



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

REPORT

# Action to strengthen human rights in Wales: 2018 to 2022

What the Welsh Government has done to support and improve human rights between 2018 to 2022.

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# Introduction

This position statement sets out the positive actions the Welsh Government has taken in devolved areas since the start of the UK's last UPR cycle in 2017 to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of everyone in Wales. This standalone position statement, produced by the Welsh Government, does not form part of the formal documentation submitted to the UN. Rather, it is intended to assist interested parties in engaging with treaty reporting processes and scrutinising the Welsh Government's human rights record. They can also be used informally by international institutions, including UN Special Rapporteurs and treaty bodies. This is in no way intended to supplant the UK State Report, nor is it intended to undermine its integrity.

## UN Conventions (example of Welsh Government intervention in each case)

### International Convention Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The **International Convention Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** was adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XXI) of 16 December 1966. It came into force on 3 January 1976 and was ratified by the UK in the same year.

The Covenant contains some of the most significant international legal provisions establishing economic, social and cultural rights relating to:

- work in just and favourable conditions
- social protection

- an adequate standard of living
- the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health
- education
- enjoyment of the benefits of cultural freedom and scientific progress

## Disabled people's employment

Welsh Ministers are focusing on supporting disabled people into employment or self-employment through our employability programmes, providing careers advice and guidance via Working Wales and supporting the current workforce to develop new skills and find new employment.

Alongside this, we increased the number of apprenticeships by providing employer incentives until 28 February 2022, of up to £4,000, with an additional payment of £1,500 to employers for each new disabled apprentice they hire.

On 15 November the Minister for Economy announced a Young Person's Guarantee which will provide every young person under the age of 25 with the offer of work, education, training or self-employment to ensure that there is no lost generation in Wales following the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, we have developed a package of support for employers, providing the tools to increase high performing inclusive workforces, helping to remove societal barriers and improve employment outcomes for disabled people. This includes an employer tool-kit - guiding employers through the journey of recruitment through to retention, an e-learning module for employers on the social model of disability, to be published shortly, and creation of a network of Disabled People's Employment Champions.

The Champions are working with Business Wales and employers across Wales to promote awareness of the support available and utilise their lived experience to advocate for employment of disabled people. They are promoting awareness

of the support available to employers, including providing practical advice and help on issues such as inclusive HR policies, recruitment, retraining and staff retention.

We are also making use of our social partnership approach and our influence to encourage employers to do more to reap the benefits of a more equal, diverse and inclusive workforce. This includes embedding equality, diversity and inclusion into our interventions, to support, facilitate and encourage social partnership and fair work, as well as working with employers, trade unions and others to promote best practice, which includes increasing awareness of the availability and benefits to employers of the champions initiative.

## Fair work

Work is continuing to introduce the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill. If passed, this will introduce new social partnership and socially responsible public procurement duties.

We are also using our non-legislative levers to advance fair work. We have:

- delivered a Workforce Rights and Responsibilities campaign
- provided grant assistance to Cynnal Cymru (the living wage accreditation body for Wales), for it to fund a living wage officer and further the promotion of the Real Living Wage in Wales
- established a range of social partnership fora including:
  - the Social Care Fair Work Forum to improve working conditions in social care
  - the national Health and Safety Forum, to improve the approach to health and safety at work
  - the Retail Forum to develop a shared vision for a sustainable and resilient retail sector that offers fair, secure and rewarding work
- we are also exploring how we can support other sectors to improve the

prevalence of fair work, including the tourism sector

We are working with our social partners and stakeholders to embed equality, diversity and inclusion into our approach to social partnership and fair work, and promote the benefits of a more equal, diverse and inclusive workforce. We are also working across government to embed fair work policy in the suite of the Welsh Government equality action plans.

In supporting the fair work 'floor' we are:

- making representations to the UK Government to safeguard against a regression on workers' rights and to call for enhancement in some areas
- raising knowledge and awareness of workers' rights and avenues of support and developing interventions to improve understanding of the role and benefits of joining a trade union. Re-invigorating the Welsh Government's code of practice on ethical employment in supply chains and improving its impact

In striving to raise the fair work 'ceiling' we are:

- using the public purse to encourage good practice and discourage poor practice, including the refreshed fair work pillar of the economic contract
- building and communicating the business benefits of fair work with the business representative organisations that are active in social partnership
- ensuring the Welsh public sector acts as a leader and role model for the behaviours and practices we want to see in others

## Real living wage

We share the ambition set out by the Fair Work Commission in **Fair Work Wales**, for the real living wage to provide the "minimum wage floor for all working hours in Wales".

We promote and encourage real Living Wage adoption and accreditation as a way of tackling low pay and in-work poverty. And our commitment to promoting the real living wage is reflected in the code of practice on ethical employment in supply chains and in the refreshed economic contract.

As part of the steps we can take to make work fairer, we are also using our influence to improve levels of the real living Wales adoption and accreditation. This includes:

- leading by example as a real living wage accredited employer
- providing funding to ensure that all registered social care staff and PAs are paid the real living wage, staff should see the uplift between April to June 2022
- encouraging employers in Wales to explore the benefits of the living wage for themselves as employers and for those that work for them.

## **Local museums improving well-being**

Inequalities can impact the how different groups access and interact with culture differently; many still feel excluded from spaces which are inaccessible or considered as 'high culture'. That is why the work of local museums, who work directly with the community, is so important for the achievement of the vision set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Small and large museums across Wales are taking actions to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of their area. They are using the medium of culture to contribute to each of the national well-being goals to the well-being objectives of their local authority.

**How local museums are improving well-being** a case study which shows how museums are enhancing well-being provided by the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

# International Convention Civil and Political rights

The **International Convention Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)** was adopted in 1966 and came into force in 1976. It was ratified by the UK in the same year.

Many of the rights covered by the Covenant are also included in the European Convention on Human Rights. ICCPR obligates countries that have ratified the treaty to protect and preserve basic human rights, such as:

- the right to life and human dignity
- equality before the law
- freedom of speech, assembly and association
- religious freedom and privacy
- freedom from torture, ill-treatment and arbitrary detention
- gender equality
- the right to a fair trial
- minority rights

The UK has signed the second optional protocol to ICCPR, aiming at abolition of the death penalty. However, it has not signed the first optional protocol, which allows individuals who:

- claim that their rights under the Covenant have been violated
- who have taken their case through the UK courts to write to the Human Rights Committee to ask for their case to be considered

A related section on Welsh Government action to Strengthen and Advance Human Rights can be found later in this report.



## Diversity in democracy

Phase 2 diversity in democracy programme action plan launched in September 2020 and included a range of actions. We are currently evaluating progress against the plan. The following has been achieved to date.

### Access to elected office fund

Disabled people are likely to face greater costs when seeking elected office, due to their impairments. A pilot access to elected office fund was established to provide additional support to disabled people to seek elected office. The fund, delivered by Disability Wales, is financed by the Welsh Government, and pays for practical support to allow disabled people to fully participate in the political process.

Phase 1 of the pilot supported individuals standing for election to the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) in 2021. Two candidates accessed the fund.

The second phase of the pilot opened in October 2021 to support disabled candidates standing in the local government elections to the 22 local authorities in Wales in May 2022. A number of access to politics events were hosted by Disability Wales to provide awareness about the support available and the timescales for applications.

There were 18 applications to the fund for support for the local government elections. An evaluation of the pilot arrangements will take place during the summer, the outcome will inform next steps in respect of the fund.

## **Duty to make and publish public participation strategy**

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a duty on principal councils to encourage local people to participate in their decision making. This includes where councils are making decisions in partnership with another principal council or in conjunction with another individual or body such as a local health board. This is set out in section 39 of the 2021 Act and is specifically intended to encourage public participation in the democratic processes of the council as a bridge with the public's direct engagement with councillors.

## **Multi-location meeting**

Councils across Wales are now required to make arrangements that ensure their meetings can take place in a way that allows people to participate to attend and participate in meetings from multiple locations. Local authorities must publish these arrangements, if the arrangements are revised or replaced, the new arrangements must also be published. While meetings will have to be capable of being held virtually, it is a matter for the council to decide whether they are held fully virtually, partially virtually, whereby some participants are in the same physical location whilst others join the meeting virtually, or as physical meetings. The council is required to take into account the personal circumstances of members when determining the type of meeting to be held. These arrangements are intended to provide greater flexibility for home/worklife balance.

## **People shaping their communities: Brecon Beacons**

Brecon Beacons is 835 square miles of some of Wales' most beautiful and richest in natural resources land. Despite the natural beauty of the land, the

national park is also characterised by poor connectivity links and health inequalities.

The planning authority serving the 33,500 people living in Brecon Beacons has chosen to address these challenges in an integrated way through their revised local development plan, which will be based around the “20-minute neighbourhood” concept. To ensure that people are involved in the design of their future places, the planning authority has undertaken multiple involvement methods and exercises. This work will help meet several of Brecon Beacons’ well-being objectives and contributes to many of the national well-being goals.

**How Brecon Beacons National Park Authority encourages local participation in local decision making**, a case study which shows how local people are being encouraged to engage in local decision-making processes to enhance their well-being provided by the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

## **Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment**

The **UN Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment** was adopted in 1984 and came into force in 1987. It was signed by the UK in 1988.

The Convention sets out a definition of torture and means States must take all necessary legislative, judicial, administrative and other appropriate measures to prevent acts of torture.

