



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

POLICY AND STRATEGY, DOCUMENT

# Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2024

Our updated strategy to help prevent and mitigate child poverty.

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# Contents

**Ministerial foreword**

**Introduction**

**How we developed this strategy**

**Objective 1**

**Objective 2**

**Objective 3**

**Objective 4**

**Objective 5**

**How we will monitor and report on our progress**

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# Ministerial foreword

The Welsh Government is committed to tackling child poverty as an absolute priority. We will continue to use all the levers we have available to the full extent possible, and we will take a leadership role in co-ordinating wider action to work towards eradicating child poverty and its impacts here in Wales.

Through our [consultation on this strategy](#) and our wider engagement work, we have heard about how poverty is impacting children, young people, families and communities across Wales. People also told us about the significant efforts underway in communities, third sector organisations, faith groups and public bodies to tackle the impacts of both the cost-of-living crisis and poverty more broadly.

We have also heard clearly that many of the policies and plans we have in place are the right ones, but that in order to maximise the difference we can make, we need to be more focused on delivery and we need to be smarter about working together both across government and with other partners to deliver Made in Wales solutions. We also need to be clearer about how we will put in place robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms to track progress against key indicators on child poverty.

The combined impacts of austerity, the UK's exit from the European Union (EU), the COVID-19 pandemic, stubbornly high inflation and global instability mean we are publishing this strategy amid the toughest financial situation since devolution began. It is therefore important for this strategy not only to recognise the reality of today's challenge but also to set out a framework through which future decisions will be taken. We must embed the priorities and objectives of this strategy across the whole of government to ensure tackling child poverty is at the heart of decision-making throughout the lifetime of this strategy and beyond.

As Welsh Ministers exercising our duty of due regard to the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), we must ensure we deliver for all children and young people. We want a Wales where all children can have the best possible start in life, through a happy and healthy childhood and opportunities to achieve their aspirations. This must also mean taking an intersectional approach where we tackle all forms of discrimination, including discrimination related to gender, race, disability and sexuality.

We must also recognise that the major financial levers and economic decisions which can help to tackle poverty are reserved. Since 2010, Welsh Ministers have consistently called on the UK Government to make fairer decisions which prioritise the needs of those who have the least, and we will continue to do so.

The scale of the challenge we face should not be understated and our collective efforts must continue to be focused on the interests of the children and young people of today and of the future. It is only through strong cross-government working to support effective collaboration at the regional and local levels that we can work together to deliver on the rights of all children and young people of Wales.

Jane Hutt MS.

Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip.

## Introduction

This strategy reflects the feedback people gave us during the consultation on the draft. Overwhelming, people agreed that the objectives and priorities were the right ones.

The strategy sets the direction for Welsh Government actions to tackle child poverty over the next decade or more and to meet our ambitions for children and

young people in Wales, no matter what their circumstances or background. It also provides a framework to maximise the levers we have at our disposal to make our contribution to eradicating child poverty.

The strategy seeks to ensure stronger integration across our national policies, programmes and action plans and to support collaboration at the regional and local levels. This will deliver our ambition to achieve greater equity of experience and outcome for all children and young people.

However, the strategy cannot be considered in isolation and is by no means a stand-alone document. The ambitions set out here take into account a number of important legislative duties placed on Welsh Ministers and will influence and inform our policies, plans and programmes across government now and for years to come.

The strategy does not seek to set out, or re-state all of the actions that the current government is taking. Other documents already detail the actions we are committed to in the Programme for Government and how we will measure progress against these. The strategy will drive those actions to be more focused on the needs of children in poverty, support prioritisation and collaboration and encourage partners to work in new or different ways. We are committed to work with our partners to agree ways in which we can transparently measure the influence of our strategy on child poverty, as well as its impacts and effects.

Where we use the term ‘child’ in this strategy we mean those up to the age of 18 years. Where we use the term ‘young people’ in this strategy we mean those up to the age of 25 years. Where we use the term ‘people’ in this strategy we mean that to include children, young people and adults.

Our vision is for a Wales:

“ “That enables children and young people to access their rights, have good wellbeing and fulfil their potential no matter what their background or

circumstances (including their socio-economic circumstances).” ”

The purpose of the Child Poverty Strategy is to look to, and plan for, the long term and to set the objectives for contributing towards the eradication of child poverty and the eradication of the worst effects of being in poverty in Wales for the next decade or more.

This looks beyond standard income measures and seeks to ensure that regardless of a child or young person’s financial circumstances they have the same opportunities, they can access the same services and they have the same access to their rights as their peers.

We have developed 5 long-term, high-level objectives to guide our efforts across the Welsh Government under current and future Programmes of Government.

We undertook a 12 week formal consultation exercise and as part of this we asked people whether they agreed with our proposed objectives and priorities.

There were 155 responses to the consultation and of those who answered questions on whether they agreed with our objectives and priorities, overall:

- 91% agreed with our 5 objectives
- 87% agreed with our 5 priorities

We have reflected other feedback throughout the Strategy.

- Objective 1: to reduce costs and maximise the incomes of families.
- Objective 2: to create pathways out of poverty so that children and young people and their families have opportunities to realise their potential.
- Objective 3: to support child and family wellbeing and make sure that work across the Welsh Government delivers for children living in poverty, including those with protected characteristics, so that they can enjoy their rights and have better outcomes.

- Objective 4: to ensure children, young people and their families are treated with dignity and respect by the people and services who interact with and support them and to challenge the stigma of poverty.
- Objective 5: to ensure that effective cross-government working at the national level enables strong collaboration at the regional and local level.

The engagement and consultation undertaken to develop this strategy has helped us to understand where, as part of the wider delivery of the Programme for Government, we need to focus our efforts to achieve greater change in as short a time as is possible and to sustain that change.

Under each objective therefore we have also identified a priority for action to deliver on that need for sustained change.

- Priority 1: entitlement (putting money in people's pockets).
- Priority 2: creating a Fair Work nation (leaving no one behind).
- Priority 3: building communities (accessible, joined up services to meet community needs).
- Priority 4: inclusion (kind, compassionate and non-stigmatising services).
- Priority 5: enabling collaboration (at the regional and local level).

Under these priorities we have set specific commitments, to be understood in the context of wider work across government and not in isolation:

1. Put in place a Welsh benefits system underpinned by the Welsh Benefits Charter that is delivered with compassion and accelerate work with our partners to passport and streamline the application process for Welsh Benefits to make them more accessible.
2. Work with partners to equip everyone who works with children, young people and families to make every contact count, so that people get face-to-face information and advice about getting support with claiming their full financial entitlements.
3. Accelerate our work with Estyn and school improvement partners (local

authorities, Consortia) to ensure education is a cost-neutral experience for children, young people and their families.

4. Champion the Real Living Wage, promote access to trade unions, and embed fair work within wider skills and economic development interventions. We will also implement the provisions of our Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act.
5. Remove barriers to employment and career pathways for disabled people, women, carers, and ethnic minority people whilst improving workplace practices and culture.
6. Focus work across government to find affordable solutions to childcare and transport costs to remove barriers to work and make work pay. This must be achieved without compromising the need to ensure that all childcare is of a quality that meets the needs of children and that transport solutions are driven by our **Net Zero Wales** commitments.
7. 'Think Community' when developing, reviewing and funding relevant policies and programmes, promoting 'one-stop shop'-style multi-agency services in the community to help address the range of interconnected needs and disadvantages people living in poverty experience.
8. Ensure that we continue to support schools to develop as community focused schools, responding to the needs of their community, building a strong partnership with families and collaborating effectively with other services.
9. Push forward, working with partners, on the delivery of more community-based offers for play, sports, youth opportunities and access to arts, culture and natural resources for children and young people and low cost family activities to support health and wellbeing.
10. Ensure that in developing our Communities Policy, we identify new, co-productive, and inclusive to all ways of working, using a community action approach to inform the development of local joined up services to tackle poverty without stigma.
11. Take a children's rights approach to the delivery of our Programme for Government, in line with the UNCRC, with tackling poverty and inequality as

cross cutting policy drivers.

