

Child Poverty Strategy

2012 Onwards



**Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru**
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

There is a set of laws, including the Care Standards Act 2000 and Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001, which explains the role and responsibilities of the Commissioner.

We want to see Wales as a country where children and young people are respected, valued, listened to and supported to lead safe and happy lives. There's a team of people who work with Keith – in Swansea and Colwyn Bay – to help him:

- **support** children and young people to find out about children's rights
- **listen** to children and young people to find out what's important to them
- **advise** children, young people and those who care for them if they feel they've got nowhere else to go with their problems
- **influence** government and other organisations who say they're going to make a difference to children's lives, making sure they keep their promises to children and young people
- **speak up** for children and young people nationally on important issues – being the children's champion in Wales.

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Foreword

Child poverty has been a consistent issue of concern for my office since its inception in 2001. The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 placed a duty on the Welsh Government to publish a Child Poverty Strategy which focuses on how the Government's policies collectively contribute to three strategic objectives; i) to reduce the number of families living in workless households; ii) to improve the skills of parents/carers and young people living in low-income households so they can secure well-paid employment, and iii) to reduce inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes of children and families by improving the outcomes of the poorest. In recognition of the key role played by the Government's partners in the shared fight against child poverty, the Measure made action to work towards the goal of eradicating child poverty a statutory requirement across local authorities, Local Health Boards and a range of public bodies in Wales.

I have already voiced my concerns over Welsh Government's decision to integrate action on child poverty into an overarching Tackling Poverty Action Plan that covers children and adults. The Consultation Draft Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2010, adopted a child's rights approach framed within the 7 Core Aims. I sought assurances that this approach would not be lost in the new overarching Tackling Poverty Action Plan. The Tackling Poverty Action Plan was published in June 2012 and of particular concern for me is the apparent loss of a clear rights based framework related directly to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) through the Welsh Government's seven core aims.

Although the Children's Commissioner for Wales is not subject to the duty contained within the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, I have made the decision to publish my own child poverty strategy to set out the work my office is undertaking to contribute towards tackling child poverty in Wales. This commitment was set out in my 2011-2012 annual report. It is my intention to update the child poverty strategy on an annual basis and to identify and promote further examples of good practice from across Wales.



Keith Jones

Child poverty

Traditionally across the UK child poverty has been seen as a consequence of family poverty resulting from a lack of economic resources. The key measure of child poverty used in the UK is a relative income measure; child poverty is defined as the percentage of children aged 0-17 years living in households with an income below 60% of the national median income.

Analysis published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2012¹ notes that a fall in relative child poverty in 2010-11 does not reflect increases in the real incomes of low-income families with children and is instead driven by the reduction in median income, and hence the relative poverty line. The UK Government complements its income-based measures of child poverty with a measure of 'material deprivation'; children are classed as living in material deprivation if their parents say they cannot afford certain items. The number of children materially deprived has increased since its low point in 2006-07. Patterns of material deprivation across different groups of children vary. The children of lone parents, those living in families where the youngest child is under 5 years of age, those living in a family where someone is disabled and those living in privately rented accommodation look relatively 'poorer' when a measure of material deprivation is used as opposed to a measure of income poverty.

The Welsh Government Programme for Government Annual Report was published in May 2012.² Evidence contained in the report demonstrates that during the pre-recession period Wales' percentage of children living in combined material deprivation and low income were broadly in line with the rest of the UK. However the most recent data from 2009-10 suggests that the financial crisis – and ensuing recession – has had a disproportionate impact on incomes and levels of material deprivation in Wales.

A rights-based approach to tackling child poverty

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international human rights treaty that applies to all children and young people under 18. It is the most widely ratified international human rights instrument and gives children and young people a wide range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights which State Parties to the Convention are expected to implement. In 2004, the Welsh Assembly Government adopted the UNCRC as the basis of all policy making for children and young people framed through the 7 Core Aims. Welsh Government passed the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure in 2011 and as of May 2012, Welsh Ministers need to demonstrate due regard to the UNCRC in the way in which they progress the integrated planning agenda and reflect this in their legislative and policy functions.

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.

Child poverty in Wales is a significant problem and looks set to affect the lives of growing numbers of children and young people. These children and young people will have their childhood opportunities limited, may be restricted in their ability to access their rights and are at risk of entering adulthood with limited opportunities to realise their potential all because they are from low income households.

- **Welsh Government cannot control the levels of tax and benefit income going into households. However the Welsh Government has made a commitment to the children and young people of Wales – a commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child.**
- **The extent to which a child or young person can realise their rights and reach their potential must not be dependent on the level of income in the household where they live.**
- **Ensuring that all children and young people – no matter where they live or how much money goes into their home can access their rights is within the gift of Welsh Government.**

Once a government signs the Convention (UNCRC), it is called a State party. State parties that have ratified the Convention are obliged to submit detailed reports every 5 years to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In response to the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee in 2008 at the culmination of the fourth periodical report (2003-08) Welsh Government identified 16 priority areas for action. These were published as the Getting it Right Action Plan for Wales 2008-2014. Tackling poverty for children and young people was priority 1 in the Action Plan. Welsh Government is in the process of finalising a progress report in relation to the Action Plan. The Childrens Commissioners from the four nations of the United Kingdom submit a separate report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Child poverty was an area of concern for Commissioners across the four nations in the report submitted to the Committee in 2008 and the continued need for urgent action on this issue will be considered in the UK Commissioners report submitted in the next reporting round.

