

**Faith Communities Forum  
Minutes of the Meeting on 16 October 2017  
Events Suite, Cathays Park**

**Present:**

First Minister	Chairperson
Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children	Deputy Chairperson
Philip Manghan	(Representative) Archbishop of Cardiff
Carol Wardman	(Representative) Archbishop of Church in Wales
Jim Stewart	Evangelical Alliance Wales
Nordzin Pamo	Buddhist Council of Wales
Naran Patel	Hindu Council of Wales
Stanley Soffa	South Wales Jewish Representative Council
Viv Bartlett	Bahá'í Council for Wales
Christine Abbas	Bahá'í Council for Wales

**Apologies:**

Aled Edwards	Churches Together in Wales
Gethin Rhys	Churches Together in Wales
Elfed Godding	Evangelical Alliance Wales
Lisa Gerson	South Wales Jewish Representative Council
Ahmed Darwish	Muslim Council for Wales
Peter Richards	Free Church Council of Wales
Surinder Channa	Sikh Cultural Association for Wales
Saleem Kidwai	Muslim Council for Wales
Nirmala Pisavadia	Hindu Council of Wales

**Presentations:**

Tom Davies	Children's Society Wales
Dr Sam Royston	Children's Society Wales

**Secretariat :**

Andrea Adams	Equality and Prosperity Division
Emma Small	Equality and Prosperity Division

**Officials:**

Maureen Howell	Equality and Prosperity Division
Sally Hunt	Equality and Prosperity Division
Ruth Studley	Community First Transition Team

**Welcome and Introductions**

The First Minister welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Minutes of the previous meeting were circulated to members in advance of the meeting. The minutes were agreed for accuracy.

## **Action Points from last meeting**

A summary of the action points from the last meeting together with updates was sent to members in advance of the meeting. These were noted.

## **Matters Arising**

There are no matters arising.

## **Agenda Item 1 – Child Poverty in Wales – Maureen Howell**

The First Minister said that Tackling Child poverty remains a priority for Welsh Government. Our National Strategy, which was published in September, provides a framework for our whole-government approach to increasing prosperity and addressing the root causes of poverty in a more effective, joined-up way.

Our aim of prosperity for all is not just about material wealth. It is about every one of us having a good quality of life and living in strong, safe communities. The National Strategy sets out the actions we will take to support families to prosper and enable children to have the best start in life.

The First Minister handed over to Maureen Howell, to give an update.

Maureen said that reducing child poverty in Wales is linked to building a strong economy and upskilling adults. Whilst the employment rate in Wales is at a record high, there were still 30% of children in Wales living in poverty in 2015/16. The economy inactivity is higher in Wales compared to the UK. There were 60% of children living in poverty where at least one adult was working in 2015-16.

Our ambition was to eradicate child poverty in 2020 – however, we know that child poverty is set to grow, partly as a result of the UK Government's tax and benefit reforms. However, we are committed to eradicating child poverty in the longer term.

Our focus is on the root causes of poverty – the early years and employability. Through our initiatives such as 'Lift and Communities for Work, we will support those furthest from the workplace to build the skills they need to find and progress in work. Programmes such as Flying Start, Families First and a focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) will support family resilience and build an ACE informed society. We will help deprived households to increase their income through initiatives such as our childcare offer which will provide thirty hours of free childcare and early education for working parents.

## **During the discussion the following points were made:**

- There are growing concerns about an increase of children with mental health issues, with an increase of self harming, particularly in girls.
- There is no sign of anything replacing the European Social Fund.
- The responsibility to raise children is not just with Government but with Communities.
- The 'Swindon Youth Empower Project' is an example of good practice of working with young disadvantaged people to share with officials working in the Child Poverty Team.
- Members asked if the data for those young people who are not in education, employment and training (NEET) is broken down into ethnic group.