12. Work with ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales on implementing the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework and achieving its ambition of Wales becoming a trauma-informed nation. This will include the identification of any additional resources required, including help and support for organisations.
13. Urgently refocus our work with Estyn, our partners and wider stakeholders to tackle the barriers to implementing approaches that 'poverty proof' children's experience of school and consistently create inclusive education environments which are based on the Rights of the Child, and anti-discriminatory values.
14. Challenge discrimination and drive equality so that protected characteristics do not make it more difficult for children, young people and their families to do well. Retaining a clear focus on our equality plans to achieve this.
15. Strengthen the Welsh Government approach to integration of policy and funding aims to better enable longer term collaboration at the regional and local level on anti-poverty work.
16. Work with public bodies and the third sector to develop and share innovative examples of good practice and positive outcomes to highlight where the Socio-Economic Duty is relevant, identify new or existing areas of work that the duty could/should be applied to, and advocate for and support the relevance of the duty to wider efforts to tackle socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome.
17. Identify the best approach, with partners, to providing additional capacity to support the coordination of anti-poverty efforts across existing regional partnership arrangements and to identify and advise on the options to better support collaborative working to tackle child poverty.
18. Establish and support a Communities of Practice approach to provide a forum where colleagues from across public services and the third sector across Wales can compare learning and share good practice to support a joined-up approach to the funding, development and implementation of work to create a More Equal Wales including tackling child poverty.
19. Work with Regional Partnership Boards and wider partners to implement the

NYTH/NEST framework for achieving a whole system approach to mental health and wellbeing for babies, children and young people. The NYTH/NEST framework focuses on the importance of the wider determinants of mental health and wellbeing including child poverty concerns and brings education, social care, health and third sector together to work in partnership to create a joined up approach to mental health support.

The current socio-economic challenges make it more important than ever for us to work together effectively with our partners to secure the greatest impact with the levers available to us. This is the best way to make sure that all children and young people can enjoy their rights under the **UNCRC** and to create a More Equal Wales.

We are retaining the definition of child poverty agreed in 2011. This reflects the levers we have at our disposal and our desire not only to contribute to the eradication of poverty but to eradicating the worst effects of poverty on children and young people:

“ “a long-term state of not having sufficient resources to afford food, reasonable living conditions or amenities or to participate in activities (such as access to attractive neighbourhoods and open spaces) which are taken for granted by others in their society”. ”

The key indicator of relative child poverty is the percentage of children living in households below 60% of the median UK household income (after housing costs). The statistics are stark, the most recent **evidence** suggests that 28% of children were living in relative income poverty in the 3 financial years ending 2020 to 2022.

**Socio-economic disadvantage** is highly intersectional. This means deprivation interacts with protected characteristics, and certain people and communities experience worse outcomes as a result of barriers they face because of their

protected characteristic in combination with socio-economic disadvantage. The intersectionality between deprivation and other characteristics can be thought of as a web, where different elements inter-connect, compounding their effects.

The **evidence** tells us that certain household characteristics, including protected characteristics, increase the chances of children experiencing poverty and disadvantage:

- Children living in a household where no adult is working remain at higher risk of relative income poverty (43%) compared to children living in a working household (26%).
- 81% of children who were living in relative income poverty lived in working households.
- Lone parent households were most likely to be in relative income poverty (at 38%). 88% of **lone parents** with dependent children are women.
- There was a 40% likelihood of people whose head of household is Black, Asian or minority ethnic living in relative income poverty. This compares to a 22% likelihood for those whose head of household comes from a white ethnic group.
- Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children experience high levels of disadvantage. **Research** suggests nearly a quarter of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children in England and Wales aged under 19 are deprived on 3 or more dimensions, compared to just two per cent of other children.
- 31% of children who lived in a family where there was a disabled person were in relative income poverty compared with 26% of those in families where no-one was disabled.

The Welsh Government recognises that poverty can impact negatively on children and young people's day to day lives and on their wellbeing throughout life.

We know that poverty has a direct impact on health inequalities, educational attainment, access to decent housing, access to play, leisure and sporting

opportunities and the opportunity to enjoy natural resources, cultural activities and celebrate heritage.

- Children living in poverty are more likely to have poorer health outcomes and experience **health inequalities** including low birth weight, poor physical health, and mental health problems.
- An **educational** attainment gap at GCSE level remains, with learners eligible for free school meals much less likely to achieve top grades than other students.
- **Evidence** links poverty to risk of child abuse and neglect, reflecting the relationship between domestic abuse, poor mental health and substance misuse, increased risk of harm to children and increased risk of family poverty.
- This also means that children who enter care will have often experienced **poverty**, may be placed in **Kinship Care** arrangements where household income is low and **care leavers** may experience financial hardship as they make the transition into adulthood.
- Where a parent or young person is in contact with criminal justice systems, especially if they are imprisoned, this has a direct **impact** on family finances and opportunities to move out of poverty. At the same time while the **relationship** between poverty and offending is not linear, issues like poor mental health, substance misuse and lower educational engagement are strongly linked to risk of involvement with the criminal justice system, and to poverty.
- **Rural** communities can face particular challenges associated with distance from key services, limited job opportunities and low incomes, higher costs of living (sometimes referred to as the 'rural premium'), public transport availability, social isolation, and restricted housing stock.

Everyone needs to work together to mitigate the impact of poverty and inequality in everything that they do. We also need to work together over the long term to achieve the big changes that will make a difference to levels of poverty in the future, despite global socio-economic challenges.

The strategy will provide the framework to drive collaboration both within government and more widely across Wales and help to re-balance actions towards preventing poverty while also mitigating the worst impacts of poverty.

We want to work with our partners towards a Wales where:

- all children irrespective of their family income can access their rights under the UNCRC, without discrimination
- adults with dependent children and young people have access to education, training and fair work, can access their full financial entitlements in times of need and are not financially disadvantaged because of discrimination or a lack of support to overcome challenging circumstances
- discrimination against people with protected characteristics and disadvantage as a result of personal circumstances is challenged so that there is equity of opportunity

Many Welsh Government action plans and strategies have been published or updated since the last publication of the Child Poverty Strategy. We do not propose to list them all here or repeat every action within them which may be relevant to tackling child poverty. However, we do outline activity most relevant to the strategy to illustrate the commitment and continued prioritisation of the Welsh Government to tackling poverty.

## How we developed this strategy

This Child Poverty Strategy is published under the **Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010**. The Measure places a duty on Welsh Ministers to set child poverty objectives and to report every 3 years on progress towards achieving those objectives. The last **Child Poverty Strategy for Wales** was published in 2015, this strategy replaces the 2015 strategy.

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In 2011, Wales became the first nation in the UK to enshrine the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in domestic law, through the **Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011**. The Measure embeds consideration of the UNCRC and the Optional Protocols into Welsh law, and places Welsh Ministers under a duty to have due regard to the requirements of the UNCRC when making their decisions. Living in poverty undermines **children's rights** guaranteed by the UNCRC. The UNCRC is an international agreement setting out the rights of children. The UNCRC is a list of rights, called 'articles', that all children and young people, everywhere in the world have. Our commitment to children's rights and the UNCRC is reflected throughout this strategy and its objectives. References to 'Articles' in the objectives are to the Articles of the UNCRC.

Everything we do must be without discrimination under Article 2 of the UNCRC. Intersectionality is a term that can be used to help us think about discrimination, inequality and disadvantage. Intersectionality asks us to think about how every person has a combination of different identities (like economic background, sex and gender identity, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation, disability and more). These could mean they are marginalised or treated unfairly, including through an interplay of characteristics, and we must take all of these into account in considering how discrimination operates. In everything we do to tackle child poverty we will also think about equality issues including a consideration of how we promote Article 22 (refugee children), Article 14 (freedom of thought, belief and religion), Article 23 (disabled children), and Article 30 (children from minority or indigenous groups).

Children and young people who are disadvantaged because of their background or circumstances can find it difficult to have their voices heard as is their right under Article 12 (respect for the views of the child). When we developed this strategy, we heard from 1402 children and young people with lived experience of poverty, who engaged via organisations that work with and for them. It is important that the policies set out in this strategy are delivered in a way that actively seeks the voices of children and young people with lived experience of

poverty.

The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015** is central to how we as a Welsh Government look to deliver for the people of Wales and improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act makes public bodies, including the Welsh Government, think more about the long term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

Some work, like tackling child poverty, is so complex that it can only be done if all Ministers work together, as one Welsh Government, and in partnership with public bodies and the third sector. Our **Children and young people's plan** sets out what the Programme for Government means for children and young people, and provides a prime example of how we are delivering our Programme for Government with tackling child poverty and inequality as a central driver.