Its main features include:

- torture can never be justified, even in exceptional circumstances

- torture must be included as a specific crime in national criminal law
- each State Party must establish universal jurisdiction over any person found in its territory who is alleged to have committed the crime of torture, irrespective of their nationality or where the offence was committed
- systematic review of interrogation rules, instructions, methods and practices, as well as custody procedures
- each State Party to establish prompt and impartial investigations whenever there are reasonable grounds to believe that an act of torture has been committed in any territory under its jurisdiction
- victims of torture have the right to complain and to have their case investigated promptly and impartially, as well as to receive redress and compensation

The UK has signed the optional protocol to UNCAT ('OPCAT'), which establishes a system of unannounced and unrestricted visits by independent international and national monitoring bodies to all places where persons are deprived of their liberty.

The UK National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) established under OPCAT includes several bodies in England and Wales:

- HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP)
- Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB)
- Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA)
- HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)
- Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Healthcare Inspectorate of Wales (HIW)
- Children's Commissioner for England (CCE)
- Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)
- Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)

## **The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable**

## **Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child makes it clear that children have the right to be protected from harm and from being hurt and this includes physical punishment. That right is now enshrined in Welsh law.

Wales joins more than 60 nations across the world to end the physical punishment of children. This landmark legislation removes the archaic 160 year old legal defence and provides children the same protection from assault as adults.

Under the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020 all types of physical punishment, such as smacking, hitting, slapping and shaking, are illegal. The new law applies to everybody in Wales, including visitors, from 21 March 2022.

## **Prisons and the probation service**

Whilst justice is currently a reserved matter, many of the services which are essential to operate the adult and youth justice systems, secure estate and the probation service in Wales are devolved to the Welsh Government.

We work closely with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the Youth Custody Service (YCS), Youth Justice Board (YJB), Public Health Wales (PHW), Welsh Health Boards and other non-devolved and devolved agencies to progress our commitments to reduce reoffending and support families, in order to build strong and resilient communities in Wales.

These relationships have been strengthened further during the pandemic, as we have worked ever closer with our key partners and service providers in Wales to manage the outbreaks and mitigate the impact of the virus, balancing the needs

of community health with the health and well-being of both adult and young offenders.

Whilst robust restrictions within both the secure estate and probation services have been necessary to reduce the transmission of the virus and save lives, we have worked closely with partners to ensure those critical services, which are integral to the rehabilitation of offenders, remained accessible.

The Welsh Government has ensured that learners have had access to resources to support their learning and wellbeing. Essential health services have been maintained within prisons and mental health support for offenders have been strengthened.

## **Asylum Seekers and Refugees**

The Welsh Government is continuing to participate in our effective 'Team Wales' multi-agency approach to provide a very positive welcome to Afghans in Wales and to find sustainable placements throughout Wales. It has been a pleasure to see Afghan friends learning Welsh, attending Wales' men's and women's international sporting events and becoming immersed in Welsh culture.

Wales has now welcomed approximately 600 people from Afghanistan and work continues to increase this further. Efforts to move families from temporary bridging accommodation to more sustainable homes have been impacted by capacity issues at the UK Government Home Office as well as by our need to ensure families have received the health screening they need before being dispersed elsewhere. We are hopeful those delays are now behind us.

# International convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination

The **UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination** was adopted in 1966 and entered into force in 1969. It was ratified by the UK in the same year.

The Convention defines racial discrimination and sets out a framework for ensuring that civil, political, economic and social rights are enjoyed by all, without distinction of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.

Our **Anti-racist Wales action plan** identifies a vision and values for an anti-racist Wales, with goals, actions, timelines, and tangible outcomes which will help us move from the rhetoric on racial equality to ensure we deliver meaningful action.

Eradicating racism and promoting race equality have always been priorities for the Welsh Government.

Our Anti-Racist Wales action plan for Wales is built on the values of anti-racism, and calls for zero tolerance of racism in all its guises.

The plan, developed collaboratively, will help us forge the truly anti-racist Wales we all want to see. Co-constructed with our Black, Asian, and Ethnic Minority communities, it identifies a vision and values for an anti-racist Wales by 2030, with goals, actions, timelines, and tangible outcomes which will help us to move from the rhetoric on racial equality and ensure we deliver meaningful action.

It outlines specific actions to be taken across all the key policy areas which emerged from our co-construction work, ranging from education to health, housing to the economy, and more.

A selection of actions is set out below.

## Health

### Priority action 5: health inequalities

The Welsh Government and NHS Wales will establish a dedicated working group on health inequalities. The working group will work alongside and co-produce with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people to identify barriers faced by these communities in accessing services. By 2023, the working group will make recommendations on how barriers can be removed to ensure equality of access to services. Alongside addressing barriers to accessing services, the working group will also develop programmes of work to maximise the contribution of NHS Wales to tackling health inequalities experienced by ethnic minority people. Through these priority actions, we commit to delivering fundamental cultural change at pace for our ethnic minority workforce within the NHS and for Black Asian and Minority Ethnic people accessing our services across Wales.

## Education

For education in particular, we continue to work to clarify the benefits of an inclusive culture and diversity in the knowledge base of education for all learners. This is not solely an initiative aimed at learners from minority ethnic backgrounds, but it should be the right of every child in Wales to have a comprehensive, relevant and future oriented education as 'ethical and informed citizens of Wales and the world'.

These actions and goals build on the final report and recommendations of the ministerial working group: 'Communities, Contributions and Cynefin: Black Asian



Minority Ethnicities in the new curriculum' chaired by Prof. Charlotte Williams OBE, published in March 2021.

The Welsh Government accepted all 51 of the group's recommendations and we have seen good progress already achieved in their implementation and delivery, for example:

- We have led the way by becoming the first part of the UK to make it mandatory to teach Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories and experiences in the curriculum. This will ensure our children and young people develop an understanding of others' identities and make connections with people, places and histories elsewhere in Wales and across the world. It will reinforce the importance of teaching past and present experiences and contributions of ethnic minority peoples, as part of the story of Wales across the curriculum.
- We have committed to delivering a strategy to recruit more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic teachers into the workforce. As an initial phase, we published the **Initial Teacher Education Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Recruitment Plan** in October 2021.
- We have also announced a new teaching award, The Betty Campbell MBE Award, to recognise and celebrate the promoting of contributions and perspectives of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in schools.
- We are working in partnership with the Black Leadership Group and Colegau Cymru, to support every college in Wales to embed anti-racist culture and practice.

Our task now is to build on these early achievements and develop our actions, to deliver our commitment of a truly anti-racist Wales, including an anti-racist education system, by 2030.

## Economic

Our aims for the Foundational Economy (FE) seek to make this part of the economy central to our ambition of supporting equality and prosperity across Wales. In doing so, we will work with strategic employers and businesses to encourage them to adopt workforce strategies which provide fair work and career opportunities to the people and communities in which those organisations are based.

Key to the development of an effective long term strategy for supporting the FE is the development of robust data and intelligence. This will support us in making evidence-based decisions and investment, and enable us to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of interventions.

Since 2016, of the 5,898 clients supported by Business Wales to start a business, 427 (7%) identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic.

Since October 2015, SMART Cymru has supported 505 businesses. Out of the 411 businesses who have so far provided monitoring data:

- 157 businesses have female owners (38.2%)
- 29 businesses have Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic owners (7.1%)

The Business Wales Barriers to Start-up grant ran between November 2020 and May 2021 and supported 335 unemployed individuals 50 of whom (15%) identified as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. The second phase launched in December 2021 and closed at the end of March 2022. The second round ran between December 2021 and March 2022 and supported 544 unemployed individuals and of those supported 78 (13%) identified as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. The third round for the over 25 years was launched in July 2022 and so far has received 593 expression of interests and 65 applicants (11%) identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. In addition, the Young Person's

Start-up grant for those aged under 25 years has received 141 expressions of interest with 12 (9%) identifying as Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic.

Business Wales provides support to the existing business community to sustain and grow their business. This includes areas such as developing digital capability, HR and employment practices, accessing finance for growth, sustainability and innovation. Business Wales has directly supported over 16,914 business owners since 2016 to support their business development and growth, 921 (5.4%) identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic.

Big Ideas Wales aims to inspire and educate the next generation of young entrepreneurs in Wales. Since 2016 we have supported 3,229 young people to progress their ideas for business, of which 298 (9%) identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. 33 (7%) of the 487 entrepreneur role models in Wales identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and play an instrumental role inspiring young people in education and wider community consider entrepreneurship. This work is a key element of the young person's guarantee offer that will see an enhanced service delivery from April 2022.

The 2020 to 2021 development bank of Wales annual report said that, out of 4,183 directors who self-reported:

- 10% (54) of owners/directors/shareholders in the businesses supported by the development bank in 2020 to 2021 are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
- 3% (36) of owners/directors/shareholders in businesses supported in 2020 to 2021 are under 25 years of age
- 29% (312) of owners/directors/shareholders in businesses supported in 2020 to 2021 are female

Successful implementation of our Anti-racist Wales Action plan will see a fairer employment market, a fairer education and training system, an equalising of racial opportunities and outcomes in health and other social services, plus promotion of active citizenship.

We know that this is just the start of what will be a long process, and that we need our communities' help in creating the anti-racist Wales we all want to live and thrive in.

