important preventative approach to one of the most pernicious of negative social outcomes. The role of local government in this is vital.
17. According to an international comparative analysis by JRF, anti-poverty strategies must be developed in tandem with economic policy. No country has reduced poverty without raising levels of employment. Sustainable economic growth requires a co-ordinated approach and investment across all levels of government. The Future Generations Bill seeks to undertake such co-ordination by establishing a set of high level goals (a prosperous; resilient; healthier; more equal wales; with cohesive communities; and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language). Identifying such high level goals is relatively easy, though. It is much harder to deliver on these goals in ways that achieve coherence between them.
18. As the Finance Committee highlighted in its report on the draft budget for 2014-15⁷ last year "...there is a disconnection between the WG's stated priorities – jobs and growth – and a budget whose clearest priorities are indicated by directing additional money towards the health service."
19. Local government is now bearing the brunt of austerity and the pressure on budgets is amplified in services that are considered 'controllable spend' The figure below has been included into the WLGA's evidence to the Finance Committee on the Welsh Government draft budget for 2015-16.

⁷ [National Assembly for Wales \(2013\). Scrutiny of Welsh Government Draft Budget 2014-15, page 5.](#)

20. It shows that since 2009-10, spending on services that facilitate economic growth has been falling through the floor. Spending on transport shows a decline of 16%, spending on planning and economic development is down 34%, and spending on non-HRA housing services is down 22%.

Figure 1: Real terms change local government in service spend between 2009-10 to 2014-15



Source: WLGA Evidence to Finance Committee Draft WG Budget 2015-16

21. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation⁸ has shown that many of these 'other' local government services are relied upon by vulnerable groups. In the longer run they also prevent negative social outcomes driving demand in other budgets including the NHS⁹

22. Initiatives like the Youth Engagement & Progression Framework gives local authorities the key leadership role for reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training. This includes working closely with the Youth Service and partners such as Careers Wales and schools. Like many programmes it requires the joining up of Welsh Government and others in a true partnership.

23. We recognise the work that Welsh Government has undertaken so far to co-ordinate policy and budgets. However, to fully address the long term issues of poverty and inequality there needs to be a whole system approach that recognises the role of other delivery partners.

⁸ [JRF \(2013\). Coping with the cuts? Local government and poorer communities.](#)

⁹ [Office for Disability Issues \(2007\). Implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvements and equipment: a review of the evidence.](#)

Appendix

Cardiff Council's Single Integrated Plan 'What Matters: The 10 Year Strategy of Cardiff' and Strategic Equality Plan, 'Everyone Matters'

Cardiff Council's SEP, [Everyone Matters](#), makes an explicit connection between socio-economic and protected characteristic components of equality. The document draws on the strategic needs assessment, undertaken to inform 'What Matters: The 10 Year Strategy of Cardiff', considering the socio-economic evidence in the context of the protected characteristics. Everyone Matters describes how 'a more sophisticated analysis of socio-economic deprivation in the city reveals connections with the nine protected characteristics. This helps us to understand how, by targeting our resources towards certain issues or populations, we can have an impact on some of the key issues for Cardiff'. The document goes on to identify objectives relating to reducing differentials in life expectancy, educational attainment and child poverty.

Publication: 'Everyone Matters'

<http://www.cardiff.gov.uk/content.asp?nav=2%2C2872%2C3257%2C6414>

Swansea's work on aligning equality and tackling poverty work

Swansea has taken action to ensure that equality and tackling poverty are treated as inter-related areas of work. For example;

- Swansea has included poverty within its EIA process, meaning Members and officers are considering the links between equality and poverty within their decision-making.
- Officers within the two areas work closely together, commenting and advising on the quality of EIAs produced across the authority.
- Swansea is piloting Tackling Poverty Training for front-line, policy and service development staff – the principles of equality are embedded within the training content.
- As part of their induction Members receive training which jointly covers equality and tackling poverty.
- The City & County of Swansea and the Equality and Human Rights Commission held 'Linking Inequality and Poverty Leadership Seminars' in 2013 to get key thinkers and decision-makers together to begin exploring the link between equality and poverty, using education as a practical example.