The **Equality Act 2010** sets out our duties, in the exercise of our functions and is central to our ambitions to; eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Our **Strategic Equality Plan**, sets out our equality aims and objectives up to 2024, together with the main actions to achieve those objectives.

At the same time the delivery of each of the Action Plans below will need to consider the intersectionality between poverty and discrimination:

- **Anti-racist Wales Action Plan**
- **Advancing gender equality: action plan**
- **Action on disability: the right to independent living framework and action plan**
- **LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales**

The **Socio-economic Duty** came into force in Wales on 31 March 2021. It improves decision making and helps those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

The Socio-economic Duty puts tackling inequality at the heart of decision-making and will build on the good work public bodies are already doing.

The **Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011** is the legislation that created the Welsh language standards. Welsh language standards promote and facilitate the Welsh language, and ensure that the Welsh language is not treated less favourably than the English language in Wales. The delivery of the policies and plans included in this strategy must take this legislation into account.

The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) review of international poverty and social exclusion strategies, programmes and interventions **Poverty and social exclusion: A way forward** (2022) concluded that an anti-poverty strategy would by necessity need to prioritise areas for action in order to be effective. It sets out that the views of those with lived experience of poverty and social exclusion should play a critical role to determine what is most important.

The WCPP suggested that the Welsh Government might best coordinate its efforts around four areas of focus: Reducing costs and maximising income, 'Pathways' out of poverty, An enabling environment and Mental load and mental health.

These four areas informed the development of four 'areas for discussion' that were included in a pre-consultation document used as the basis for engagement sessions to generate evidence to inform a consultation draft of this strategy.

The Welsh Government has a proud history of working to ensure that the views of the people of Wales are at the centre of our decision making. We worked with our partners to hold engagement events in the communities where people live, delivered by organisations that people know and trust. This work was

undertaken with children, young people, families, and community members with lived experience of poverty.

This was especially important in relation to engaging people with protected characteristics, including Black, Asian and minority ethnic people, disabled and neurodivergent people, people with Additional Learning Needs, unpaid carers, LGBTQ+ people and women receiving support because of gendered issues. This work has included care experienced young people and kinship carers.

The pre-consultation engagement activity engaged with:

- 3,272 people, including 1,953 via work targeted at those with protected characteristics

Of the total:

- 1,402 were children or young people
- 1,329 were parent/carers and 319 were grandparents and great grandparents
- 222 were representatives of organisations (directly or indirectly)

We have captured the evidence gathered through our pre-consultation engagement and published it in the [report 'What we have heard'](#). There is also information about our engagement with children and young people in our [Rights of children and young persons: compliance report \(October 2020 to March 2023\)](#) (see Case Study 4).

We have undertaken a formal [consultation](#) on a draft of this strategy. A '[Summary of Responses](#)' is available. The consultation was promoted as part of the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip's programme of meetings and visits across Wales. It was also promoted at relevant network events and electronically. In total we received 155 consultation responses.

The information gathered through our engagement activity and through the

consultation exercise has had a direct impact on our decisions about the contents of this strategy.

## **Objective 1: to reduce costs and maximise the incomes of families**

This means making sure people know what they are entitled to and making it easier for people to claim financial support, and supporting people with the cost of food, fuel and housing, as well as essential items like period products and school uniforms through the social wage.

We know that issues like digital exclusion and the cost and availability of transport, especially in rural areas, can make it difficult for people to access information and advice about their financial entitlements and the support that is available.

For ethnic minority people, including those who are Asylum Seekers or Refugees and Roma, Gypsy and Traveller people, it can be particularly difficult to access information and advice, especially when they have English as an additional language. Care experienced young people can find the benefits system particularly complex. We know that there are also specific challenges around access to and evidencing entitlement to disability and carers' benefits. Families where a child or adult has complex health needs or is terminally ill can face additional financial burdens at a time when caring responsibilities or ill health prevent a parent from working. Advice on financial support can be especially important at these times.

People have told us that they value face-to-face information and advice, preferably from workers that they know and trust, whatever the reason the

worker is in contact with them. People have also told us that they value access to information and advice in the communities where they live.

We want all services and organisations to have a focus on how what they do makes it easier for children and families to access their financial entitlements and access to low or no cost goods, without stigma.

The work taken forward under Objective 1 will promote children's rights under Article 26 (Social Security), Article 27 (adequate standard of living) and Article 24 (health and health services) of the UNCRC. The work under Objective 1 aims to make sure families can claim their full entitlements to social security, that they get help with essential items, keep more money in their pockets and secure an adequate standard of living for their children, while help with food and fuel poverty is important to support the health and wellbeing of children.

## Maximising incomes

We want people to be able to easily access information and advice about their financial entitlements. This will mean that children and young people growing up in families who need welfare benefits get all of the financial support they and their families are entitled to.

The creation of a coherent Welsh Benefit System has long been an ambition for the Welsh Government and other key stakeholders to ensure that people in Wales are maximising their household income by claiming all the financial support they are entitled to. We believe that a social security system should be delivered with compassion, should be fair in the way it treats people and should be designed to ensure that it makes a positive contribution to tackling poverty. The Welsh Benefits Charter sets out the principles which will underpin the delivery of a coherent and compassionate Welsh benefits system and supports local government to **identify** where we can streamline the application process for Welsh benefits to make them more accessible.

'Welsh Benefits' are payments for individuals which are devolved to the Welsh Government. For example, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme helps households pay their Council Tax bill, the Schools Essential Grant and Free School Meals help households with the cost of the school day.

The Welsh Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) provides grants in the form of Emergency Assistance Payments to help in an emergency or when there is an immediate threat to health or wellbeing and Individual Assistance Payments, to help people to remain or begin, living independently in the community.

Building on our **Income Maximisation Action plan**, we are working to ensure that families who rely on UK welfare benefits get access to their entitlements. We fund Citizens Advice Cymru and their partners, through the Single Advice Fund, to deliver **Advicelink Cymru** where people can get help to access their entitlements and manage their financial commitments. We fund **Dangos** training programme for frontline workers, so they are better able to support their service users to access all the financial support they are entitled to.

Through pioneering work such as the **Basic income for care leavers** in Wales pilot we are testing approaches to maximising the incomes of people in Wales. Between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023, more than 600 young people leaving care in Wales were offered £1,600 each month (before tax) for 2 years to support them as they make the transition to adult life. Those taking part in the pilot also received individual advice and support to help them manage their finances and develop their financial and budgeting skills. We have commissioned an expert team led by the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre at Cardiff University to lead the wide-ranging evaluation of the pilot. This multidisciplinary team of world experts in complex evaluation, basic income, social care and social security interventions will assess the impact of the pilot, how it was experienced and delivered, as well as the costs and benefits to wider society.

As we build on the **Nation of Sanctuary Plan** we will consider how to further

support our aim to promote financial inclusion for refugees and asylum seekers to avoid destitution, reduce or mitigate the impacts of poverty and improve living conditions for those on low incomes.

Foster Wales is helping us to decide on a new structure and payment levels for the National Minimum Allowance for foster carers. An Expert Group has been established, with the aim of ensuring an improved and consistent needs-based approach to supporting Special Guardianship families across Wales.

To realise the four purposes of the **Curriculum for Wales** we want our children and young people to have opportunities to learn life skills and develop financial knowledge and money management. As such, financial literacy is an embedded aspect of the Curriculum for Wales and is a specific element of the numeracy framework. The Curriculum for Wales provides opportunities for learners to encounter contexts involving personal finance, where they develop the skills and experience needed to manage their own finances, interpret information, make informed decisions, assess risks and become critical consumers.

## Reducing costs

We know that the current cost of living crisis has placed additional financial hardships on low income households and that the UK economic forecast is unlikely to improve in the short term. It is not acceptable that families are struggling to pay for the absolute basics like housing, food, fuel and period products. We are doing everything we can to keep more money in people's pockets by reducing costs and by maintaining our commitment to the social wage. The social wage is a measure of how much better off individuals are from social spending by government on supports and services.

## Reducing food costs

Food poverty is about the affordability of food and its accessibility in local communities. People can face a 'poverty premium' at local food shops where prices are higher and may be limited in their ability to pay for transport to access food at better value prices in other areas. A lack of access to affordable, healthy food is directly related to health inequalities.