**Actions for officials:**

- To forward the statutory Progress Report on child poverty which was published in December 2016
- To forward the Public Health Wales reports on Adverse Childhood Experiences
- To confirm if available data for NEETs is presented by ethnic group

**Agenda Item 2 – Faith and Community Cohesion Meeting of UK and Devolved Administrations- Carl Sargeant AM, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children**

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children gave an update from the last meeting of the Devolved Administration for Faith and Community Cohesion held in Edinburgh on 12 October.

All Ministers agreed that it was vital to hear the voices of G&T communities during policy making so that policy-makers can understand the “lived experience” of these communities. The UK asked for help from Scotland and Wales on how best to engage with communities.

In Scotland, the registered charity called ‘Interfaith Scotland’ (IFS) is funded by the Scottish Government. The IFS facilitates engagement between different faith and belief communities across Scotland. Representatives from the major faith communities in Scotland sit on the IFS Board.

The Cabinet Secretary asked the Faith Forum in Wales to come back to him with a paper for the next meeting with ideas about community cohesion and how we can do things better. He said that he would share the ideas with Ministers from UK Government and Scotland at the next Inter-Ministerial meeting (to be held in Wales in Spring 2018).

The Cabinet Secretary said there will be a separate meeting of the devolved administrations to discuss issues affecting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

**Action:** Forum members to produce a paper on how Faith Communities can contribute to Community Cohesion, for discussion at the next meeting in April 2018.

**Agenda Item 3 - The Children’s Society in Wales’ Report : The Knowledge Gap. Dr Sam Royston and Tom Davies, Children’s Society Wales.**

Sam said the purpose of the report was to examine the safeguarding responses for children in Wales who go missing or who are at risk of going missing. The report examined five key areas:

- 1) the number of children who have been missing and the number of missing episodes they experienced
- 2) the initial response undertaken by key agencies when a child is reported as missing

- 3) the provision of debriefs when a child is found or returns from a missing episode
- 4) the information gathered from conducting debriefs and how this is shared with partner agencies
- 5) safeguarding practice for looked after children who have been placed out of their local authority area and who go missing

Tom explained the report was the result of information from the fourteen Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to local authorities and police forces in Wales. Thirteen local authorities in Wales responded to the FOIs. The Children's Society conducted interviews with stakeholders working in children's services, the Church in Wales and with other charities that provide support to children who have been missing.

This report accompanies another report of from the Children's Society: Making Connections, in which examined information-sharing practices in England when children go missing, as the statutory framework supporting children who go missing differs across the two countries.

Some of the key findings from the report are:

- During 2015/16, almost 4,500 children in Wales went missing from home or care. Some of these children will have gone missing only once, while others will have experienced multiple missing episodes.
- Current guidance for safeguarding missing children in Wales does not make return interviews (or debriefs as they are often known) a statutory requirement. The research found that in Wales a high proportion of debriefs are decided on a case-by-case basis (30%), meaning children reported missing in Wales are less likely to receive an offer of a debrief than in England.
- Only two local authorities in Wales who responded to our FOI requests stated they operate data-sharing arrangements with the police through a multi-agency model with twelve reporting they have no data sharing agreement in place at all. This means when children go missing, police officers will often be unaware of the risks they face.
- Looked after children who are placed outside their home local authority are more likely to go missing, than children placed within their home local authority. Thirteen out of fourteen local authorities who responded to the FOI did not provide any information to the local police force when they received a looked-after child in their area. One local authority reporting they notify the police if they are aware the child is high risk.
- Four out of thirteen local authorities do not notify the local police force when placing a child in their boundaries and a further four only do so when the children is deemed to be a high risk.

Sam asked if the Welsh Government would, as part of its current revision of the All-Wales Protocol for Missing Children, make the independent debrief a statutory requirement across Wales. The Children's Society estimate the annual cost of introducing debriefs for all children going missing to be approximately £1.1m, based

on a debrief cost of £95. In addition, debriefs should be conducted by care workers and not officials because this could be less daunting for the child. The Children's Society is also calling for England to apply statutory guidance where children cross from England to Wales. The Children's Society confirmed there was not enough accurate data to evidence the number of debrief interviews being conducted in Wales.