## **Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women**

The **Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** was adopted in 1979 and came into force in 1981. It was ratified by the UK in 1986.

The Convention focuses on equality between women and men in all areas of life. Discrimination against women is defined as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

The UK has signed CEDAW's optional protocol, which gives individuals and groups of women the right to complain to the Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women about violations of the Convention. It also allows the committee to investigate potentially serious abuses of women's human rights.

### **Gender review**

The Welsh Government Advancing Gender Equality in Wales plan provides us with a framework and a focus through which to address the changing landscape for women in Wales.

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We have committed to fund childcare for more parents in education and training and those on the edge of work. The Childcare Offer gives parents, in particular women, more choice and a greater ability to have both a family and a career.

In December 2021, the Welsh Government presented the first set of our national milestones and indicators in the Senedd (effectively the Welsh Parliament). The Welsh Government has committed to work in social partnership with public sector bodies to eliminate the pay gaps for gender, race and ethnicity by 2050.

The milestone reflects our ambition and aspiration for economic and social justice and our understanding of how equality, diversity and inclusion at work is integral to our broader commitment to fair work for all workers in Wales.

Tackling pay gaps requires consistent action to transform organisational structures, policies and practices. This requires action and commitment within and outside of Government.

Our social partnership approach provides us with opportunities to work with employers and trade unions, to address workplace equality, diversity and inclusion issues, including pay gaps.

## Convention on the Rights of the Child

The **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** (CRC) was adopted in 1989 and came into force in 1990. It was ratified by the UK in 1991.

The Convention grants all children and young people (aged 17 and under) a comprehensive set of rights.

It is the only international human rights treaty to include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It sets out in detail what every child needs to have a safe, happy and fulfilled childhood, regardless of their sex, religion, social origin,

and where and to whom they were born, including the rights to:

- special protection measures and assistance
- access to services such as education and health care
- develop their personalities, abilities and talents to the fullest potential
- grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding
- be informed about and participate in achieving their rights in an accessible and active manner

The UK has signed 2 optional protocols to CRC: on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

However, the UK has not signed the third Optional Protocol, which allows children to bring complaints directly to the Committee on the Rights of the Child so that the Committee can investigate and direct governments to take action.

## **Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)**

The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring all children in Wales have the best possible start in life. That means tackling childhood adversity in all its forms, including adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Our early years, parenting and family programmes play an important role in reducing ACEs and supporting the development of more resilient children. These include Flying Start and Families First, which work to identify children at risk of exposure to ACEs and offer appropriate interventions to address them.

The ACE support hub for Wales was established in 2017 as a centre of knowledge and expertise to help organisations, communities and individuals become ACE informed. It has delivered ACE awareness training to over 600 schools, 1,100 housing officers, 300 ACE Ambassadors, 140 Estyn inspectors

(Inspectorate of Schools in Wales) and challenge advisors, 120 youth workers and 95 youth services 'train the trainers'.

The ACE support hub has supported the development and delivery of a range of the Welsh Government policy areas related to crime and justice, further and higher education, violence against women domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) and diverse communities, including refugees and asylum seekers.

Up to the end of the 2021 to 2022 financial year, we have provided around £2.6 million to the ACE Support Hub for Wales, to help organisations, communities and individuals understand more about ACEs and support families who may be at risk of exposure to them. We also made available an additional £500 thousand in 2021 to 2022 to support community projects aimed at tackling ACEs and building resilience.

We have confirmed a further 3 years of funding for the ACE Support Hub, at £500 thousand for each year from 2022 to 2023 to 2024 to 2025, subject to an agreed work programme.

## **Access to blended learning for children: Hwb**

The Welsh Government remains fully committed to maintaining support for the **Hwb digital learning platform** to ensure that all maintained schools have equitable access to online tools and resources which can be accessed as needed, without the need for geographical boundaries

Hwb provides all pupils and teachers in maintained schools, as well as other education stakeholders, such as trainee and supply teachers, with access to a range of bilingual digital infrastructure, tools and resources including an all-Wales Microsoft Education licensing agreement that is helping to transform digital teaching and learning in Wales.

We have also invested over £180 million, including a further £10 million in 2022 to 2023, to future-proof education technology infrastructure; provided over 216,000 end user devices, and work has begun on refreshing the teaching and learning tools and peripherals across Wales to help deliver the Curriculum for Wales.

Through these initiatives the Welsh Government has provided national foundations capable of supporting and delivering real transformation to the education sector, which will ensure digital is at the heart of the curriculum for Wales.

The impact of the pandemic undoubtedly led to an increased reliance on online services to deliver teaching and learning. Recognising the need for learners, practitioners and families to understand the risks and stay safe online, the Welsh Government continues to work with stakeholders across Wales to provide children and young people with guidance, advice, and practical tips to address online issues.

Through our 'Stay safe. Stay learning' programme, Wales was well positioned to support all learners with remote learning and quickly established support for digitally excluded learners in maintained schools through the foundations established by the Hwb EdTech programme.

The education policy Institute recognised the Welsh Government's digital strategy, existing infrastructure and collaboration with local authorities as key enablers for schools across Wales to deliver digital learning, particularly during the pandemic.

## **Developing a children's charter: Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board**

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, in partnership with organisations and



councils across North Wales, held a number of events and opportunities for young people to help write a children's Charter, and create a lasting difference in areas that matter to them.

A children's charter is a set of standards that organisations work to, to make sure children and young people are treated fairly and have a voice.

The health board's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) and Neurodevelopment Services will be leading on series of events and engagement sessions across North Wales, in partnership with the National Trust Cymru, for young people and children to attend and be involved in creating the charter's standards.

**Children and young people help develop North Wales' Children's Charter Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board ([nhs.wales](https://www.nhs.uk))**, further information on the Betsi Cadwaladr Children's Charter.

## **International convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** was the first human rights treaty of the 21st century. Adopted in 2006, it came into force in 2008 and was ratified by the UK in 2009.

The Convention asserts that disabled people should be able to enjoy their human rights on an equal basis with non-disabled people.

It recognises that disabled people continue, in practice, to face a wide range of barriers, and sets out the measures governments are expected to take to remove them and to ensure that the rights of disabled people are respected. The Convention covers rights in areas such as: health, education, employment,

access to justice, personal security, independent living and access to information.

The UK has ratified the optional protocol to CRPD, which allows people to bring a petition to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities if they:

- believe their Convention rights have been breached
- have exhausted means of redress via the UK or European Courts

This step also gives the Committee authority to undertake enquiries, when reliable information is received, into allegations of grave or systematic violations of convention rights. Such an inquiry was conducted in response to a formal request from disabled people's organisations concerning the cumulative impact of legislation, policies and measures adopted by the UK Government on social security schemes and on work and employment since 2010. The **UN Committee issued its report in 2016** and the **UK published a formal response**.

The Welsh Government recognises the importance of ensuring that disabled people have the right to live independently in accessible and adaptable homes that fully meets their needs.

The Welsh Government remains committed to ensuring that standards, provision, and services linked to the provision of homes meet the diverse needs of disabled people.

The Welsh Government is developing new guidance for local housing market assessments (LHMAs) with local authorities and housing associations. This includes an analysis of the need for homes of key groups (disabled people, those with mental health conditions, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, homeless people, older people, ethnic minority women etc.) within each local authority to understand:

- the availability of appropriate housing

- the estimated future need
- what any shortfall is for each key group

The Welsh Government will provide all local authorities with training and ongoing support. We now also collect data on the provision of around 34,000 adaptations provided to support independent living across Wales each year. The data provides detailed information about the provision and cost of adaptations of different types and will be used to support policy interventions designed to reduce inequities in provision dependent on geography and tenure.

## **Direct payments for social care support**

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, 2014 underpins and encourages the use of direct payments for people who have been assessed as requiring social care services. Direct payments can be used by individuals to meet their care and support needs and daily living activities by employing, for example, personal assistants to support people in employment and those accessing training opportunities.

We know that disabled people are far more at risk of having poorer employment outcomes, which also puts them more at risk of living in poverty. The Welsh Government will use the new network of Disabled People's Employment Champions to help close the gap between disabled people and the rest of the working population.

Their role is to implement the attitudinal changes required to encourage more employers to recognise the benefits of employing disabled people. The champions are disabled people themselves and have lived experience of the barriers faced in gaining employment. All are inspirational role models for individuals and employers alike, to see what can be achieved when the right conditions are in place. Through their conversations with employers, the champions promote the social model of disability to create a culture shift in the

way employers, stakeholders and employability providers in Wales think about disabled people's employment.

## **Access to employment for disabled people**

The Welsh Government's new plan for Employment and Skills, **Stronger, fairer, greener Wales**, was published on 8 March 2022. The plan focusses on supporting people furthest away from the labour market to find work and places a renewed focus on improving labour market outcomes for disabled people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, women, and those with low skills. The plan highlights Welsh Government's commitment to give people the skills and confidence to fulfil their potential in a fast-changing world, no matter what their background or protected characteristics, so they are empowered to make informed choices to find and secure fair work, start a business, switch careers, progress, and overcome barriers along the way. The plan recognises it is vital to raise aspirations and opportunities.

The Welsh Government employer incentive scheme for disabled apprentices is designed to encourage employers to get first-hand experience of the benefits of recruiting disabled people. The incentive scheme, which has already seen more than 6,100 new apprentices recruited since August 2020, had been due to close on 28th February 2022, but will now run to 31 March 2023. The incentive scheme helps businesses to recruit a disabled person and support the development of a diverse workforce.