All primary aged children attending a school which is maintained by a local authority can request to have a free breakfast at school. All primary school children in Wales will be offered a **Free School Meal** by September 2024 as a result of our Co-Operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru. In rolling out this offer we are learning valuable lessons that will inform any future plans in relation to expanding a free school meal offer further, should budget become available.

We are supporting cross-sector **Food Partnerships** that can help build resilience in local food networks through the co-ordination of on the ground, food-related activity which tackles the root-causes of food poverty. This will support further access to no cost and low cost healthy foods for low income families.

**Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales** includes a National Priority to remove barriers to reduce diet and health inequalities across the population. The policy aims to achieve visible support for all families in need across Wales; whole systems working together to enable a narrowing of the health inequalities gap through programmes that enable positive change.

## Reducing fuel costs

When families cannot afford to heat their homes this has a negative impact on housing conditions (such as damp) and their health and wellbeing. Facing difficult decisions like whether to 'eat or heat' adds to the mental burden of

poverty.

Our funding to the **Fuel Bank Foundation** has established a strong partner network across Wales to support people on a pre-payment meter who are at risk of self-disconnection or have already self-disconnected and those households that are off-grid and have to bulk buy fuel but do not have the finances to afford to top up their tank

Our long-term ambition is to improve the energy efficiency of Welsh homes, ensuring we use only the energy we need, to keep homes comfortably warm at an affordable cost. This is set out in the **New Warm Homes Programme: policy statement, 2023**. The Programme will need to assess the impact measures have had on individual households in relation to bill savings, the impact the scheme has on fuel poverty, carbon savings over the lifetime of the assets retrofitted, measured in CO<sub>2</sub>e and the contribution made towards wider community benefits, such as skills and the foundational economy.

## **Water affordability**

Recent research has found many households already struggle to afford water bills and water bills are likely to increase over the next few years to finance environmental improvements by the water companies. Water companies offer a range of social tariffs to help eligible households, as well as measures for all customers struggling with payment such as payment breaks, advice on water efficiency and signposting to other support. To give water companies more flexibility to help the most financially vulnerable households the Welsh Government is reviewing the 2013 water social tariff guidance to give water companies more flexibility.

## Reducing education costs

Children and young people have told us about feeling stigmatised and excluded in school when their families cannot meet the costs of essential items like school uniform and equipment. Parent/carers feel real financial pressure in trying to meet the costs of essential items and things like school trips.

Children whose families are on lower incomes and qualify for certain benefits can apply for a **School Essentials Grant**. All compulsory school years from reception to year 11 are now eligible. We have issued **School uniform and appearance: policy guidance for governing bodies**. Schools must have regard to this guidance, which focuses on equity of treatment, cost and affordability, practical considerations and the need for consultation with parents, pupils and the community.

**Education Maintenance Allowance** (EMA) has, since April 2023, increased in Wales from £30 per week to £40 for eligible further education students in sixth form or college. This is a commitment for 2 academic years, while a comprehensive review into EMA is conducted.

## Reducing health costs

There is a direct link between poverty and health inequalities.

Through our delivery of the social wage people in Wales benefit from **free prescriptions** and **free parking** on hospital sites across Wales, in the ethos of a health service that is free at the point of use.

Through our **Period Proud Wales Action Plan**, we have provided funding for local authorities and Further Education to provide free period products in all schools in Wales. Local authorities provide products in a range of community

settings under existing grant arrangements.

Breastfeeding is important for the health and development of infants and their mothers and is linked to the prevention of major health inequalities. The provision of human milk is the most accessible and cost-effective activity available to public health and our [Breastfeeding plan 2019 to 2024](#) sets out how we are supporting breast feeding as a choice for mothers.

We are working to promote take up of [Healthy Start](#) to help pregnant women and young families receiving certain benefits to buy milk, infant formula, fruit, vegetables and get free vitamins.

We have worked with our health service partners to pilot [Baby Bundles](#) and we are considering how best we can use this learning to support low income families with the essentials needed for when a new baby arrives.

## **Priority 1: entitlement (putting money in people's pockets)**

We will:

1. Put in place a Welsh benefits system underpinned by the Charter that is delivered with compassion and accelerate work with our partners to passport and streamline the application process for Welsh benefits to make them more accessible.
2. Work with partners to equip everyone who works with children, young people and families to make every contact count, so that people get face-to-face information and advice about getting support with claiming their full financial entitlements.
3. Accelerate our work with Estyn and school improvement partners (local authorities, Consortia) to ensure education is a cost-neutral experience for children, young people and their families.

## **Objective 2: to create pathways out of poverty so that children and young people and their families have opportunities to realise their potential**

The first 1,000 days of life, from conception to age 2 significantly influence the outcomes for children, parents, and families, throughout the life course, and from generation to generation.

The evidence shows that the gap in attainment between children growing up in poverty and their peers starts early and lasts through school. We want everyone to share our aspirations for all children and young people to have access to support so they can reach their potential and enjoy poverty free futures. People have told us that disabled children, neurodivergent children and children with Additional Learning Needs need more timely and appropriate support to reach their potential.

There is strong evidence that discrimination related to gender, gender identity, ethnicity, disability and sexuality can impact negatively on educational experience and outcomes and on the ability to secure fair work. The employment rate for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people is **lower** than for white people. For disabled people the employment rate is **lower** than for non-disabled people. **Research** suggests that **lone parents** face specific challenges to securing suitable employment and that 90% of lone parents are women.

Children and young people told us that they want greater opportunities for quality work experience and careers advice in school and further education and positive role models in the world of work and self-employment.

People have told us that that they want flexible, fair work with good working conditions and fair pay. They want opportunities for career progression through education and training. People have told us that without access to affordable

childcare and transport it can be very difficult to make work pay. This is especially true for lone parents and families where an adult or child is disabled.

We need an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing fair work.

Throughout the life course (which means from birth, through life until death) there are things we can do to help people out of poverty through early childhood play learning and care, education, training and support into fair work. Supporting parents/carers into employment can lift children out of poverty.

Under Objective 2 we set out work that will promote children's rights under Article 6 (life, survival and development), Article 31 (leisure, play and culture), Article 28 (right to education), Article 29 (goals of education) and Article 27 (adequate standard of living). We know that poverty can impact adversely on child development and access to learning through play in the early years and we have set out the ways we are seeking to address this. Every child has the right to education, but poverty can impact negatively on the educational experiences, engagement and outcomes for children. Our ambition is to achieve high standards and aspirations for all by tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment and supporting every learner. Building a strong economy and supporting young people and parent/carers into fair work will support children in this and future generations to have an adequate standard of living.

## **The best start in life**

There is growing evidence that there is a strong link between poverty and cognitive outcomes in the early years. We know that investing in the early years of a child's life have a positive impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of children. We want to provide children with the best start in life.

**Flying Start** is the Welsh Government early years programme aimed at improving outcomes for families with children under 4 years of age in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales. We are committed to continuing support for our flagship Flying Start programme. And, in line with the Co-operation Agreement, we have extended this commitment to deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all 2-year-olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh-medium provision. The **phased expansion** of the **Flying Start programme** recognises the significant impact that early intervention and the provision of high quality childcare can make to children's outcomes.

We have **launched** our approach for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) in Wales so that babies and young children have a high-quality stimulating learning and care experience in any setting and/or school they attend (formally known as early childhood education and care (ECEC)).

The Early Years Integration Transformation Programme has been working with Public Service Boards to explore how to deliver early years services in a more systematic way, ensuring children and families receive the right support at the right time and in the right way.

Access to high quality play opportunities is critical for the social, emotional and physical development of all children. Children growing up in poverty can face barriers to accessing play opportunities in the same way as their peers.

The Playworks Holiday Project was established to tackle holiday hunger by providing free healthy food/snacks at play schemes during the holiday periods with the option of increasing existing holiday play provision. The funding is split by formula between the 22 local authorities. The scheme targets areas of deprivation, and can operate in in each school holiday period, at the discretion of local authorities.

Children living in poverty are at higher risk of speech, language and

communication needs and by intervening early we can reduce the risk of negative outcomes. The **'Talk with me'** Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) delivery plan represents Welsh Government's investment in universal and targeted support for SLC development in the early years.

The primary aim of our early years policies and programmes is always to support the best start in life. However, we also recognise that a lack of appropriate and affordable childcare can make it difficult for parent/carers to make work pay.