Communities First area visits 2012

Meeting children and young people and finding out what life is like for them is a critical part of the role of the Commissioner and informs the work that is prioritised by his office. The Children's Commissioner contributed to a BBC television production that focused on the realities of life for families living in poverty in Wales that was broadcast earlier this year. The experience of going into families' homes, meeting children, young people and their parents and hearing about the day to day struggles they are facing had a huge impact on the Commissioner.

“Meeting children and young people across Wales is not only one of the most enjoyable aspects of my role, it provides a fantastic opportunity for me to hear from children about their daily experiences and the issues that most affect them.” Keith Towler, Children's Commissioner for Wales

In 2011 the Commissioner conducted a successful schools visits programme and following his involvement in the BBC Wales broadcast he decided to undertake a similar week long tour of projects working with children and young people in Communities First areas. Communities First is a Welsh Government community focused programme that supports the most disadvantaged people in the most deprived areas with the aim of contributing to alleviating persistent poverty.

The objectives of the visits were to meet and listen to children and young people living in Communities First areas, listen to the adults supporting these children and young people about the issues facing these communities and identify any good practice with children and young people being undertaken by projects in Communities First areas. In addition the Commissioner visited two primary schools undertaking important work with very disadvantaged families. The Commissioner was really impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment of projects working with children and young people in disadvantaged areas. The examples of practice he found out about are used in this strategy to demonstrate community based work to promote the rights of children and young people growing up in poverty. The 2012 tour visited projects in South and West Wales. In 2013 the Commissioner will undertake a similar programme of visits in other areas of Wales.

Community Ambassadors

The Children's Commissioner for Wales already operates a successful School Ambassadors scheme that currently involves over 130 primary schools in Wales and is set to expand. The Commissioner has decided to pilot a Community Ambassadors scheme in order to increase opportunities for children and young people living in areas of social deprivation to inform the work that he does. As with the established School Ambassadors children and young people who become Community Ambassadors will be expected to:

- 1. Tell others about the UNCRC;**
- 2. Tell others about the Children's Commissioner for Wales;**
- 3. Be a voice for the Commissioner on the ground to tell him about the positive things that are happening in their communities so he can share it with others and tell him about anything that they think they need help to improve in their area.**

The pilot is being undertaken across a number of Communities First areas and the visits acted as a means to invite communities to become involved. The Children's Commissioners office is providing training workshops and on-going support to the pilot areas. The pilot is also being supported by the Film Agency for Wales and the National Museum of Wales. The pilot will be completed by the end of March 2013.

Equality Impact Assessment

The Children's Commissioner for Wales is subject to Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and has a Strategic Equality Plan that outlines how he will discharge those duties. It is clear that the Children's Commissioner has an important role to progress equality of opportunity for all children and young people in Wales. The equality impact assessment (EIA) process is a systematic way of examining whether a function, policy or procedure affects any person or group of persons adversely. The Children's Commissioner for Wales is undertaking a schedule of EIAs and will be making these assessments publicly available. For the purposes of the equality duty there are a number of protected characteristics such as for example disability, sex and race.

However in carrying out the schedule of EIAs in relation to the functions, policies and procedures of the Children's Commissioner for Wales a decision has been made to include socio-economic considerations as a discrete factor to be assessed although there is no obligation to do so under the Equality Act 2010. This means that in everything we do we should be confident that the needs of children and young people from low-income households have been considered and that we ensure that there is no negative impact on them and that we advance equality of opportunity.

Employment policy

The Children's Commissioner for Wales aims to provide pay, employment conditions and a working environment for its people in a responsible, supportive and creative way. A way that ensures we are contributing to society as an ethical employer and ensures that we are considering the impact of our employment processes on families and children of all ages.

In order to minimise barriers to employment which could prevent low income parents considering the Children's Commissioner for Wales as an employer we will:

- Design jobs and services with flexibility in mind so that we can respond to the individual and different needs of parents in employment. This would include for example opportunities for home working.
- Invest in individuals to take up training opportunities and gain new qualifications to support the creation of a skilled workforce able to work generically to provide cover arrangements in different parts of the organisation.
- Advertise our posts in a range of different arenas using a range of different methods in order to ensure that socio economic considerations are routinely applied to the recruitment process.
- Promote our comprehensive set of employment policies, procedures and guidelines that enable us to operate effectively and fairly with our employees, policies that are generally in excess of the statutory and market requirements, particularly regarding special leave and maternity rights.
- Promote our established commitment to supporting a variety of working patterns, flexible working requests and childcare voucher schemes to remove barriers to employment for parents.
- Ensure that we will offer salaries to all our people and sub contractors that will pay the same or more than the amount recognised as the 'living wage' in the UK (currently calculated as £7.20 per hour in 2012).
- Involve young people in designing a number of targeted future work experience opportunities at the Children's Commissioner for Wales specifically for young people from communities where there are high levels of multiple deprivation 2013/2014.
- Provide learning opportunities for all staff, volunteers and audit committee members on raising awareness about child poverty in Wales and its effect on children, young people and families in Wales. This will include progress against the Children's Commissioner for Wales' child poverty strategy and child poverty issues.