## **Access to play services for disabled people**

Under section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, every local authority must secure sufficient play opportunities in its area for children, having regard to the 3 yearly sufficiency assessment which it must carry out. As part of the statutory guidance, **Wales: A Play Friendly Country**, Matter B: "The

local authority should aim to offer play opportunities that are inclusive and encourage all children to play and meet together if they wish to.” The play sufficiency assessments should also cover the extent to which play opportunities are accessible to and inclusive of disabled children and may include support to access play opportunities. The play action plans are reviewed each year to monitor progress and set out actions that need to be taken.

## Human rights

The Welsh Government works closely with the UK Government and other devolved administrations to ensure we fulfil our international obligations and comply with the UN Conventions signed and ratified by the UK State party.

The Programme for Government commits us to incorporate both the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Welsh ministers have agreed that both a holistic approach, such as a Welsh Human Rights Bill, and other possible actions in relation to specific issues need to be jointly considered.

Our research into **Strengthening and advancing equality and human rights in Wales research report**, published on 26 August 2021, has explored a range of related issues. The research was led by Swansea University, in collaboration with Bangor University, Diverse Cymru and Young Wales. The report points the way in relation to safeguarding and promoting equality and human rights of individuals and communities in Wales and can help inform our future work.

The Welsh Government’s response to the report was published in May 2022: **Strengthening and Advancing Equality and Human Rights in Wales research report: Welsh Government response**.

The response sets out the main areas of work we will now take forward,

including:

- undertaking preparatory work on options for incorporation of UN conventions into Welsh law
- developing a suite of guidance on human rights
- reviewing the Public Sector Equality Duty regulations
- adding human rights to our integrated impact assessments
- stepping up the way in which we promote these issues in Wales

We are developing a detailed plan of action and timeline to cover all of these streams of work. A new Human Rights Advisory Group has been established to oversee this work. The HRAG is chaired by Welsh ministers and has strong cross-sectoral expertise and representation.

## Well-being of Future Generations

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides a comprehensive approach to sustainable development that mirrors the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and associated Sustainable Development Goals. It provides for seven well-being goals for Wales, which address the four dimensions of sustainable development (environmental, economic, social and cultural), places legal duties on Government and public institutions, establishes local partnerships to improve well-being and institutes the world's first independent Future Generations Commissioner.

Through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and its 7 well-being goals, we have a framework for Wales's future: a Wales that is economically, socially and environmentally just, and a Wales we would want our children and grandchildren to inherit from us.

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government for this Senedd term will maximise Welsh Government's contribution to Wales' collective future and

create a stronger, fairer, greener and more compassionate Wales, addressing the unprecedented challenges we face. It focusses on ways we can improve the lives of people in Wales both now and in the future.

Under the Well-being of Future Generations framework we have a suite of 50 national well-being indicators to measure Wales' progress and have set national milestones to shape Wales' future to 2050.

In 2021 we consulted on the [first wave on national milestones and changes to the national indicators](#). Based on the outcome of this consultation we have added 4 more national indicators and laid the first wave of national milestones.

The additions to the indicator set included new measures on justice, travel, housing costs and digital inclusion, which were all matters that we were told play a larger role in shaping our national well-being than they did before the pandemic.

The expanded national indicator set will continue to help us measure progress towards the 7 well-being goals and our journey towards becoming a fairer, greener, more successful Wales.

The national indicators are designed to represent the desired outcomes for Wales, and its people. These will help demonstrate progress towards the 7 well-being goals. They are not performance indicators for an individual organisation or actions by an individual organisation. They provide a more holistic national picture of what is changing.

Each national indicator has its own interactive page on our [national indicators dashboard](#) and are updated when the data becomes available. More information on the timings can be found in the [schedule](#).

The annual '[Well-being of Wales Report](#)' will be published for the sixth time in September this year, and will report on the 50 [national indicators](#), and for the

first time this year the milestones where data is available.

The **national milestones** are a series of measures against the national indicators that set out our expectations of what the indicators should show in the future. They help us understand whether the national indicators are moving in the right direction and moving us as a nation towards achieving the well-being goals. The first wave of national milestones were laid in December 2021.

The report covers all goals/indicators where data is available. The main points from the summary of the report from last year are below.

- The Welsh labour market continues to perform strongly, with the gap between Wales and the UK narrow in historical terms.
- Young people's (19 to 24 year olds), participation in education and the labour market has increased over the period since the recession of 2008 before levelling off more recently.
- The qualification profile of the Welsh working age population has been improving over time. Attainment in secondary schools has risen in recent years, although children from deprived backgrounds still have poorer outcomes.
- There has been little change in overall relative income poverty levels in Wales for over 15 years, though there has been a slight increase in child poverty in recent years.
- The latest comprehensive assessment of Welsh natural resources **Natural Resources Wales/State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales 2020** shows that overall, biological diversity is declining. Most habitat types have seen a reduction in diversity over the last 100 years, with the rate of decline increasing from the 1970s onwards.
- Wales is a world leader in household recycling, but we continue to use up resources faster than they can be replenished.
- Air quality has improved greatly since the 1970s, however, it remains a risk to human health.
- Greenhouse gas emissions have reduced by nearly a third since the 1990s,



despite some periods of increases. More rapid change will be needed in future to meet Welsh Government targets.

- Installed electrical capacity from renewable energy continues to increase but at a slower pace than in recent years.
- Life expectancy had been rising, although at a slower pace in the past decade. However, it has fallen for the most recent period, reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Healthy life expectancy continues to be worse for those living in more deprived areas, but there is no evidence that the gap is increasing.
- The proportion of babies born with a low birth weight has increased in recent years, following the lowest figures in 2014 and 2015.
- The proportion of children who were up to date with their routine immunisations by four years of age in Wales was 88% this year, the highest since this measure was first reported on.
- Latest data shows the gender pay gap has decreased to 4.3%, an all-time low. Latest data also shows the ethnicity pay gap has decreased. On average, employees from ethnic minority groups earn around 1.4% less per hour than white employees, although there are large differences among different ethnic minorities.
- In the latest year there has been a substantial increase in community cohesion. However, it is too early to tell if this is the beginning of a sustained trend.
- There has been an increase in people feeling that they can influence decisions in their local area which appears to reverse a downward trend seen in the previous two sets of results.
- Recorded race hate crime incidents fell slightly in 2019 to 2020.
- Prior to the pandemic, there was no change in the share of adults or children regularly taking part in sport. More recently, the pandemic has widened inequalities in sports participation.
- Latest survey data suggests that there are increases in the percentage of people who say they can speak Welsh, but not fluently. Use of the language remains steady.

- Conditions of listed buildings in Wales have generally been stable, but fewer recently assessed monuments are in a stable condition.
- In 2021 the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales has been added to the UNESCO's World Heritage List, becoming the fourth in Wales.

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has published a series of Case Studies on the Commission website. These are included for additional information with the consent of the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales [Case Studies: The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#).

## Equality and Inclusion

The Welsh Government is committed to creating a fairer society, where diversity is valued and respected, where people do not face discrimination and prejudice and a society where everyone can participate, flourish and have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. We published our Strategic Equality Action Plan 2020 to 2024 on 3 April 2020 and keep it under regular review, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our annual report on equality is published and laid each year by the Welsh Government.

At the heart of the 2020 to 2024 Strategic Equality Plan there are three main elements; aims, objectives and actions.

- Long-term aims: these aims are about strengthening and advancing equality and human rights in Wales which we expect to remain relevant beyond the period covered by this plan.
- For each of these long-term aims, we have set a single Welsh Government equality objective for 2020 to 2024. These objectives relate more closely than the long-term aims to the role and powers of the Welsh Government. They are a statutory requirement and support the Welsh Government to meet their public sector equality duties.

- Underpinning each of these objectives are a number of measurable actions which demonstrate how the Welsh Government will achieve its objectives.

## **Examples of key actions to support our equality objectives**

It should be noted that the examples included in this report are not a complete list of everything the Welsh Government has done or will do to achieve our equality objectives.

### **Regional advice network (SEP 2016 to 2020, Objective 2)**

Encouraging the development of regional advice networks has been one of nineteen actions contained within the Welsh Government's current Information and advice action plan.

Six regional advice networks have now been put in place, covering the following regions; North Wales, Mid and West Wales, Swansea Neath Port Talbot, Cwm Taf Morgannwg, Cardiff and Vale and the Gwent region.

The overall aims of the regional advice networks are to ensure that advice providers, planners and funders work together to offer people in need of advice more joined-up services and to ensure that the resources invested are being used to create most impact.

Regional action priorities have been identified by regional network members and include issues such as mapping advice providers, putting in place improved referral procedures, sharing training, including training to support the wellbeing of service providers, and gaining greater insight into what matters to people using advice services.

Regional stakeholder engagement events took place in July 2019, from which steering group members were recruited. Regional advice network steering groups took place in October 2019, with inaugural meetings of full members occurring in November and December 2019 and then quarterly on an ongoing basis.