The **Childcare Offer** for Wales provides up to 30 hours of government funded early education and childcare to the 3 and 4 year olds of working parents for 48 weeks per year; parents who are enrolled on higher and further education courses also benefit from the Offer. This expansion of the Childcare Offer demonstrates our commitment to support working families with the costs of childcare. These expansions of the Childcare Offer, demonstrate our commitment to support working families with the costs of childcare. **Evaluations** have shown that this is having a positive impact on parents' ability to increase their earnings and creating more employment options for parents. The Childcare Offer is also supported by the Childcare Offer for Wales: Additional Support Grant. This separate funding is intended to ensure that the childcare element of the Offer is inclusive to eligible children who need additional support, such as those with Additional Learning Needs.

The **National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare** were revised in May 2023 to contain greater clarity and guidance on first aid, safeguarding, and childminders working with assistants. It also included a new section on ensuring high quality provision for all children, across all settings.

Local authorities have a **statutory** duty to secure as is reasonably possible the provision of childcare in their area that is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents to work or train. To help local authorities meet this duty every 5 years they must assess the supply and demand for childcare in their area. The

assessment must include an action plan showing how the local authority will address any gaps in provision. The last full Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) was undertaken in 2022.

As part of the CSA process, local authorities consider specifically the needs of parents with children with additional and complex needs; parents working at typical hours; ethnic minority parents, as well as a whole range of other groups of parents.

## Education and progression

Poverty has an impact on educational experiences and outcomes and there is an attainment gap between learners from low income households and their peers. **Our national mission** is to achieve high standards and aspirations for all by tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment and supporting every learner. We will work with our partners to tackle the impact of poverty on aspirations and attainment. All learners, whatever their background, will be supported to be healthy, engaged, enterprising and ethical citizens, ready to play a full part in work and life. This includes education-based practical careers, work-related experiences, and careers advice.

The **Pupil Development Grant (PDG)** provides extra targeted support for disadvantaged learners and we will work with partners to review how it is used and further support schools in the effective use of the grant PDG funding aims to raise the attainment of children and young people from low-income households. It does this by reducing the barriers that they often face to achieving their full potential. Funding is also provided for care-experienced children. The PDG is a key resource for realising the Welsh Government's ambition of **high standards and aspirations for all**. The grant is provided to schools and settings for children and young people aged 3 to 15. Use of the PDG should focus on the following key areas: high-quality learning and teaching, Community Focused Schools, Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC), high aspirations

supported by strong relationships, health and wellbeing, leadership, Curriculum for Wales and qualifications, and supporting post-16 progression.

The Welsh Government's annual Minority Ethnic and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (MEGRT) grant is to support children and young people who experience barriers to learning and accessing the curriculum and education. This support is essential to ensure equity in education for all children and young people. Since 2021, funding allocated to all 22 local authorities has supported the establishment of Ethnic Minority Achievement Services (EMAS) across Wales.

This investment has enabled local authorities to develop the infrastructure, skills and expertise necessary to support Refugee and Asylum Seeking learners to access education. The funding also supports Traveller Education Services (TES) within local authorities to support learners from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to engage in education and access the curriculum.

Families who have a child with additional learning needs can face additional costs and extra challenges to balancing caring responsibilities with employment. Some parent/carers told us that they are concerned their children don't get the support they need to reach their potential. We will drive our **Additional learning needs** reform of systems, provision and practices around person-centred practice and inclusive education, delivering positive changes for learners with ALN and monitor system effectiveness. Our **Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services** (2021) sets out arrangements for supporting assessment and diagnosis pathways for children.

Caring responsibilities are associated with risk of poverty and challenges to engagement in education and training. Our **Strategy for unpaid carers** includes a priority to support unpaid carers, including young carers, in education and the workplace and encouraging employers and educational/training settings to adapt their policies and practices, enabling unpaid carers to work and learn alongside their caring role.

The **Youth Engagement and Progression Framework** contributes towards our goal of tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment by helping us re-engage young people and raise their aspirations, to ensure no one is left behind. **The Young Person's Guarantee** is our key commitment to provide everyone aged 16 to 24 with support to gain a place in education or training, help to get into work or self-employment.

We commissioned a **Review of Vocational Qualifications in Wales** and are responding to the recommendations. Through the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research we will do all we can to ensure that educational inequalities narrow and that opportunities are available to support learners and provide them with the knowledge and skills for lifelong learning, development and success.

The Welsh Government has committed to support and grow the School Holiday Enrichment Programme, with a commitment in the Programme for Government to continue to “build on” the programme. The School Holiday Enrichment Programme is a school-based scheme that provides healthy meals, food and nutrition education, physical activity and enrichment sessions to children in areas of socio-economic disadvantage during the school Summer holidays.

## **Economy and fair work**

Building a strong economy and supporting people to succeed and prosper in that economy is fundamental to reducing child poverty in the long term.

Our **Economic mission: priorities for a stronger economy** sets out our ambitions for a more prosperous, greener and a more equal economy.

Improving the well-being of everyone in Wales is central to the mission. A well-being economy is an economy that operates within safe environmental limits, and which serves the collective well-being of current and future generations first and foremost. We want to place focus upon economic development, which aims to grow the economy and to reduce inequalities across communities throughout

Wales.

The **Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act, 2023** places new social partnership duties on specified public bodies in Wales, promotes fair work and places a duty on certain public bodies to consider socially responsible procurement and carry out contract management duties.

**Business Wales** aims to support micro-businesses and SMEs including social enterprises, and aspiring entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses and build an economy based on the principles of fair work, sustainability and the industries and services of the future. Aligned to the Employability and Skills Plan, Business Wales will work with businesses to provide a range of support to entrepreneurs and businesses to improve management approaches, employment and HR practices, improve equality and diversity practices, work more inclusively, adopt the Equality Pledge, and become age inclusive employers.

To support the Young Person's Guarantee, Big Ideas Wales provides advice and support for young people (entrepreneurs) and a network of Big Ideas Wales Role Models to inspire and develop enterprising capabilities and understanding of self-employment and business start-up.

Fair reward is a key part of our **Fair work** ambitions, promoting the Real Living Wage (based on the cost of living), supporting and encouraging employers to create high quality employment, improving the offer to workers, championing fair employment practices, ensuring the social value of investment and encouraging the public sector to embed the priorities in workforce planning.

Our **Plan for Employability and Skills** sets out clear policy and investment priorities, and sharpens our delivery focus and the activity of partners. The key priorities for the Plan are: Young people realising their potential; Tackling economic inequality; Championing Fair Work for all; Supporting people with a long term health condition to work and Nurturing a learning for life culture.

Our **Tech Valleys programme** aims to make the South Wales Valleys a globally recognised centre for developing new technologies to support cutting edge industry. The programme is creating sustainable jobs, predominantly within new technologies and advanced manufacturing across the Valleys area. Through the various elements of the programme, infrastructure, skills and business growth, we are sowing the seeds for the high-quality employment of tomorrow, as well as working with businesses to create resilient jobs today.

Our **evolving approach to gender budgeting in Wales** has included a gender budgeting pilot to help people develop skills in non-gender typical areas. This has been enabled through our **Personal Learning Account** programme that provides support for employed people on below average salaries to gain higher level skills, helping them access a wider range of job opportunities.

## Transport

We recognise that the accessibility and affordability of transport is crucial for people to find a pathway out of poverty through access to education, training and employment opportunities.

Our Wales Transport Strategy, **Llwybr Newydd** aims to reduce the cost and improve the accessibility of sustainable transport for everyone in Wales, including students.

Our **National transport delivery plan 2022 to 2027** lists the actions we are taking to make transport easy-to-use and good value for money to meet people's needs now and in the future. As part of our commitment to explore 'Fairer Fares' across Wales, we are looking at a range of options to ensure sustainable public transport fares are made more affordable for all in the community. This work will involve a careful examination of discounted travel for young people. We are also looking at opportunities to ensure our fares and ticketing strategy maximises opportunities to encourage more integrated public transport provision for passengers through the one ticket approach and pay as you go technology to

ensure the best fare is provided for every public transport journey.

