



Llywodraeth Cymru
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Minutes of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Cost of Living
meeting on 14 November 2022.

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Present

- Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS
- Jane Hutt MS (Chair)
- Rebecca Evans MS
- Mick Antoniw MS
- Jeremy Miles MS
- Julie Morgan MS
- Hannah Blythyn MS
- Vaughan Gething MS
- Dawn Bowden MS
- Lesley Griffiths MS
- Lynne Neagle MS

External contributors

- Rocio Cifuentes, Children's Commissioner for Wales
- Karen McFarlane, Children in Wales
- Ellie Harwood, Child Poverty Action Group
- Paul Slevin, Executive Chair, Chambers Wales
- Abdul-Azim Ahmed, Assistant Secretary General, Muslim Council Wales
- Naomi Alleyne, Director of Social Services and Housing, WLGA
- Monika Cole, Llamau supporting children and young people:
 - Axe Jones
 - Elin Morris
 - Ellie Kidd
 - Shazeen Feroz

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Apologies

- Archbishop of Wales, Andy John
- Andrew Morgan OBE, Leader, WLGA
- Ruth Marks, Chief Executive WcVA

Officials

- Andrew Goodall, Permanent Secretary
- Des Clifford, Director Office of the First Minister
- Will Whiteley, Head of Cabinet Division
- Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser
- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser
- Kate Edmonds, Special Adviser
- Jo-Anne Daniels, Director General Education, Social Justice and Welsh Language
- Reg Kilpatrick, Director General, COVID-19 recovery and Local Government
- Judith Paget, Director General, H&SS
- Jo Salway, Director Social Partnership and Fair Work
- Claire Bennett, Director Communities and Tackling Poverty
- Toby Mason, Head of Strategic Communications
- Catrin Sully, Cabinet Office
- Liz Lalley, Director, Recovery & Re-start
- Maureen Howell, Deputy Director, Tackling Poverty and Supporting Families
- Tom Smithson, Deputy Director COVID recovery and Local Government Group
- Christopher W Morgan, Head of Cabinet Secretariat
- Damian Roche, Cabinet Secretariat (Minutes)

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Item 1: Social Partners and Children and Young People presentations

Presentations by:

Rocio Cifuentes, Children's Commissioner for Wales

Karen McFarlane, Children in Wales

Axe Jones, Elin Morris, Ellie Kidd and Shazeen Feroz – lived experience

1.1 Croesawodd y Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol yr holl Bartneriaid Cymdeithasol a'r Plant a Phobl Ifanc i'r cyfarfod a gwahodd i gyflwyno i'r grŵp. The Minister for Social Justice welcomed all Social Partners and children and young people to the meeting and invited them to present to the group.

Rocio Cifuentes, Children's Commissioner for Wales

1.2 The Children's Commissioner for Wales, Rocio Cifuentes reported that her office had been conducting a large survey of children and young people and the purpose of the briefing was to share the early findings of that work with the committee.

1.3 The committee noted how the large surveys undertaken by the Children's Commissioner's office during Covid were extremely valuable resources that directly influenced the Welsh Government's response to the pandemic.

1.4 Listening and engaging with social partners and hearing the lived experience of those children and young people who were directly impacted by the cost-of-living crisis was a valuable learning tool for the Committee, which would help influence the Welsh Government's response to the crisis.

1.5 The national survey had received over 8,000 responses and detailed the

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difficult lives of many children already living in poverty, along with the acute impacts on children's mental health.

1.6 There were a worryingly high number of children who were concerned about how they and their families could afford everyday essentials such as heating and food, with over half of respondents worried about money and how their families would survive the winter.

1.7 There was an immediate need to address the suffering of the lowest income households, and to that end it was suggested that an action plan to tackle child poverty was needed that could focus on short- and longer-term priorities.

Karen McFarlane, Children in Wales

1.8 Nesa oedd cyflwyniad o Karen McFarlane, Plant Yng Nghymru. Next was a presentation from Karen McFarlane, Children in Wales.

1.9 It was noted that there were stark findings from the cost-of-living impacts work conducted with children and young people, which included the emotional stress and anxiety that was evident throughout the lives of young people with the least resources.

1.10 There were worries about debt increasing and whilst those increases were previously due to paying for unexpected costs, such as repairs, debts were now being built up by families and individuals to cover basic everyday needs.