The First Minister said we should re-examine the (multi-agency) model – get that right first. This will be more helpful than making a statutory arrangement. Part of the problem is that social workers are focussed on getting the child back to their family. This may not be the right decision for the child, if there is no stability within the family unit. The First Minister said we need data to evidence the number of debriefs conducted.

The First Minister said that safeguarding missing children involves a number of services, both devolved and non-devolved and is an issue Welsh Government takes with the utmost seriousness. We are taking action to both tackle the causes and respond to incidents of children going missing more effectively in Wales. We have been working with a wide range of stakeholders to inform our approach.

The Cabinet Secretary explained that Welsh Government has set up a Ministerial Advisory Group on Improving Outcomes for Children. David Melding AM is its Chair. The Group is reviewing the current All Wales Missing Protocol. The new Missing Protocol will provide practice guidance on procedures in relation to all missing children including those missing from residential care. The Group will provide its evidence to the Cabinet Secretary. The Cabinet Secretary will ask the advisory group to feedback to the forum at the next meeting.

**During the discussion the following points were made:**

- Children should have the right to a debrief interview, if they want one
- There should be support for foster carers to understand the complex issues of fostering children
- There appears to be a lack of sharing information between police and local authorities

**Action:** The Cabinet Secretary asked to return to this item at the next meeting.

**Agenda Item 4 - Communities First Transition (CFT) – Ruth Studley**

Ruth explained the Communities First programme will close by March 2018. The Cabinet Secretary announced a number of mitigating actions including a £6m Legacy Fund. This will be used to maintain the most effective aspects of Communities First and support associated community activity. The scope of The Legacy Fund will be determined at a local level by LAs in partnership with their communities and partners as they are best placed to determine which successful aspects should continue

The Welsh Government is now half way through the transition year. We are working with Lead Delivery Bodies (LDBs) to support both the closure of CF and how they plan to use their legacy fund in 18-19.

The LDBs have submitted their transition plans for the year and officials have been meeting each LDB regularly as well as holding the all Wales LDB Network meetings bi-monthly. These have allowed the opportunity for an open discussion to cover both broad and specific issues and to share best practice based on good effective working relationships. These have also given us the chance to understand the challenges LDBs are facing locally.

Early indications suggest that many LDBs are taking a holistic approach. Where appropriate they mainstreaming work previously delivered under Communities First and in some cases finding alternative sources of funding.

The Cabinet Secretary said the Communities First Programme was 16 years old, with millions of pounds going into our communities. This radical shift to lift people out of poverty is significant in our Prosperity for All programme. We want to build on that trust factor, using local knowledge. This transition is to make our communities more resilient and stronger for the future.

**During the discussion the following points were raised :**

- Officials were asked what they have learnt and reported the strength of communities to deliver locally when they are enabled to do so.
- Expertise within Communities First programme should not be lost – this will be picked up through the Lessons Learned exercises being conducted this year.

**Agenda 5 – Interfaith Week – Emma Small**

Emma asked the Forum to share their plans for celebrating Interfaith week. Emma informed the Forum that the Office of National Statistics is holding a seminar in London on 23 October to examine how information about Sikh faith communities are captured in the 2021 census.

**Action:** The secretariat will circulate to the Forum details of interfaith events to be held during Interfaith Week (12-19 November).

**Agenda Item 6 - Any Other Business**

- Naran Patel thanked the First Minister for attending the unveiling of the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Cardiff Bay on 2 October. He presented the First Minister with a commemorative book.
- Christine Abbas informed the Forum that the Bicentenary celebration of the founder of the Baha’I faith ( Baha’u’llah) will be held at the Senedd on 8 November.

**Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting will be issued shortly.