## **Priority 2: creating a Fair Work nation (leaving no one behind)**

We will:

1. Champion the Real Living Wage, promote access to trade unions, and embed fair work within wider skills and economic development interventions. We will also implement the provisions of our Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act.
2. Remove barriers to employment and career pathways for disabled people, women, carers, and ethnic minority people whilst improving workplace practices and culture.
3. Focus work across government to find affordable solutions to childcare and transport costs to remove barriers to work and make work pay. This must be achieved without compromising the need to ensure that the all childcare is of a quality that meets the needs of children and that transport solutions are driven by our [Net Zero Wales](#) commitments.

## **Objective 3: to support child and family wellbeing and make sure that work across the Welsh Government delivers for children living in poverty, including those with protected characteristics, so that they can enjoy their rights and have better outcomes**

In Wales, we all want the best for all our children, no matter what their

backgrounds are, where they come from or where they live. We want them all to have the best start in life and go on to lead the kind of lives they want to live.

People told us that they want decent homes in cohesive communities. They want to have a voice about the decisions made in their communities and about what is needed to support their wellbeing. This is especially important for disabled people, Black, Asian and minority ethnic people, Asylum seekers and refugees, Gypsies and Travellers and Roma people and LGBTQ+ young people who told us about experiencing discrimination and the poor understanding of their needs.

The practical barriers of cost and availability of transport and the mental burden of multiple appointments mean that people want joined up services close to where they live. For families where a child or adult is neurodiverse or disabled local joined up services that talk to one another and to families are especially important.

People want to be able to build relationships with trusted workers who understand the distinct needs of everyone in the community and they value community based information, advice, family support and support for emotional and mental health to increase their wellbeing.

They want opportunities in the communities where they live to enjoy play, sport, leisure and family activities that support their mental and physical wellbeing. Related to this children and young people talked about the importance of clean, green spaces and looking after the environment.

It is also important that transport and access costs do not prevent people from having access to cultural experiences, like museums and celebrations of diversity.

The need to provide community based joined up services that promote a No Wrong Door approach is well understood. We heard about some good examples

of this but not as a common experience for the families who spoke to us. We recognise that in some communities, especially rural communities, it is not always cost efficient to offer co-located services in one physical base. However, rotating or 'pop up' services can provide a good level offer in areas where there are lower populations.

Our work under Objective 3 of this strategy will promote children's rights under Article 18 (parental responsibilities and state assistance), Article 19 (protection from violence, abuse and neglect), Article 24 (health and health services), Article 27 (adequate standard of living) and Article 31 (leisure, play and culture). The strategy sets out how we are supporting parent/carers and how we want to strengthen the support available to low income families in the communities where they live. The relationship between abuse and poverty is not straight forward but early support to families can reduce the risks that children will get harmed, as can building thriving communities. Child poverty is strongly associated with health inequalities.

The strategy sets out our policies to support mental health and wellbeing and for energy efficient decent housing, we know that poor housing conditions impact negatively on children's health. Our plans for energy efficient decent housing and preventing homelessness will help children to enjoy an adequate standard of living. Promoting community based, accessible information, advice and support will help parent/carers to secure entitlements and interventions that can support them in providing an adequate standard of living for their children. We set out that we will work towards joined up services in communities and local access to play, sport, youth opportunities support health and wellbeing.

## **A decent place to live**

The economic situation of people has a direct impact on the risk that they will experience homelessness, or inadequate or poor-quality housing.

On 1 December 2022 the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 changed the way all landlords in Wales rent their properties, improving how we rent, manage, and live in rented homes in Wales. **Renting Homes Wales** means that social and private tenants have seen some changes in the way their contracts are provided, in the way their homes are maintained and in how they communicate with their landlords.

The **National Empty Homes Scheme** could see up to 2,000 long-term empty properties brought back into use. This scheme runs alongside with other Welsh Government schemes like **Leasing Scheme Wales** which is designed to improve access to longer term affordable housing in the private rental sector.

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires every local authority in Wales to prepare a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) and report on the need for additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches in their area, both permanent residential and temporary transit. We are reviewing the robustness of assessments across Wales to meet the site needs across Wales for Gypsy and Traveller Communities.

We are taking concerted action to address homelessness through our **Ending homelessness in Wales: high level action plan 2021 to 2026**, which was **reviewed and updated** in August 2023, ensuring it aligns with Welsh Government tackling poverty strategies. We intend to take through legislation to transform homelessness services, putting the emphasis on early intervention and prevention. Our **White Paper** on ending homelessness in Wales sets out a range of proposals which seek to prevent homelessness, with a particular focus on children, young people and those who are care experienced.

The refreshed **Youth Engagement and Progression Framework** now includes the prevention of youth homelessness to ensure young people at risk are identified early and suitable support put in place. Our move towards rapid rehousing and the legislative reform, will work to ensure homelessness is rare, brief and unrepeatable. Where homelessness does occur, people will be

supported into good quality settled homes as quickly as possible. We have a commitment to deliver 20,000 social homes for rent this government term.

We know that cold, damp houses are a risk to children's health and wellbeing and place parents under additional stress. In relation to the installation of energy efficiency measures, the Welsh Government believes the **Warm Homes Programme** should focus effort, and where required investment, on improving energy efficiency for households who are least able to pay for improvements themselves (i.e. households in, or at risk of, fuel poverty and those in severe fuel poverty) in the owner occupier, private rented and housing co-operative sectors.

## Communities

Our Programme for Government is founded on the distinctively Welsh values of community, equality and social justice. Wales is a nation rich with community action where initiatives have been grown by community members to address community needs. Our role is to enable and grow these approaches, always making sure that everything that is delivered addresses the distinct needs of local communities.

We recognise that what is needed is not a standalone community programme, but a cross-cutting, whole of government response. We have published research on **Place-based approaches to community engagement and support** which is informing our thinking.

This will mean working with our communities and other partners to co-produce solutions that will support delivery of our Programme for Government and, at the same time, enable all our communities to be thriving, empowered and connected. We want to listen to and learn from our communities, drawing on local knowledge and hard-won experience. We are working with stakeholders to develop a **Communities Policy** to support this.

Our **Community Facilities Programme** provides funding to help communities all over Wales buy, develop and improve crucial local buildings and green space. We have also committed to supporting Community Asset Transfers and community led developments by providing a support framework that delivers advice, guidance and finance.

We are investing to make sure more schools are able to operate and develop as Community Focused Schools, which reach out to engage families and work with the wider community to support all pupils and particularly those from low-income households. Moving forward we want all schools in Wales to be **Community Focused Schools**: building a strong partnership with families; responding to the needs of their community and collaborating effectively with other services.

## Providing play, sport and youth opportunities

Children and young people growing up in poverty can face financial, practical and environmental barriers to accessing opportunities for play, sport and positive leisure activities.

**Wales: a Play Friendly Country** is the statutory guidance which supports local authorities in assessing and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas, so far as reasonably practicable. The opportunities should be inclusive and encourage children and young people to play and meet together if they wish to, recognising that there may be barriers for some children in taking part in the range of play opportunities in their area.

We provide funding to Sport Wales to support sports clubs, National Governing Bodies, local authorities and other national partners to deliver the **Vision For Sport**, which seeks to make Wales an active nation where everyone can have a lifelong enjoyment of sport. The 6 levels of strategic intent in Sport Wales's strategy, '**Enabling Sport in Wales to Thrive**' include providing every young person with the skills, confidence and motivation to enable them to enjoy and

progress through sport; giving them foundations to lead an active, healthy and enriched life.

There are significant health inequalities related to road traffic accidents, with children and young people living in poor areas at a higher risk of being harmed on the road. Since September 2023 most 30 mile per hour (mph) speed limits in Wales have changed to **20 mph**. This will help to support safer healthier communities, reducing collisions and provide safer opportunities for children and young people to play and socialise in their communities.

Our **Youth Work Strategy for Wales** aims to ensure that young people are thriving. Youth work helps young people to grow, develop, achieve and be happy as they become adults. It helps to give young people skills for life and opportunities for learning and helps young people with any issues that may affect their lives. Work is underway to develop and take forward the **Interim Youth Work Board's recommendations** aimed at achieving a sustainable delivery model for youth work in Wales.

We know that culture and creative experiences contribute to positive health outcomes, personal wellbeing, community cohesion and economic growth. This will guide continued policy development in access to culture.

## Supporting families

All families need support at some times. Challenging circumstances are related to increased risks of poverty and the stress of coping with financial hardship can also put extra strain on families.

