



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Cabinet Sub-Committee on Cost of Living meeting: 15 May 2023

Minutes of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Cost of Living
meeting on 15 May 2023.

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Present

- Mark Drakeford MS
- Jane Hutt MS (Chair)
- Rebecca Evans MS
- Jeremy Miles MS
- Hannah Blythyn MS
- Julie Morgan MS (part meeting)

External attendees

- Susan Lloyd-Selby, Trussell Trust
- Cllr Andrew Morgan, WLGA
- Naomi Alleyne, WLGA
- Ruth Marks, WCVA
- Abdul-Azim Ahmed, Muslim Council for Wales
- Tom Lee, Child Poverty Action Group
- Paul Butterworth, Chambers Wales (part meeting)

Officials

- Des Clifford, Director Office of the First Minister
- Rebecca Dunn, Head of Cabinet Division
- Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser
- Ian Butler, Special Adviser
- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser
- Kate Edmunds, Special Adviser
- Philippa Marsden, Special Adviser
- David Hooson, Special Adviser
- Jo-Anne Daniels, Director General Education, Social Justice and Welsh

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Language

- Reg Kilpatrick, Director General, COVID-19 recovery and Local Government
- Nick Wood, Deputy Chief Executive NHS Wales
- Amelia John, Interim Director Communities and Tackling Poverty
- Jo Salway, Director Social Partnership and Fair Work
- Andrew Jeffreys, Director Welsh Treasury
- Emma Watkins, Deputy Director Budget and Government Business
- Jonathan Price, Chief Economist
- Toby Mason, Head of Strategic Communications
- Catrin Sully, Cabinet Office
- Neil Buffin, Legal Services
- Liz Lalley, Director, Recovery & Re-start
- Emma Spear, Deputy Director, H&SS
- Christopher W Morgan, Head of Cabinet Secretariat
- Damian Roche, Cabinet Secretariat (Minutes)
- James Burgess, Acting Deputy Director, Cost of Living
- Heather O'Sullivan, Cost of Living Team
- David Willis, Head of Tackling Poverty

Apologies

- Eluned Morgan MS
- Lynne Neagle MS

Item 1: Introduction and minutes of previous meeting

1.1 Croesawodd y Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol partneriaid i'r cyfarfod. The Minister for Social Justice welcomed all partners to the meeting.

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1.2 The minister also welcomed Paul Butterworth from Chambers Wales to the meeting, and thanked Paul Slevin for his contribution to the committee.

1.3 The minister set out the focus of the meeting, which would be on food poverty. Food prices had been a major contributor to inflation, which remained high, and this was placing significant pressure on households already struggling.

1.4 The sub-committee agreed the minutes of 27 March / Cytunodd y Pwyllgor cofnodion o 27 Mawrth.

Item 2: Update on future of this committee and work of the Expert Group

2.1 The Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip provided partners with an update on the future of the sub-committee and the Cost of Living Expert Group.

2.2 It was noted that the sub-committee had been extremely valuable since its introduction, bringing ministers together to co-ordinate action across delivery partners. Allied to this had been the opportunity to hear from partners and other expert speakers about how the crisis impacted people and organisations on the ground, which had provided invaluable insights.

2.3 It was clear the cost-of-living crisis was far from over, so meetings would continue throughout the summer term, but at a reduced frequency given the time pressures on diaries. Ministers would meet again in June, followed by a further meeting with partners in July.

2.4 A watching brief would be maintained throughout the summer recess, prior to a final decision being taken about future meetings, depending on the situation at the time.

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2.5 The minister thanked all partners for their ongoing commitment and time spared to attend and contribute.

2.6 In relation to the Expert Group, ministers and some partners would be meeting with the group on 24 May and again on 8 June, prior to final recommendations being submitted to the Welsh Government.

2.7 The sub-committee noted the update.

Item 3: Presentation on food poverty in Wales from Susan Lloyd-Selby, Trussell Trust

3.1 The Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip invited Susan Lloyd-Selby from the Trussell Trust to present the latest information about food poverty in Wales.

3.2 It was reported that between April 2022 – March 2023, 24,000 families had been forced to turn to one of the 114 foodbanks in the Trussell Trust network in Wales for the first time, which represented a 37% increase in the number of families using foodbanks for the first time compared to the same period in 2021/22. These families amounted to over 56,000 people.

3.3 It was noted that providing cost of living payments had correlated with a reduction in need in Wales, but this was short-lived, and all nations and regions had seen an increase in need this year, with those most impacted being single adults and single parents, households with children, unpaid carers & people with ill health or a disability or another protected characteristic.

3.4 It was clear that foodbanks were witnessing increasing demand and deepening hardship across Wales, with evidence of people attending foodbanks who were starving, had no heating, or without access to basic supplies like

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kettles and microwaves. Decisions were being taken about whether people should be provided with no cook or low cook requirement parcels.

3.5 In terms of donations meeting demand, there had been an increase in donations compared to last year, but meeting further increases in demand could become an issue given that every foodbank had provided more stock than received in donations between January and April, and almost every foodbank was buying food.

3.6 The Trust was making emergency grant funding available for foodbanks to purchase food and to increase administration staffing, but it was uncertain whether this would be enough if food inflation continued to rise at its current pace.

