



Title: **Inquiry into Poverty in Wales: supplementary questions following oral evidence**

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1. Information and working context of Barnardo's Cymru

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities working in the country. We currently run 88 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with 19 of the 22 local authorities, supporting in the region of 8,500 children, young people and families last year. Barnardo's Cymru services in Wales include: care leavers and youth homelessness projects, young carers schemes, specialist fostering and adoption schemes, family centres and family support, parenting support, community development projects, family support for children affected by parental imprisonment, domestic abuse and parental substance misuse, short breaks and inclusive services for disabled children and young people, assessment and treatment for young people who exhibit sexually harmful or concerning behaviour and specialist services for children and young people at risk of, or abused through, child sexual exploitation and young people's substance misuse services.

Every Barnardo's Cymru service is different but each believes that every child and young person deserves the best start in life, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work with children to campaign for better childcare policy and to champion the rights of every child. We believe that with the right help, committed support and a little belief, even the most vulnerable children can turn their lives around.

- **This response may be made public.**
- **This response is on behalf of Barnardo's Cymru.**

Barnardo's registered Charity Nos. 216250 and SC037605
Rhifau Cofrestru'r elusen Barnardo's 216250 a SC037605

Inquiry submission: Strand 1: poverty and inequality

Barnardo's Cymru works with families, children and young people across Wales. This work includes provision of Families First services, provision in Communities First areas and work with specific groups who are particularly vulnerable to poverty such as families with disabled children, young carers whose parents are disabled or have issues such as substance misuse, children affected by parental imprisonment, young parents, care leavers and homeless young people.

1. Leadership and coordination

- **How successful is the Tackling Poverty Action Plan in linking with child poverty strategies?**
- **How could coordination between different strategies to tackle poverty be improved?**
- **Is there a tension between integrated, cross-governmental approaches to tackling poverty, and the need to provide tailored solutions to specific groups of people?**

We set out in our first written submission concerns about the loss of a specific Child Poverty Delivery Plan (as set out at consultation stage in relation to the current Strategy) and the development instead of an all age Tackling Poverty Action Plan. In particular the loss of a clear framework to deliver change for children affected by poverty against the UNCRC is less likely to achieve a position where children and young people living in families experiencing material deprivation can access their rights in the same way as their peers to secure good outcomes.

It is fair to say that revisions of the Tackling Poverty Action Plan since 2011 have led to incremental improvements in terms of inclusion of child poverty issues. The revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (currently out for consultation) has a much stronger focus on the UNCRC than the current Strategy as published in 2011. The revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales has been developed in a way that clearly links the Strategy and the current Tackling Poverty Action Plan. Work has been undertaken to set out the link between Tackling Poverty Action Plan outcomes and revised Child Poverty Strategy outcomes with shared targets/indicators and key policies for policies and programmes (see pages 23-26 of revised Child Poverty Strategy).

However we would strongly advocate the need for a separate Child Poverty Strategy Delivery Plan that utilises a children's rights framework in line with the UNCRC. The Welsh Government 'Evaluation of the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy' 2014 evidences that the percentage of children in relative poverty after housing costs (33%) and in-work poverty after working costs (21%) is worse than in the baseline year of 2005. The current global economic situation, UK austerity measures and welfare reform mean that realistically we are unlikely to see a reduction in material deprivation and in the number of children living in poverty in Wales. However Welsh Government can still take measures to mitigate the effects of poverty on children and young people and to ensure that household income does not impact on the degree to which children can access and realise their rights in line with their peers.

An approach that focuses on ensuring that children in poverty can realise their rights will in turn impact positively on the potential for them to enjoy good outcomes. Without this focus and investment children will remain in poverty as they grow into adulthood and will have children who grow up in the poor households and the cycle of poverty will not be broken.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales has set out in his Child Poverty Strategy (2012) that: *'Child poverty is the result of family poverty. However a child poverty approach to tackling the issue is essentially different from a family poverty approach.³ A child poverty approach puts the child at the centre of all policy measures and acknowledges the child as a rights bearer with rights that extend beyond the family. Once framed in a child rights context, based on the UNCRC the distinctiveness of a child poverty approach becomes clear and should drive all policy initiatives to combat child poverty.'*

We are concerned about the loss of the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty portfolio at a time when welfare reform, employment practises such as zero hour contracts and the increased cost of living mean that strong leadership on poverty across Welsh Government divisions is critical. The children's sector in Wales is advocating strongly for a Children and Young People's Minister who could provide strong leadership on child poverty as a cross-cutting issue.