1.11 There had been a rise in loan shark activity amongst those struggling the most, as the vulnerable were preyed upon in their time of need. Rent arrears were also a prevalent issue that needed to be addressed, including complaints about cold and damp housing due to the affordability of heating.

1.12 There were impacts evident across education with children arriving at

school tired and hungry and a rise in absenteeism for a range of reasons. There was also evidence of poverty related bullying, which can be an issue where uniforms are unaffordable or those eligible for free school meals stigmatised by others. Some young people were reducing time in education to bring in an extra income.

Children and young people – lived experience: Axe Jones, Elin Morris, Ellie Kidd and Shazeen Feroz

1.13 Yna clywodd y Pwyllgor am brofiad byw plant a phobl ifanc gafodd eu heffeithio gan y sefyllfa. The Committee then heard about the lived experience of children and young people impacted by the situation.

1.14 The first presenter, Axe Jones, reported on the work of a focus group of 18- to 23-year-olds, established to hear issues from those who had experienced homelessness during their youth.

1.15 The key issues raised by the group included access to nutritious, affordable food, paying for electricity and gas bills and doing so whilst maintaining some semblance of a normal life, including some social activities.

1.16 There was evidence of young people not being able to afford ready meals as even cheap food had increased and become unaffordable, with people having to survive on snack foods. Some were getting help via food-sharing apps, but this relied on the generosity of others.

1.17 Where costs could not be met for food, other young people were looking at animal rehoming as they could not afford to feed their pets, despite their clear benefits for mental health.

1.18 Transport costs also weighed heavily on young people, preventing them from visiting family and friends.

1.19 In summary, it was disappointing that young people were so reliant on the generosity of others to survive, and this impacted on young people's hopes and dreams for the future and mental health. There was a risk of people falling into negative routines and a real worry that people would die unnecessarily due to the current crisis.

1.20 The second presenter, Elin Morris, focused initially on the housing options for young people, and reported that despite evidence there were up to 40,000 empty homes across Wales, it was felt that the most was not made from housing options. It was very difficult to get access to affordable housing in the community a person lived.

1.21 On energy it was noted that heating was just not used as it was too expensive and the money was needed for other basics. There were strong feelings amongst young people that the companies currently profiting excessively from oil and gas revenues, which were also contributing to climate change, were not acting responsibly. Nationalisation of these companies was suggested.

1.22 The current benefits system was also too complicated, with some disabled people expected to look for work despite being unable to. It was recognised that young people's experience of benefit interviews was often negative, with an interrogation style unnecessarily adopted.

1.23 Tribunals for benefit awards were also taking too long and with the high rate of successful appeals were denying benefits to those who needed them the most. The inevitable consequence of this was the fear that more people would die unnecessarily.

1.24 The third presenter, Ellie Kidd, focused on the mental health impacts of the cost-of-living crisis both on young people themselves and on their parents who were trying to shield their children from the impacts.

1.25 It was noted the impacts were being amplified given recent experiences during the pandemic, with people already in difficult situations due to furlough or worsening health.

1.26 It was felt the waiting times to access mental health support were too long and more should be done to address timely provision.

1.27 It was reported that many had to leave education or training to provide for themselves or their families, which had a knock-on effect for the rest of young people's lives. The campaign to ensure young people were 'fit, fed and read' was cited as a good example of the important things young people needed to succeed in life.

1.28 The final presenter, Shazeen Feroz, focused on the disparity in treatment that some from ethnic minority backgrounds had received when trying to access services.

1.29 It was felt that language barriers and a lack of awareness amongst some ethnic minority communities of how to access the services available to them was causing unequal hardship amongst this section of society.

1.30 More assistance was needed for those families struggling to access support and everything possible needed to be done to ensure there was no inherent racism in service design. It was unacceptable that some could not access help due to their race.

Summary

1.31 The Minister for Social Justice thanked all presenters for their valuable insights and powerful contributions, noting that the Welsh Government would continue to listen and engage with the concerns of children and young people in Wales, with the goal of improving the lives of those faced by serious challenges

throughout their young lives and into adulthood.

1.32 There was discussion about the potential benefits of awareness raising on some of the issues to help destigmatise them and make it easier for people to talk about them and seek help, but also that this must be done sensitively to avoid unintended consequences.

1.33 The committee noted there were no simple solutions to the issues, and the wider economic and fiscal position facing the Welsh Government and its delivery partners was very challenging.

Cabinet Secretariat
November 2022

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