3.7 Polling by YouGov, on behalf of the Trussell Trust, suggested the public were increasingly concerned with issues related to poverty and hunger in the UK.

3.8 In response to the poll, a majority considered that foodbanks should not be required in the UK, with a strong majority agreeing that everyone should be able to buy enough food for themselves and their family.

3.9 The public were also in agreement that solving the issue of poverty and hunger could not be done using foodbanks, as these did not solve the root causes of poverty. Ensuring everyone had enough money for basic needs should be a high priority for the UK government

3.10 To that end, the Trust had launched their latest campaign, 'Guarantee Our Essentials'. This included some key policy 'asks' of the UK and Welsh Government.

3.11 It would be necessary to campaign for the UK government to provide a long-term commitment that benefit rates would always be sufficient for people to

be able to afford the essentials. Therefore, the Trust was calling on the UK Government to enshrine in law the principle that at a minimum, Universal Credit should protect people from going without essentials.

3.12 In addition, effective local crisis support also had a role to play and the UK Government should set out a long-term strategy for local crisis support and commit to a multi-year funding settlement.

3.13 In terms of the 'asks' of the Welsh Government, the Trust would like to see a Wales specific national plan developed to reduce and prevent the need for emergency food aid.

3.14 There was a call to implement the Bevan Foundation's recommendations on a common approach to Welsh benefits, and to support the introduction of an Essentials Guarantee by the UK government.

3.15 The sub-committee noted that foodbank use was worryingly high in Wales, but was increasing across the UK and particularly in the North East of England.

3.16 It was noted that foodbanks in Rhondda Cynon Taff were reporting a 15% increase in use, and the amount spent on buying produce was increasing significantly with fears that demand could outstrip supply in certain areas later in the year.

3.17 The point was made that advice services and 'making the contacts count' work was ongoing at foodbanks across Wales, with a £1.7 million investment from the Trussell Trust, but there was always more that could be done.

3.18 It was imperative that local authorities worked together to signpost via their websites, and to collaborate on delivering automatic payments wherever possible to those in need and more widely in terms of joining up offerings across Wales.

3.19 The sub-committee noted the good work ongoing between faith networks,

warm hubs and information being shared through the County Voluntary Council network and that the UKG would be pressed through the civil society network to provide adequate Universal Credit to cover the essentials.

3.20 The sub-committee thanked Susan Lloyd-Selby for the presentation and partners for their contributions.

Item 4: Update from partners on food poverty

4.1 The minister invited social partners to provide updates from their respective organisations on the food poverty situation.

4.2 The good work ongoing in schools was highlighted as a positive, with the 'Big Bocs Bwyd' scheme and various food clubs for those who were on the cusp of requiring support. It was anticipated the number of these families would increase and were a hidden statistic at present.

4.3 There was feedback from the Muslim community about demand for particular types of food items changing, for cheaper ingredients that had a longer shelf life. This was concerning given the aim to provide a balanced and nutritious diet through food support, but not unexpected given the drive by supermarkets to reduce their surplus waste.

4.4 In addition, there were logistical issues with storing food and the manpower required to transport and store large quantities of fresh supplies.

4.5 It was noted that in 2022-23, £5.9 million had been allocated by the Welsh Government to support community food organisations to overcome barriers to accessing, storing and distributing additional supplies of good quality food, including good food surplus. It had also enabled them to purchase products such as baby milk and items such as hot water bottles as well as other essential

goods that supported well-being, healthy diets and personal dignity.

4.6 Initiatives such as baby banks and uniform banks were also being supported, in addition to providing support for initiatives which could help families save money on food by building their food knowledge and skills.

4.7 It was clear there was a disproportionate impact on communities, with those from diverse backgrounds often attending foodbanks outside their own area to avoid being stigmatised.

4.8 The lack of sufficient household income was a key driver for food poverty and the Discretionary Assistance Fund and other local authority funding support was vital to provide people with some respite and to ensure they had choices and could maintain their personal dignity. The commitment to rollout Free School Meals in the autumn was a welcome step by the Welsh Government.

4.9 It was suggested that reaching vulnerable individuals was key, and Town and Community Councils played a vital role with their local community contacts. They would also assist in making the links between allotment holders who might be willing to donate any excess produce held at this time of year.

4.10 It was reported that since 2019, the Welsh Government had allocated over £15 million to support community food organisations to tackle food poverty and provide a wider range of services to help individuals and households maximise their income and build financial resilience.

4.11 The Welsh Government was building on its action to tackle the root causes of food poverty by focussing additional resource on prevention, sustainability and resilience.

4.12 To this end, cross-sector food partnerships had been established in each local authority area. The funding was also supporting the co-ordination of on the ground, food-related activity, drawing in help and expertise from other services

such as Public Health Wales, Welsh housing associations and advice services, to understand and address local need. This would help maximise the effectiveness of projects.

4.13 In addition, work was ongoing on the Community Food Strategy to bring together the various strands of delivery and consideration was being given to taking forward the recommendations in the Bevan Foundation Welsh Benefits Report, published the previous month.

4.14 The sub-committee thanked all partners for their feedback.

Cabinet Secretariat
May 2023

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