**Family Information Services** are the first point of contact for advice and information on local services for families and carers. They provide free, impartial help, support and advice on a range of family issues such as childcare, finances, health care, education and leisure services.

**Families First** promotes greater multi-agency working to ensure families receive holistic help and support as needed. The programme can be accessed by all families in Wales and can help with wide-ranging issues such as parenting, signposting to financial support, family relationships, education matters and many more. The intention is to offer early support with the aim of preventing problems escalating.

Across Wales, parents and carers have access to a range of services to support positive parenting delivered by our partners across public services. **Parenting. Give it Time**, is a dedicated bilingual website that provides parenting tips, information and advice on common parenting concerns and promotes positive parenting.

To support schools to develop as Community Focused Schools, we continue to invest in family engagement officers employed by schools. We know that family engagement officers can be a highly effective resource for schools in reaching out to parents and carers and engaging them in their children's learning. A family engagement officer can ensure that positive partnerships with families are developed, and that bespoke support and services are offered.

## **Mental health and wellbeing**

We know that children and young people growing up in poverty are more likely to face mental health difficulties. People with mental health problems are also more likely to experience poverty.

The independent **review** of Together for Mental Health Strategy and Talk to Me 2 was published in March 2023, and the Welsh Government has undertaken engagement throughout the year to inform the successor mental health strategy which will be subject to consultation early in the new year. We have ensured this early thinking is informed by the evidence gathered from those with lived experience poverty.

The **National Framework for Social Prescribing** sets out the ways in which we will promote social prescribing, an umbrella term that describes a person-centred approach to connecting people to local community assets. Community assets include community groups, interventions and services which could be delivered online or in person, as well as buildings, land or even a person within a community. Social prescribing is a way of connecting people, whatever their age or background, with their community to better manage their health and wellbeing.

### **Priority 3: building communities (accessible, joined up services to meet community needs)**

We will:

1. 'Think Community' when developing, reviewing and funding relevant policies and programmes, promoting 'one-stop shop'-style multi-agency services in the community to help address the range of interconnected needs and disadvantages people living in poverty experience.
2. Ensure that we continue to support schools to develop as community focused schools, responding to the needs of their community, building a strong partnership with families and collaborating effectively with other services.
3. Push forward, working with partners, on the delivery of more community-based offers for play, sports, youth opportunities and access to arts, culture and natural resources for children and young people and low cost family activities to support health and wellbeing.
4. Ensure that in developing our Communities Policy, we identify new, co-productive, and inclusive to all, ways of working, using a community action approach to inform the development of local joined up services to tackle poverty without stigma.

## **Objective 4: challenge the stigma of poverty and ensure children, young people and their families are treated with dignity and respect by the people and services who interact with and support them**

We expect the people and services that support children, young people and their families to operate in a way that does not add to the burden of pressures that poverty brings. We know that these pressures can cause poor mental wellbeing and mental health. We must make sure children and young people are not excluded because their families are on a low income.

Some people in poverty can experience discrimination and stigma both because of their protected characteristics and because of their experience of poverty. This has a direct negative impact on wellbeing. We need to better support an understanding of the impact of poverty and inequality on children's rights across services.

We recognise that people working in services in the public and third sector are working hard under challenging circumstances. Supporting the workforce is a critical part of achieving kind and compassionate services and tackling poverty is central to relieving the current pressures on those services.

Many people have told us they do not feel they are treated with dignity and respect by the services that are there to support them. They do not always feel listened to by people who work with them and spoke about the importance of trusted relationships. This is especially the case when children, young people and their families are accessing their entitlements related to initiatives to reduce costs and maximise incomes, an experience that often leaves them feeling stigmatised, as if they are a 'problem'.

Children and young people gave us clear messages about feeling stigmatised

and excluded in the school community. Some of this was related to the cost of the school day (uniforms, school trips) and the cost of the school year, including non-learning activity such as non-uniforms day, school proms etc. People described the ways in which feeling stigmatised and excluded in the school community has a negative impact on engagement and potential to learn and in some cases on attendance.

Care experienced young people told us that they do not always feel that they have a voice in the decisions that are made about them.

Children and young people can feel that their circumstances are poorly understood in schools and about the ways adults speak to and respond to them, including sanctioning them. Where children and young people have Additional Learning needs, are young carers, are care experienced or are Black, Asian or minority ethnic they can find it particularly difficult to feel that their voices are heard, and their needs are understood.

Objective 4 focuses on the ways we will promote Article 12 (respect for the views of the child), Article 24 (health and health services), Article 29 (goals of education) and Article 42 (knowledge of rights). We want to make sure that children and young people are not stigmatised because of the financial circumstances of their families. The people who work with children, young people and families need support to understand the ways in which poverty impacts on children's rights and how to make sure children and young people are not stigmatised. Kind and compassionate services will help children and young people to enjoy good experiences in education and reduce the impact of child poverty on their mental health and wellbeing.

## **Giving children and young people a voice**

We know that we must listen to the voices of children and young people when we develop policies that affect them, this is part of our responsibility under the

UNCRC. Children and young people growing up in poverty can face barriers in accessing their right to be heard and we need positive action to address this.

Wales was the first country in the UK to establish an office of the Children's Commissioner as an independent champion of children's rights. The role of the Commissioner is to act as an independent champion and safeguard and support the rights of all children and young people, advocating their interests and making sure their voices are heard at local, national and international levels.

The Welsh Government funds **Young Wales**, a Children in Wales initiative that aims to ensure that young people have opportunities to raise issues that are important to them and to ensure their voices are heard by decision makers, policy officers, Welsh Government officials and Ministers. This work is underpinned by the UNCRC and the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards.

As an example of our work with Young Wales, we are currently collaborating with Children in Wales, Young Wales Project Board to co-produce a Young Person's version of the Budget Improvement Plan which will be published in the new year.

The Disability Rights Taskforce was set up to identify the inequities and barriers, which affect the lives of many disabled children and adults in Wales. The Taskforce has a number of working groups taking forward its priorities, including 'the social model of disability' and 'children and young people'. The working groups bring together people with lived experience, representative organisations, and Welsh Government policy leads.

Through the engagement work to inform this draft strategy for consultation we have heard evidence from 1,402 children and young people. Moving forward we will agree ways to involve children and young people in letting us know if we are making progress on delivering against our objectives and priorities to tackle child poverty in Wales. This will include working with our partners to make sure that

children and young people from low income households consistently have opportunities to be heard at the community, local and regional levels.

## **Delivering services with kindness and compassion**

Children, young people and their families with lived experience of poverty told us that they feel stigmatised and judged by the services that they seek support from.

All organisations and systems need to work in a trauma-informed way. That is to understand behaviour as communication and recognise and understand the impact of cultural, gender and historic inequalities, and social injustice.

The **Trauma Informed Wales Framework** helps us to understand the roles we all have, and the difference we can make by simply being kinder, more compassionate and more understanding of each other.

We are already taking this approach forward in a number of ways, the Youth Justice **Blueprint** takes a 'children first' rights-based approach. This means ensuring our efforts are child-centred rather than service focused, responding in a way that recognises the best interests of the child in order to best meet individual need.

We are promoting child and person-centred services through our policies aimed at **Ending homelessness in Wales** which are focused around supporting households and families with housing solutions that are most suited to their individual need, helping to sustain existing tenancies, and break repeat cycles of homelessness, providing for sustainable cohesive communities, whilst removing the stigma too frequently associated with homelessness. Such person-centred approaches are also central to our **social care** legislation and policies.

Our aim is to ensure that all services are non-judgemental, kind and

compassionate and promote resilience. At the centre of this approach is the importance of establishing trusted relationships.

## Creating inclusive education environments

The Welsh Government has provided a range of guidance and resources to support schools in understanding poverty and providing for the **education of disadvantaged children**, including the **Tackling the Impact of Poverty on Education Project**.

Our **Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing** seeks to support good emotional and mental well-being by promoting a positive cultural environment in schools, where children and young people form positive relationships with staff and other learners, and relationships are strengthened between them and the wider community.

Children and young people can experience bullying because of their circumstances. For learners to fully benefit from their school experience, they must feel safe and properly supported. Schools must adopt a zero tolerance approach to all forms of bullying. Our vision is to challenge bullying holistically, addressing the root causes of unacceptable behaviour and create an inclusive and engaging environment where learners feel safe and are ready to learn. Our focus is for schools to work towards developing positive and respectful relationships amongst children and young people. We are currently updating our anti-bullying guidance **Rights, respect, equality** to strengthen advice around prejudice related bullying.