## **Apprenticeships (SEP 2016 to 2020, Objective 3)**

The Welsh Government has worked to ensure that apprenticeships are accessible to all by focusing on the following areas of activity:

- increasing participation of protected groups in apprenticeships
- instigating a culture change on the programme to embrace diversity
- working with key partners to ensure that apprenticeships associated with ICT Infrastructure delivered programmes address and support those with protected characteristics

We have continued to take forward actions in the Inclusive apprenticeships disability action plan published in December 2018. The practical actions set out in that plan have seen a year on year increase in the number of disabled apprentices, reaching 6.9% in 2019.

The practical actions within the plan that were developed under a number of themes have continued. The themes were:

- marketing and raising awareness
- role models
- incentives motivations
- flexibility of entry and exit criteria
- data and disclosure
- transition onto apprenticeships
- support for individuals

- support for employers
- support for providers

We continue to fund the National Training Federation for Wales (NTFW)'s equality champion who hosts regional equality and diversity meetings for our apprenticeship providers with guest speakers from third sector organisations such as Chwarae Teg, ethnic minorities and youth support team (EYST), the National Autism Team Wales and many others.

We also developed changes to eligibility criteria introducing flexibilities for people with learning disabilities undertaking essential skills qualifications.

## **Diversity and inclusion strategy for public appointments in Wales (SEP 2016 to 2020, Objective 5 and SEP 2020 to 2024, Objective 7)**

- to gather better data (particularly diversity data), and get the right information from that data
- to build a robust public appointment pipeline based on inclusion
- to ensure that we have open and robust and potentially new types of public appointment assessment processes
- to ensure Board members are fully knowledgeable and aware of equality and diversity, particularly in relation to their role and that of their organisation
- to strengthen leadership in relation to inclusion and diversity

The strategy is focused on regulated Boards only, but with the hope, and intention, it will encourage non-regulated bodies and others to adopt good practice.

Initially, the strategy will focus on helping disabled people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds to obtain public appointments. However, the work will cover all protected groups.

## **Community Cohesion in rural areas (SEP 2016 to 2020, Objective 6 and SEP 2020 to 2024, Objective 6)**

Through the 'Welsh Government Rural Communities Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 to 2020' we have encouraged and supported improved conditions for migrant workers and job security through up-skilling. We have also worked to improve ICT literacy and transport access for disadvantaged groups living and working in rural Wales including ethnic minority groups.

The RDP also contains a measure for basic services and village renewal. This was principally delivered via the Rural Community Development Fund (RCDF). Under RCDF the Welsh Government offered grants for eligible interventions designed to prevent and mitigate the impact of poverty in rural communities improving conditions which can lead to future jobs and growth. This can include transport and digital inclusion actions designed to broaden access to employment and training opportunities.

Since the start of the RCDF scheme in late 2015 there have been a total of seven expression of interest (EOI) rounds. There was a range of thematic options available to address problems associated with access to services, digital exclusion, fuel poverty and in-work poverty.

The projects approved are currently under implementation. No further activity is planned under this programme.

## **Rewriting the future and PDG (SEP 2016 to 2020, Objective 1 and SEP 2020 to 2024, Objective 1)**

The Welsh Government has worked to raise the academic attainment of learners from deprived backgrounds through implementation of strategies set out in re-writing the future and its revision, (the Welsh Government's overarching policy

for improving the outcomes of pupils from deprived backgrounds) and an extended Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG).

We remain committed to the PDG for the remainder of this Senedd-Cymru term. This long-term commitment will enable schools to make sustainable, long-term decisions on investment that help identify and address barriers to learning early.

Year on year, we have extended the PDG. It now supports even more of our most vulnerable learners. As well as the free school meals element; the PDG suite now includes looked after children, those in the early years, those in pupil referral units and Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision.

We commissioned Children in Wales to produce a suite of guides for schools covering key aspects in addressing the cost of the school day, including understanding the causes and impact of living in poverty, food and hunger, and school uniforms and are available on Hwb (school children and parent accessible information portal).

## **Affordable housing (SEP 2016 to 2020, Objective 1 and SEP 2020 to 2024, Objective 1)**

The Welsh Government's 2016 work programme '**Taking Wales Forward 2016 to 2021**' included a commitment to deliver an extra 20,000 affordable homes during 2016 to 2021. This commitment included supporting the construction of more than 6,000 homes through the Help to Buy scheme.

Totals from three statistical series contribute to measuring this target.

- Affordable housing, as defined in **Technical Advice Note (TAN) 2**: from 2016 to 2017 to 2020 to 2021, 13,999 additional affordable housing units were delivered across Wales.
- 'Rent to Own : Wales' scheme: from February 2018 to March 2021, 187

additional units were delivered under this scheme.

- ‘Help to Buy: Wales’ scheme: from April 2016 to March 2021, 8,875 purchases have been made under this scheme.

Considering the 3 statistical series described above, just over 23,000 affordable homes were delivered between April 2016 and March 2021, exceeding the 20,000 affordable homes target for the period.

In June 2021, Welsh Government announced the commitment to deliver 20,000 new low-carbon homes for rent in the social sector as part of the 2021 to 2026 Programme for Government. Initial progress in achieving that commitment will be detailed in the next statistical release in this series, provisionally planned for publication in Autumn 2022.

## **Age Friendly Wales (SEP 2016 to 2020, Objective 1 and SEP 2020 to 2024, Objective 3)**

Age Friendly Wales: our strategy for an ageing society, sets out the action we will take to prepare for the future. To reflect the multi-dimensional nature of ageing, we have worked across government departments to address the range of factors that influence how we age from our health and transport systems to the way we socialise, work and care for others.

The strategy aims to change the way we think about ageing. By acknowledging and valuing the contributions of all older people in Wales, we aim reject ageism and work across generations to create an age friendly Wales.

## **BSL charter (SEP 2020 to 2024, Objective 1)**

One of the commitments in our framework ‘Action on disability: the right to independent living’ is to develop a BSL charter for Wales.



We have recently funded the British Deaf Association to undertake an audit of our BSL policies and provision in the Welsh Government.

This work commenced in February 2021 and we are considering publication of the report. The audit assessed the Welsh Government's policies and services; provided a series of recommendations; and outlined a set of proposals for ongoing engagement with the deaf community. This work will now feed into the Disability Rights Taskforce to develop an integrated plan for disabled people in Wales.

The BSL audit will provide a strong basis to consider how BSL support services in Wales might be improved and how BSL skills might be enhanced.

The Welsh Government is considering the practicalities of signing up to the British Deaf Association's BSL Charter. As an organisation this will allow us to lead by example and promote good practice in accessible communications to other organisations and businesses right across Wales.

## **Asylum seekers and refugees**

Wales is a Nation of Sanctuary, we do all we can to provide a warm welcome in the short-term to refugees and asylum seekers, recognising our communities; will be enriched by their skills and experiences.

The Welsh Government funds crucial advice and advocacy services for people seeking sanctuary. The Welsh Refugee Council have recently been awarded funding for a successor service to the existing Welsh Government Asylum Rights Programme which will be in place from 1 April 2022 for at least 3 years.

Our **Sanctuary** website provides refugees and asylum seekers with a range of information on their rights and entitlements, including sections on health, education, and employment. The website uses translation and text-to-speech

software to ensure the site is accessible to a larger number of people seeking sanctuary. We have kept this website up-to-date with information about COVID-19.

We have provided funding to the Welsh Refugee Council and its partners to deliver a pilot scheme which will see free transport costs for asylum seekers in Wales. We will continue to support and encourage local authorities to accommodate those at risk of homelessness, as well as developing hosting arrangements and provision of legal advice.

We are continuing to participate in our effective 'Team Wales' multi-agency approach to provide a very positive welcome to Afghans in Wales and to find sustainable placements throughout Wales. Wales has now welcomed more than 380 people from Afghanistan and work continues to increase this further.

Wales has now welcomed hundreds of people from Afghanistan and over 5,000 people from Ukraine and work continues to support further arrivals. Every Welsh local authority has come forward to pledge their support to the Afghan schemes and all are providing support to Ukrainians under those schemes.

Under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the Welsh Government has developed the 'Super Sponsor' route which has enabled the Welsh Government to sponsor visa applications for the first time. Through this route, we have sponsored over 4,500 individuals to come to Wales without knowing a UK based household and to be safely accommodated in one of our initial accommodation sites whilst vetting is undertaken on any potential longer-term hosts. In addition, we have provided free interpretation services, food, activities and other support to our super sponsor beneficiaries. Meanwhile, we are funding Housing Justice Cymru to deliver support for Homes for Ukraine hosts in Wales and British Red Cross are being funded to deliver support to Ukraine Family Scheme families.

Every Welsh local authority also previously supported the Syrian resettlement scheme and many have continued to support the asylum system day-in-day out

for the last couple of decades. The Home Office has recently announced that all local authorities will be expected to accommodate unaccompanied asylum seeking children and adult asylum seekers and we will work with Welsh local authorities to support this in the coming months.

## **Hate crime**

We fund the National Hate Crime Report and Support Centre, run by Victim Support Cymru, to provide free, confidential support and advocacy to all victims of hate crime, 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Support is provided over the telephone, face-to-face, or virtually. Victim Support Cymru will continue to provide a Wales hate crime support service for at least the next 3 years from 1 April 2022. From then on the service will be known as the “Wales Hate Support Centre”. The national hate crime statistics for 2020 to 2021 showed a 16% increase in recorded hate crime in Wales. The increase is a cause for concern and highlights why our work in this area is required.

## **Community cohesion**

Our community cohesion programme funds 8 teams across Wales to provide front-line support to communities, including more direct engagement to help monitor and mitigate tensions, as well as ongoing awareness raising around hate crime.