2. Tackling poverty and inequality

- **Although some levers of influence over the labour market do not sit with the Welsh Government, what action could it take to encourage employers in Wales to assist in tackling poverty?**

The introduction of a socio-economic duty in Wales would assist in securing employer practices that would tackle poverty such as consideration of the placement of new premises in communities of multiple deprivation, an increase in flexible working arrangement offers and improvements in the potential for securing the living wage for employees. The Welsh Government commitment to support the development of a skilled workforce through education, training and workforce development must go hand in hand with structural changes to support employers in providing real and sustainable employment opportunities.

- **How could the introduction of a socio-economic duty in Wales support the Welsh Government's strategic focus on tackling poverty?**

A person's socio-economic background remains a key factor in determining their life chances and there is a clear link between the risk of socio-economic disadvantage and protected characteristics. The introduction of a socio-economic duty in Wales would contribute significantly to driving forward efforts to reduce the impact of child poverty and to improve equality of outcomes for children and young people in Wales.

The introduction of a socio-economic duty would support a process of integrated accountability for 'poverty proofing' in relation to the development of legislation and of policy at the national, regional and local

level. The duty could also impact positively on recruitment and employment practices, procurement policy and the focus on tackling poverty across key sectors such as housing, health, education etc.

While a Child Poverty Duty already exists as a result of the Children and Families Measure 2010 that required public bodies to produce a Child Poverty Strategy our original written evidence set out the ways in which the demonstration of this duty has been diluted in new integrated planning processes.

- **Your evidence highlights evidence of in-work poverty and food poverty. Can you expand on the specific issues faced by users of your services?**

Unfortunately many of the issues we have identified are very well rehearsed and have been examined over a number of years but continue to persist. Issues such as fuel poverty, transport costs, digital exclusion, the poverty premium, high interest debt, costs associated with education, and extra curricula activity and food poverty in the school holidays for families who qualify for free school meals.

However the impact of the radical changes that have been made to benefits system, unemployment rates, zero hour contracts and the rising cost of living are leading to a marked increase in families who are approaching our services in a state of destitution. We have seen a marked increase in the number of families experiencing food poverty because of rising living costs but also because of issues such as benefits changes and benefit sanctions.

3. Definition and evidence

- **To what extent does the Welsh Government's understanding of poverty reflect the actual experiences of families living in poverty, particularly around stigma and public attitudes?**

Our engagement with Welsh Government in relation to poverty suggests to us that they actively seek evidence from the sector in relation to the impact of poverty on families. Key programmes such as Communities First, Families First and Flying Start are underpinned by an approach based on community development and working with family strengths. The importance of supporting pupil well-being to tackle disadvantage has been recognised through guidance such as 'Rewriting the Future' but more could be done to ensure the implementation of processes to support pupil well-being. Exclusionary practices such as demand for course materials (especially for vocational education and training), expensive school trips and the expense of events such as the school prom (now common practice), insistence on uniform from more expensive suppliers, continue to leave children and young people from low income households feeling singled out and stigmatised.

- **Witnesses told the Committee last week that there needs to be a better understanding of who is living in poverty, as it is not a static and homogenous group. Should the Welsh Government adopt a clear definition of poverty?**
- **Could the Welsh Government collect more data to understand and address how people experience poverty in Wales, for example by taking into account debt and other expenditure rather than just measuring household income?**

We believe that there is already firm evidence from Wales and the UK in relation to poverty, for example from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the New Economics Foundation as well as from the Welsh Government. There is an official measure of poverty and Welsh Government has recognised the issue of in-work poverty. We do not believe that the adoption of a clear definition is a priority; rather it should be a priority to tackle the poverty that is already identified.

We already understand what the issues are- we have been examining the issue of child poverty in Wales for well over a decade. Data is already available from tackling poverty programmes as well as from UK sources. Some useful analysis of the impact of the welfare reforms was generated through work commissioned by Welsh Government. The focus must be on mitigating the impact of poverty and securing the well-being of families in poverty and the rights of children in poor households.

- **How effectively does the Welsh Government evaluate its actions to tackle poverty, such as Families First and Flying Start?**

The Welsh Government has commissioned evaluations of both programmes which has been published and are reasonably in-depth. We also understand that a shared outcomes framework for Families First, Flying Start and Communities First is being developed. As providers of Families First and Flying Start services we are subject to rigorous accountability measures in relation to use of resources, value for money and outcomes. The frequency of reporting and the level of scrutiny at a local level are very robust.