The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, **Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales** and supporting **guidance** sets out the importance of taking time to undertake the ALN process in a person-centred way; putting the views of children and their families at the centre of the decision-making process.

As part of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, a duty has been placed on governing bodies and head teachers to promote knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC and the Convention on the United Nations Rights of People with Disabilities.

As the new curriculum rolls out, all schools and settings across Wales will adopt a child's rights approach, placing emphasis on the central role of rights in developing our children and young people to become ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world.

Estyn inspections include inspecting how effectively maintained schools, Pupil Referral Units and local government education services reduce the impact of poverty on the educational attainment and well-being of pupils eligible for free school meals and/or those from low-income household. There are many **examples** of good practice.

## **Priority 4: inclusion (kind, compassionate and non-stigmatising services)**

We will:

1. Take a children's rights approach to the delivery of our Programme for Government, in line with the UNCRC, with tackling poverty and inequality as cross cutting policy drivers.
2. Work with ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales on implementing the Trauma Informed Wales Framework, which will include the identification of any additional resources required, including help and support for organisations.
3. Urgently refocus our work with Estyn, our partners and wider stakeholders to tackle the barriers to implementing approaches to poverty proof education and to consistently creating inclusive education environments which are based on the Rights of the Child, and anti-discriminatory values.

4. Challenge discrimination and drive equality so that protected characteristics do not make it more difficult for children, young people and their families to do well. Retaining a clear focus on our equality plans to achieve this.

## **Objective 5: to ensure that effective cross-government working at the national level enables strong collaboration at the regional and local level**

If we are going to deliver against our objectives in an effective way, we need to create the right conditions to enable change to happen. This will be a fundamental part of delivering our Made in Wales, Made for Wales approach.

Our current Programme for Government commitments are being shaped and delivered with the need to combat poverty and inequality as a central driver. The message from people and organisations that work with and speak out on behalf of children and families in poverty is clear, we need to have greater integration across Welsh Government policies, programmes and investment. People told us that further strengthening the integration of cross-government work will in turn support stronger collaboration at the regional and local levels, so that planning and delivery are more efficient and effective.

As we take forward work under Objective 5 of this strategy, we will work with our partners to ensure that we do all we can to make sure every child can enjoy their rights through policies and delivery that promotes and protects children's rights, in line with Article 4 (implementation of the Convention).

We know that more streamlined and focussed budget decisions across Welsh Government are needed to support cross-government working on implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. We

publish a **Budget Improvement Plan** on an annual basis. The Plan outlines our vision, including short and medium-term ambitions over the next 5 years, to improve the budget process in the Welsh Government using the 2015 Act and the five ways of working to drive continuous improvement. We have established a **Budget Improvement and Impact Advisory Group** to provide advice, feedback and evidence from an equalities and inclusion perspective.

To drive the change that is needed and have a tangible impact on child poverty, it is essential that the Welsh Government, local government and other public services in Wales work together to improve the lives of children and their families who are in poor households and to reduce poverty in the longer term. The third sector (voluntary organisations and charities) and faith communities (religious organisations and groups) provide critical support to children, young people, families and communities in Wales and has a key role in tackling child poverty. The private sector (businesses) can also be key for supporting pathways out of poverty through their direct activity as employers and working in partnership with small and local charities, people and communities.

People working in public bodies and the third sector have told us we need stronger coordination and collaboration between organisations working at the local and regional levels on tackling poverty including child poverty and that we need to use our powers to bring partners together and focus action on where it is needed the most.

At the regional level, **Public Services Boards** (PSBs), **Regional Partnership Boards** (RPBs) and **Corporate Joint Committees** (CJCs) bring together local and regional partners to promote well-being through collaboration in a more effective way.

The **Marmot** approach can support local and regional partners in tackling inequity through action on the social determinants of health; the social and economic conditions which shape our health. Gwent Public Service Board are working towards becoming a **Marmot Region** and have sought the help of

Professor Sir Michael Marmot and his team at the [Institute of Health Equity](#).

The [Foundational Economy](#) Programme considers how we spend money in Wales and how we can make better informed decisions on how to spend it for the longer term. The Foundational Economy is about achieving better outcomes for people who are disadvantaged by ensuring we work collaboratively across sectors to improve economic, educational, social, and environmental opportunities. By working in this way, we are helping make Wales more resilient, greener by reducing global supply chains and strengthening businesses that are rooted in Wales. This positively impacts on Health and Wellbeing. This approach will ensure that the provision of local jobs and opportunities is at the heart of our communities.

As part of the Welsh Government's current Programme for Government, we have committed to reducing the administrative burden on local authorities to allow them to get on with their vitally important work and not to be hampered by any unnecessary bureaucracy.

The Welsh Government Grant Centre of Excellence has introduced a longer duration of funding and benchmarking process, to allow longer duration of funding/multi-year funding where appropriate.

The [Socio-Economic Duty](#) came into force in Wales on 31 March 2021. It improves decision making and helps those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

The Socio-economic Duty gives us an opportunity to do things differently in Wales. It puts tackling inequality at the heart of decision-making and will build on the good work public bodies are already doing.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission report [Evaluating the socio-economic duty in Scotland and Wales](#) (2021) considers how Wales is implementing, or preparing to implement, the socio-economic duty (part of the

Equality Act 2010). The report highlights how the duty can be implemented effectively, the barriers that get in the way, how the duty affects the behaviour of public bodies and the steps needed to ensure future success.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales has developed a set of resources, **The Right Way - A Children's Rights Approach**, that places the UNCRC at the core of planning and service delivery. As we work with partners to strengthen collaboration, find solutions together and promote good practice, it will be important to ensure that together we take a children's rights approach. As we work with partners to enable collaboration and support good practice we will think about a children's rights approach as a principle underpinning the work we develop and deliver together. This will promote Article 42 (knowledge of rights) of the UNCRC.

Public services, the third sector, faith communities and the private sector are all key partners in tackling child poverty and are already leading important work to improve the lives of children and young people in the here and now and longer term. While organisations across Wales are working to address the same issues, there is a need for a stronger approach to enabling collaboration and shared learning to support effective solutions, adapted to local needs.

## **Priority 5: enabling collaboration (at the regional and local level)**

We will:

1. Strengthen the Welsh Government approach to integration of policy and funding aims to better enable longer term collaboration at the regional and local level on anti-poverty work.
2. Work with public bodies and the third sector to develop and share innovative examples of good practice and positive outcomes to highlight where the Socio-Economic Duty is relevant, identify new or existing areas of work that

the duty could / should be applied to, and advocate for and support the relevance of the duty to wider efforts to tackle socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome.

3. Identify the best approach, with partners, to providing additional capacity to support the coordination of anti-poverty efforts across existing regional partnership arrangements and to identify and advise on the options to better support collaborative working to tackle child poverty.
4. Establish and support a Communities of Practice approach to provide a forum where colleagues from across public services and the third sector across Wales can compare learning and share good practice to support a joined-up approach to the funding, development and implementation of work to create a More Equal Wales including tackling child poverty.
5. Work with Regional Partnership Boards and wider partners to implement the NYTH/NEST framework for achieving a whole system approach to mental health and wellbeing for babies, children and young people. The NYTH/NEST framework focuses on the importance of the wider determinants of mental health and wellbeing including child poverty concerns and brings education, social care, health and third sector together to work in partnership to create a joined up approach to mental health support.

## How we will monitor and report on our progress

When the Welsh Government introduced the **Children and Families (Wales) Measure, 2010** it placed a duty on Welsh Ministers to set child poverty objectives and to report every 3 years on progress towards achieving those objectives.

This strategy has been co-constructed with the children and young people, families and organisations who have given their time to help us understand what will make the greatest difference to them. We are committed to continuing this way of working as we deliver the revised strategy.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act drives better decision making across the Welsh public sector and balances the needs of current and future generations. The **national milestones** measure our collective progress as a nation and progress towards these national milestones will help us deliver a more sustainable Wales for current and future generations.

We will produce a Framework to monitor and report on the impact of this strategy, engaging independent academic expertise, taking into account the **Wellbeing of Wales National Indicators**. The next Child Poverty Strategy Progress Report will be available in December 2025.

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