Among a wide variety of work, the community cohesion teams have been essential in helping us to build local government commitments to participate in a range of resettlement and asylum dispersal programmes.

## Disabled people

The Disability Equality Forum continues to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to advise Welsh Government on the key issues that affect disabled people in Wales. During the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Minister for Social Justice chaired 8 meetings of the forum, where discussions have taken place on a variety of concerns and developments related to disabled people in Wales. The feedback provided by forum members enabled the Welsh Government to take into consideration the views, experiences and needs of disabled people during this crisis, and as we lead Wales out of lockdown.

In light of the testimony from the Disability Equality Forum, and other data which was emerging about the impact of COVID-19 on disabled people, the Minister for Social Justice commissioned forum members to examine the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on disabled people. The resulting report "Locked Out: Liberating disabled people's lives and rights in Wales beyond COVID-19" was co-produced by Professor Debbie Foster of Cardiff Business School and a Steering Group of those with lived experience, chaired by Rhian Davies, Chief Executive of Disability Wales. The report was published on the 2 July 2021 alongside the Welsh Government's response. The First Minister has established a minister led taskforce to take forward this work to address the inequalities highlighted by the report and oversee the implementation of actions in conjunction with our partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The Welsh Government's Gender Equality Action Plan draws on the recommendations made in Deeds not Words, a review of gender equality in Wales. This report states that a new vision for gender equality in Wales requires an equalities mainstreaming approach which includes gender budgeting as an intrinsic component. Two new gender budgeting pilots commenced in 2022 to complement the initial findings of the personal learning account pilot undertaken previously. In addition, a mainstreaming equality pilot began in January 2022 and will report in September 2022.

## Period dignity

We continue to provide funding to local authorities to provide free period products within schools and communities. Funding is also provided to further education colleges for the same purpose. The funding was increased for financial year 2022 to 2023 in recognition of the looming cost of living crisis. Total funding this year is £3.7 million. Work has completed to develop a Period Dignity Action Plan, the plan will be published in September 2022 alongside a suite of communications materials and a dedicated campaign website.

## Race

Eradicating racism and promoting race equality have always been priorities for the Welsh Government. Our Race Equality Action Plan, an Anti-Racist Wales, is built the values of anti-racism, and calls for zero tolerance of racism in all its guises. The Plan reinforces these values and calls for zero tolerance of racism in all its guises. It is built on open and transparent values, is rights-based, and draws on lived experiences of racism. Co-constructed with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic researchers, policy officials, communities, and other key race stakeholders, the Plan is ambitious but achievable.

Race Equality First will shortly deliver a formal analysis report to help strengthen the Plan, whilst policy leads are revising the draft Plan to refine to ensure we have the right goals and action to deliver an ant-racist Wales by 2030. The Plan is due to be published later this year

## Faith

Faith leaders meet with the First Minister and the Minister for Social Justice twice a year through the Faith Communities Forum (FCF). However, the FCF

met more frequently with the Welsh Government throughout 2020 to 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the Wales FCF, we share a strong understanding of our shared values, working towards the well-being of Wales. This reflects the Welsh Government's commitment to working with faith groups at all levels to promote understanding and foster community cohesion.

## **Gypsies, Roma and Travellers**

We want to ensure local authorities are providing adequate and culturally appropriate sites where there is need. Since we created the duty to identify and meet the need for appropriate accommodation within the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 we have seen well over 200 new pitches either created, or refurbished, many on small, privately-owned family sites. This compares to only a handful of new pitches created between 1997 and 2014.

Between 2015 and 2021, the Welsh Government funded local authorities to build 63 new pitches and refurbish many more. Since April 2021, 78 pitches now have improved access to utilities, 5 new pitches have been constructed and 73 pitches have been improved or refurbished enabling improved site safety.

## **LGBTQ+**

Each February we mark LGBTQ+ history month. It is a chance to celebrate and commemorate the contribution LGBTQ+ people have made to our communities and our country.

We are committed to making Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe which is why we are developing a robust and cross-cutting LGBTQ+ Action Plan, one that strengthens protections for LGBTQ+ people, promotes equality for all and helps coordinate ambitious actions across government and beyond.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a statutory requirement in the Curriculum for Wales framework and is mandatory for all learners aged 3 to 16. It will be implemented in primary schools, maintained nursery schools, and non-maintained nursery settings from September 2022. The RSE Code will ensure that 'all learners can see themselves, their families, their communities and each other reflected across the curriculum and can learn to value difference and diversity as a source of strength'.

We are supporting the provision of evidence on peer-on-peer sexual harassment among young learners, to include aspects covering LGBTQ+ communities

As part of the draft LGBTQ+ Action Plan, the Welsh Government had committed to reviewing provision of healthcare for trans youth in Wales.

We have made new funding available to support grassroots Pride events taking place across Wales this year, as well as establishing a Wales wide Pride Fund for future years.

Progress has also been made in sexual health through the HIV action plan for Wales, published for consultation in June 2022. The Plan aims to reach the target of zero new HIV transmissions by 2030, to tackle stigma and improve the quality of life of people living with HIV.

The Hate Crime in Schools Project aims to equip pupils in over 150 schools with critical thinking skills to enable them to identify misinformation and hateful narratives. WLGA is leading on the delivery of this £530,000 project. Victim Support Cymru will continue to provide a Wales hate crime support service for at least the next 3 years from 1 April 2022.

## **Socio-economic equality**

The Socio-economic Duty came into force in Wales on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. The

Duty requires relevant public bodies, including Welsh Ministers, to give due regard to the need to reduce inequalities experienced as a result of Socio-economic disadvantage, when taking strategic decisions.

The Welsh Government's report **Implementing the Socio-economic Duty: A review of evidence on socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome** was published on 13 October 2021. The report provides a summary of key evidence relating to how socio-economic disadvantage affects the people of Wales. It particularly focuses on how it affects those with protected characteristics as well as communities of place and interest.

In addition, to further support public bodies in meeting with requirements of the Duty, a **progress tracker** tool has been made available to access via the Socio-economic Duty dedicated **website page**.

## **Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence**

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) remains a significant human rights concern in Wales. All types of VAWDASV, particularly domestic abuse, have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (the VAWDASV Act) was a ground-breaking piece of legislation and has led to other UK nations turning to Wales for best practice. Implementation of the VAWDASV Act has led to increased training, stronger guidance, practice change and clear strategic direction throughout the Welsh public service, all impacting on the lives of those affected.

The Welsh Government published its first **National Strategy on VAWDASV for 2016 to 2021** and later published a **Delivery Framework (2018 to 2021)**, which sets out how the Government will meet commitments made in the National



Strategy. The National Strategy for 2022 to 2026 is currently in development.

The Welsh Government has also published a comprehensive suite of guidance and toolkits for schools, local authorities, local health boards and regional commissioners, informed by stakeholders and survivors. In May 2019, the Welsh Government published its **statutory guidance for the commissioning of VAWDASV services in Wales** to support the commissioning of evidence based and integrated interventions by VAWDASV services.

In September 2021, the Welsh Government published **Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: research with survivors**. A range of communications campaigns have been carried out to raise awareness of what VAWDASV is, challenge attitudes and signpost to help. This includes the 'Home shouldn't be a place of fear' campaign launched in May 2020.

Another aim of the Welsh Government has been to increase awareness in children and young people of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong. As a result of Welsh Government project funding, over 165,000 children and young people in Wales have been educated about healthy relationships. The Welsh Government also funds the Live Fear Free helpline which is a free, 24/7 service in Wales for all victims and survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and those close to them, including family, friends and colleagues.

## **European funding to Member States, horizontal themes, impact of loss of EU funding**

Wales has benefited from European funding with explicit requirements towards gender equality, anti-discrimination and environmental protection (horizontal themes).

European funding programmes in Wales have 'added value' to their main

strategic objectives, through additional requirements and supporting actions.

The picture of integrating the horizontal themes into successive European funding programmes shows steady progress and improvement, progressed through increased awareness and understanding amongst stakeholders, the development of legislation and policies, changes in attitudes, and a clear focus on the importance of the horizontal themes from the European Commission.

Post Brexit, Welsh Ministers were clear that the Framework for Regional Investment in Wales, which has been co-developed with stakeholders and which reflects the distinct regional landscape and strategic priorities for Wales, was the mechanism that should be used to deliver the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

UK Government has decided to utilise the financial assistance powers of the UK Internal Market Act (UKIM Act) to spend in devolved areas, bypassing the Welsh Government, which in turn may mean bypassing any commitment to the horizontal themes. While the Community Renewal Fund does refer to 'due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty', it is unclear what consideration has been given to equality when making the final decisions on the portfolio of approved projects.

The Senedd withheld consent to the UKIM Act in December 2020, and the Welsh Government is challenging aspects of the Act by way of Judicial Review. The Welsh Government has not identified grounds for legal challenge of the financial assistance powers, but Welsh Ministers have been clear that this does not justify the actions of the UK Government on these funds.

Brexit and the diminishment of EU funds coming into Wales pose a significant risk to the future delivery of the horizontal themes. In a recent research paper addressing the question, what will we do without the European Union? (Nov 2020) Dr Rachel Minto and Dr Alison Parken from Cardiff University, suggest there is a significant risk of rollback of more socially sensitive economic development if Welsh actors no longer have access to European funds and

funding requirements. “If the UK government has control over these funds, it is unlikely that their aims will meet the social justice agenda set out by the Welsh Government in relation to the economy”.

## **Equality and Inclusion Funding Programme**

Our Equality and Inclusion Programme has long been at the heart of our work in this area, providing support and service for diverse communities and key groups through representative organisations with appropriate expertise. We have provided significant investment in this way and intend to continue doing so.

The current E and I programme commenced in April 2017 to support our equality objectives for 2016 to 2020. It funds 7 organisations to provide support to individuals and communities across Wales in relation to gender, disability, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers, sexual orientation and gender identity, race and hate crime. The scheme has been extended to 31 March 2023 to enable development of successor arrangements.

## **Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units**

The Welsh Government recognises that reliable and useable evidence is essential to understand the systemic inequalities citizens in Wales face and address the often deep rooted issues which adversely impact those with protected characteristics. The Welsh Government has established three distinct Units, each with their own evidence programme and lead.

- Equality Evidence Unit
- Race Disparity Evidence Unit
- Disability Disparity Evidence Unit

The Units’ mission is to improve the availability, quality, granularity and

accessibility of evidence about individuals with protected and associated characteristics so that we fully understand the level and types of inequalities across Wales. This will enable decision makers to develop better informed policies and to assess and measure their impact. This will drive us towards better outcomes for people with protected and associated characteristics and contribute to our goal of 'a more equal Wales' as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The three Units work together as the Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units with an overarching Equality Evidence Strategy to ensure synergy, effectiveness, efficiency and cohesion. Draft research priorities for each Unit have been developed with stakeholders based on commitments already made and emerging requirements from the Anti-Racist Wales action Plan; Advancing Gender Equality plan; LGBTQ+ Action Plan; Disability Rights Taskforce; Inclusive Data Taskforce and other Welsh Government plans and strategies.

The strategy and initial priorities will be published by Autumn 2022, so that key stakeholders can see the intentions for the Units and get involved in prioritisation. These will be live documents as it is expected they will evolve over time.

Data and statistics relevant to this report are provided in [Well-being of Wales report](#).

The report is due to be updated in September 2022.

## **Poverty: tackling poverty**

Through our Programme for Government, we have set out our commitment to protect, re-build and develop our services for vulnerable people and improve outcomes for low-income households. This includes continuing support for our flagship Flying Start programme; and additional funding for childcare where

parents are in education and training.

## **The Wales Delivery Plan for Financial Wellbeing (WDP)**

The Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) launched the [UK Strategy for Financial Wellbeing](#) in Wales in March 2020. The Wales Delivery Plan was developed collaboratively between MaPS, WG, policy experts, regulators and those with a passion for improving Financial Wellbeing.

Recovery phase activities in the [Wales Delivery Plan](#) for those most in need and vulnerable groups will form the focus of delivery between 2021 to 2023. A review phase between 2023 to 2024 has been built in to ensure that, throughout its 10 year lifespan, deliverables in the Wales Delivery Plan remain flexible and relevant for the future. Equivalent documents covering Scotland, England and Northern Ireland will be published simultaneously.

## **Food poverty**

For the last 3 financial years, £2 million EU Transition funding has been allocated to support community food organisations to increase their reach and build their resilience. The funding supported organisations to manage an increase in demand by strengthening local food initiatives, including focussing on activity that helps to address the root causes of food poverty.

Funding was also used, for example, to provide specialist support for initiatives such as outreach work, training for volunteers (for example food handling qualifications) and to build community resilience through the development of community hubs which co-locate a range of support services such as debt and housing advice, social enterprises and advice services, built around community food provision such as holiday hunger schemes, food banks and community cafes.

A further £1.1 million was allocated under the Household Support Fund to support community food organisations to meet increased demand as a result of the cost of living crisis.

In 2022 to 2023, the Welsh Government has allocated £3.9m to support action which tackles the root causes of food poverty and increases activity which addresses food insecurity.

## Fuel poverty

The Welsh Government's plan to **tackle fuel poverty 2021 to 2035** was published in March 2021. The targets are realistic and achievable over the next fifteen years (by 2035):

- no households estimated to be living in severe or persistent fuel poverty
- no more than 5% of households estimated to be living in fuel poverty at any one time
- the number of households “at risk” of falling into fuel poverty will be halved by more than 50% (based on the 2018 estimate)

## Household support fund including take up of winter fuel payment

On 16 November 2021, the Welsh Government announced a £51.7 million package of funding to help low income households meet the pressures on living costs this winter. The aim is to reduce the impact of the cut to Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit and the rising cost of energy.

£38million has been made available to support households through a Winter Fuel Support Scheme. The scheme opened on 13 of December and will directly support households to cover their energy costs and keep their homes warm this

winter.

As of 22 February data from the 22 Welsh local authorities is showing over 192,000 applications have been received and 145,770 applications have been paid.

## **Response to the cost of living crisis**

Since November 2021, we have announced £380 million funding to help Welsh households manage the cost of living crisis.

## **Household Support Fund**

In November 2021, the Welsh Government allocated £51 million Household Support Fund to help mitigate the impacts of the cost of living crisis. This package of support was targeted at people who need help the most and included:

- a Winter fuel support payment: a £200 cash payment for people and families on low incomes to help them pay their energy bills this winter
- £1.1 million provided to support foodbanks, community food partnerships and community hubs

## **Discretionary Assistance Fund**

As part of the 2022 to 2023 final budget, a further £15 million was made available for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF). This will help extend flexibilities until March 2023, ensuring more people receive emergency financial support when they need it. This figure is in addition to the fund budget uplift of £7 million per annum for the next three years.

DAF support for off-grid households, which are unable to afford their next delivery of oil or LPG due to extreme financial hardship has been extended through the summer and winter to the end of March 2023. This will help those households with up to £250 for a one off oil payment or up to 3 payments of £70 for LPG.

## A further package of support

After OFGEM announced increases to the domestic energy cap, Minister for Finance and Local Government, Rebecca Evans, unveiled a £330 million cost of living package of support, which goes beyond that announced by the UK Government.

A £150 cost-of-living payment will be provided to all households in properties in council tax bands A to D and to all households, which receive support from the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in all council tax bands.

- More than 332,000 households across Wales have already received their £150 payment.
- This goes further than the UK Government's announcement of a £150 payment for households in council tax bands A to D in England.
- Scheme has already issued £152 million worth of support.

A further £25 million will be provided as a discretionary fund for local councils, to help households which may be struggling.

The remainder of the funding is being invested in a range of other schemes to help people with the costs of living, including an extra £21.4 million to extend free school meals through the Easter, Whitsun and summer holidays in 2022.

£90 million has been made available to run another Welsh Government Fuel Support Scheme in 2022 to 2023 which will support people on low incomes with



a non-repayable £200 payment towards their energy bills. The scheme will launch on 26 September and has been extended to support more households with vital support.

On 10 June, we announced nearly £4 million of funding which will enable the Fuel Bank Foundation to introduce a national fuel voucher and heat fund scheme in Wales for households that have to prepay for their fuel.

The scheme will commence in the Autumn and will provide direct financial support to eligible households on prepayment meters and those not connected to the mains gas network who are struggling to prepay for their fuel and are at risk of disconnection.

## **Income maximisation**

A second national 'Claim What's Yours' benefit take up campaign has been completed. Over 8,000 people responded to campaign's call to action to contact Advicelink Cymru and have been helped to claim over £2.1 million of additional income.

A programme of training for frontline workers is delivering increased advice and support on welfare benefits through existing family support models.

A programme of targeted tailored messages and support is encouraging take-up amongst groups least likely to claim all the financial support they are entitled to.

## **Warm Homes Programme**

Since 2010 to the end of March 2021, more than £394 million has been invested to improve home energy efficiency through the Warm Homes Programme, benefitting more than 67,100 lower income households. More than 160,800

people have received energy efficiency advice through the Warm Homes Programme since its launch in 2011.

## Advice Services

This year over £11 million has been made available for Welsh Government's Single Advice Fund services. These services are a lifeline for people struggling with the cost of living, helping them to maximising their income and deal with their debts.

Since January 2020, Single Advice Fund services have helped 127,000 people deal with over 602,000 social welfare problems. Those helped were supported to claim additional income of £75 million and had debts totalling £22 million written off.

Since November 2021, we have announced £380 million funding to help Welsh households manage the cost-of-living crisis.

In November 2021, the Welsh Government allocated £51 million Household Support Fund to help mitigate the impacts of the cost of living crisis. This package of support was targeted at people who need help the most and included a Winter Fuel Support Payment offering a £200 cash payment for people and families on low incomes to help them pay their energy bills this winter. A further £1.1 million was provided to support foodbanks, community food partnerships and community hubs.

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## **Child poverty**

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 provides the legislative framework for tackling child poverty in Wales. It places a duty on Welsh Ministers and named public bodies to publish a Child Poverty Strategy which sets out objectives for tackling child poverty and the actions they will take to

achieve the objectives.

Our Child Poverty Strategy, published in 2015, sets out the Welsh Government's objectives for tackling child poverty through a continued focus on what we know works well using the levers available to us. The objectives focus on reducing the number of children living in workless households, increasing the skills of parents and young people, reducing inequalities in education, health and economic outcomes, creating a strong economy and labour market and action to increase household income.

While the objectives still remain relevant, the Minister for Social Justice has given a commitment to refresh the Strategy given the impact of our exit from the EU and the pandemic on levels of poverty.

## **Discretionary Assistance Fund**

We have made available an additional £14.7 million for the current financial year 2021 to 2020 so that we can continue our COVID related flexibilities.

These flexibilities allow an increased number and greater frequency of payments where COVID is a factor, and have now been extended to include people impacted by the withdrawal of the Universal Credit £20 uplift from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021.

In addition, a further £15 million is being made available for 2022 to 2023 to extend the support to those continuing to experience extreme financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the current, significant cost of living crisis. This funding will also allow for the extension of flexibilities, providing more frequent payments for more people as well as support with energy costs for off-grid homes across the summer months as well as the winter, including support for Gypsies and Travellers.

## Children and education

### Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020

The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020 came into force on 21 March 2022. The aim of the Act is to help protect children and their rights by prohibiting the physical punishment of children by parents and those acting in the place of a parent. Its intended effect, together with an awareness-raising campaign and support for parents, is to bring about a further reduction in the use and tolerance of physical punishment of children in Wales.

The law change is consistent with the Welsh Government's commitment to children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It gives children the same protection from assault as adults and will make the law clearer easier for children, parents, professionals and the public to understand. All types of physical punishment of children, such as smacking, hitting, slapping and shaking, have been made illegal.

### Free school meals

We are proud of our record on delivering free school meal provision for pupils in Wales and we are committed to building on that provision. To that end, we announced on 22 November 2021 a Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru which commits us to extend free school meals to all primary school pupils, over the lifetime of the agreement. Since the start of the pandemic, the Welsh Government has provided an additional £83.3 million for free school meals, £60 million in 2020 to 2021 and £23.3million in 2021 to 2022. This includes funding to provide free school meals during school holidays and for those learners

unable to attend school as a result of pandemic-related disruption. The provision of a free meal during the holiday for eligible pupils will continue to the end of the summer 2022.

## **Looked after children: improving educational outcomes**

We have supported looked after children in education by some £5 million annually through Pupil Deprivation Grant for Looked After Children (PDG-LAC). The Regional Education Consortia administer this grant in collaboration with local authorities and schools. PDG-LAC funding is based on £1,150 per looked after child; however, the funding is not ring-fenced for each child. This approach enables Consortia, working with partners, to determine the most effective, strategic interventions to support care experienced young people regardless of care or school placement changes.

## **Childcare Offer**

We recognise that affordable, available and accessible childcare enables parents to work, supporting our drive to increase economic growth, tackle poverty and reduce inequalities.

In line with our Programme for Government commitment to fund childcare for more families where parents are in education and training or on the edge of work, the Childcare Offer has now been extended to include parents enrolled in Higher or Further Education Courses. There were over 18,200 children taking up the Childcare Offer in June 2022.

We have continued to support our Flying Start programme, and have started to deliver our phased expansion of early years provision for all 2 year olds, with a focus on Welsh medium provision.

## Early childhood education and care

In 2019 we launched our vision for Early childhood education and care (ECEC) which will reform the provision of early education and care in Wales to ensure that every child gets the best possible start in life. The aim of our ECEC programme is to bring together a number of policy aims into a single system in recognition of the sometimes confusing childcare landscape. This will take time, but it is our intention to ensure all children can access high quality provision in their early years.

The Welsh Government has embarked upon a 10 year journey to achieve these aims. Work on a Quality Framework to enshrine principles of quality and to support practitioners and parents is in development.

## Families First

Families First is designed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. It places an emphasis on early intervention, prevention, and providing support for whole families, rather than individuals. The programme works with the whole family to stop problems from escalating towards crisis.

Families First is 1 of 6 programmes within the Children and Communities Grant (CCG) which focus upon early intervention and prevention. Flying Start is also included in the CCG. We have provided an additional £40 million revenue up to 2024 to 2025 for early help and support, including for Families First, recognising the importance of supporting more children and families across Wales.

## Flying Start

Flying Start is the Welsh Government's flagship early years programme. It

continues to make a real difference to the lives of children under four in some of our most disadvantaged communities.

The target to double the reach of Flying Start to 36,000 children by 2016 was met a year early when the programme delivered to 37,260 in 2014 to 2015. Despite the significant disruption to Flying Start services during the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020 to 2021, 31,832 children benefited from Flying Start services. The Welsh Government is committed to maintaining this important programme.

## **Curriculum for Wales: relationships and sexuality education (RSE)**

Safeguarding all our young people and supporting them to navigate the complex area of relationships and sexuality education is vital. Schools and settings have an important role to play in creating safe and empowering environments in supporting learners' rights to enjoy fulfilling, healthy and safe relationships throughout their lives.

Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is a statutory requirement in the Curriculum for Wales framework and is mandatory for all learners aged 3 to 16. It will be implemented in primary schools, maintained nursery schools, and non-maintained nursery settings from September 2022. It will ensure that 'all learners can see themselves, their families, their communities and each other reflected across the curriculum and can learn to value difference and diversity as a source of strength'.



# Employment

## Code of Practice: ethical employment in supply chains

The Code was devised in 2017 as a Welsh Government response to the UK Modern Slavery Act 2015 with a focus was on ensuring public sector organisations were taking steps to reduce the risks of modern slavery and exploitation in their supply chains.

The Code sets out 12 commitments which signatory organisations are expected to uphold. The Code commitments include addressing unethical and unlawful practices such as blacklisting, false self-employment, and unfair use of zero-hours contracts. The Code commitments also include consideration of paying the real Living Wage and becoming an accredited real Living Wage employer.

Since its publication in 2017, over 400 organisations have signed up to the Code. This includes over 50 public sector organisations.

## Fair work

Work is continuing to introduce the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill. If passed, this will introduce new social partnership and socially responsible public procurement duties.

We have established the Social Care Fair Work Forum to improve working conditions in social care, a national Health and Safety Forum to improve the approach to health and safety at work, and a Retail Forum of Welsh Government, trade unions and employer representatives to develop a shared vision for a sustainable and resilient retail sector that offers fair, secure and rewarding work.

## Social partnership

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to legislate to put social partnership on a statutory footing in Wales.

The Welsh Government consulted on a draft Bill in the Spring of 2021. A new Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill will be introduced in the Senedd this year. The Bill will fulfil the Programme for Government commitment by establishing a statutory Social Partnership Council (SPC), a tripartite body of Welsh Ministers, trade unions, and public and private sector employers. The Bill will also include provisions relating fair work, to socially responsible procurement, and to new social partnership duties on certain public bodies and on Welsh Ministers.

## Advice and advocacy services

The Welsh Government has a longstanding commitment to supporting information and advice services to enable the most vulnerable people in our society to access the free and impartial advice that they need to resolve problems with their housing, welfare benefits, employment and managing their financial commitments. It is more important than ever that we have a social welfare advice sector in Wales where resources are used as effectively as possible and quality assured providers are delivering services targeted at people in our communities who need them most.

## Pandemic interventions

In March 2020 legislation was passed to provide emergency powers to respond to the Covid-19 outbreak in Wales. This subsequently became the **Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020**.

In April 2020, the Welsh Government **published its plans** for how restrictions related to Covid-19 would be eased as infection rates in the population of Wales decreased. To enable recovery, the Welsh Government set out a framework for assessing the evidence on current infection rates, whether any proposed changes would affect these and how the public health surveillance and response would be enhanced to prevent infection and track the virus as restrictions were eased.

The Welsh Government published its '**Test, Trace, Protect**' (TTP) strategy, in May 2020, informed by expert public health advice. TTP launched on 1 June to identify people suspected of having COVID-19, trace individuals who had been in close contact with a person who had tested positive and provide advice and guidance.

Since changes that ease formal restrictions could lead to an increase in transmission of the virus, every 'easement' of a restriction was informed by scientific expertise and the international evidence.

The need to focus on the most vulnerable in society, as well as the societal inequalities thrown into sharp focus by COVID-19, were important considerations in easement plans which were developed.

The continued approach to carefully easing restrictions and safeguarding people in Wales was explained further in the **Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales**, published in August 2020. This outlined how the impacts of the restrictions and the relaxations would be monitored using a number of indicators and explained that controlling COVID-19 was a collective effort, with everyone having a role to play.

Between March 2020 and April 2022, the Welsh Government delivered more than a quarter of a million grants worth more than £2.6billion to support Welsh businesses to help them survive and to protect their employees. Welsh Government financial support was designed to add value and fill the gaps

around UK Government national schemes such as loans, job retention, self-employment support. The main economic funding interventions have been the Economic Resilience Fund (ERF) and the Cultural Recovery Fund (CRF), as well as Non-Domestic Rates linked grants (NDR) and local discretionary funds that were delivered via local authorities, in addition to business rates relief.

Throughout the pandemic Business Wales continued to be available to support businesses through a range of support options during the crisis and beyond with post COVID-19 support. The Business Wales Helpline has provided practical information, advice and sign posting to businesses experiencing issues because of COVID-19, such as supply chain delays or staffing matters. Business Wales also adapted its advisory support services so that all advice could be provided virtually, digitally or by telephone to support businesses across Wales. In addition a series of live webinars were developed to address the challenges faced by businesses.

The Development Bank of Wales also played a key role in helping businesses in Wales manage the challenges presented by COVID-19 by providing loan and equity funding to Welsh businesses.

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