Welsh Government's seven core aims

Aim 1: flying start in life

Flying Start is a flag-ship Welsh Government programme targeted at 0-3 year olds in the most disadvantaged communities in Wales. The programme provides free quality part-time childcare for 2-3 year olds; an enhanced Health Visiting service (where the Health Visitor caseload is capped at 110 children); access to Parenting Programmes and access to Language and Play sessions. These are universally available to all children aged 0-3 and their families in the areas in which it runs. However not all children in low-income households live in areas where the targeted Flying Start programme is available.

Families First is a Welsh Government innovation programme that promotes the development by local authority areas of effective multi-agency systems and support, with a clear emphasis on prevention and early intervention for families, particularly those living in poverty. The programme is built on evidence that the best way of supporting children, particularly those living in poverty, is by working with the whole family. This approach is based on sound evidence. However the Children's Commissioner is clear that in considering the holistic needs of the family the individual needs of children and young people within the family must be met. Children and young people may for example require therapeutic support or access to play opportunities to meet their specific needs as part of a response to the whole family.

Flying Start and Families First are targeted programmes – they do not provide for families who do not live in target areas or meet thresholds for access to targeted services. The Children's Commissioner is concerned that changed funding streams and the rationalisation of local plans and partnerships could limit the priority given to universally available support to parents and carers. Not all low-income households are in Flying Start geographically targeted areas and not all low-income families need the level of support offered through Families First. If we support parents and carers we support better outcomes for children and young people. The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 included provision for parental support services but there is no current guidance in place to support implementation.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales will:

- Review evaluation evidence in relation to Flying Start and Families First programmes as it becomes available and monitor reported progress against the indicators included in the Programme of Government; this evidence will inform the annual update of the CCfW Child Poverty Strategy.
- Continue to engage with Welsh Government on the need for guidance to support the implementation of parenting support as set out in the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

Aim 2: access to education, training and learning opportunities

Final data on the school banding of secondary schools was published by Welsh Government in December 2011. The measures used reflect the Minister's priorities for improvement which include reducing the impact of deprivation. Data published by Welsh Government in March 2011 indicates that performance of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than their non eligible counterparts at all key stages and in all performance measures.⁴ The School Standards Unit is working with education consortia to take forward improvement plans with each band 4 and 5 school.

Evidence suggests that solutions for reducing the poverty gap in education can be found in holistic and mutually reinforcing approaches that unite schools, parents and communities. However the latest Estyn annual report⁵ suggests that only a 'few schools' are supporting disadvantaged learners well and that schools do not share best practice or collaborate well with each other on this issue.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales will:

- Review and monitor progress on the Programme of Government indicator on the percentage of Flying Start children reaching their development milestones at age three years and differences in Key Stage 4 attainment compared to levels of deprivation ; this evidence will inform the annual update of the CCfW Child Poverty Strategy.

- Use his influence to promote good practice on reducing the gaps in educational outcomes between children and young people from low-income households and their peers. Engage with local and national decision makers on the need for better practice exchange on the impact of community focussed schools.
- Target schools in areas of multiple deprivation for inclusion in his School Ambassadors programme.
- Write to institutions of Higher Education in Wales to highlight the work Cardiff University have been undertaking in supporting Adamsdown Homework Club in Cardiff and to ask them to consider similar partnerships as part of their work on tackling child poverty.

Promoting good practice – making sure children and young people living in poverty can access their right to an education that supports them to reach their potential.

Goetre Primary School, Merthyr Tydfil

The Children's Commissioner for Wales visited Goetre Primary School in the summer term of 2012. The school serves a community where there are high indicators of multiple deprivation, and where a lot of parents are young parents, many of whom have basic skills issues themselves. There are currently 6 mainstream classes and 3 Learning Resource Base Units catering for pupils with additional learning needs in the Junior Department. In the Infants Department there are Lower and Upper Foundation Phase Units and two Learning Resource Bases catering for the needs of approximately 350 children.

The school has employed an Education Family Support Officer who is driving forward action on working with families and the community to ensure that children are accessing and benefiting from an education. The decision to create this post is part of

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the wider ethos of a school that is truly community focussed. The work has a clear focus on promoting a strong and positive relationship between the school, families and the community. The school is a hive of activity that includes practical support as well as work to engage families in education. This includes:

- A uniform recycling scheme;
- Facilitating food bank support for families struggling to feed their children in the school holidays;
- A food cooperative is facilitated by the school to offer fruit and vegetables at a reduced cost to support families on low incomes to provide healthy meals;
- Poor attendance is closely monitored by the school and this supports the school to identify families who would benefit from the support of other agencies to help them tackle a variety of other significant issues such as domestic abuse or substance misuse;
- Providing basic skills learning opportunities for parents on the school site;
- Engaging mothers, fathers and other family members in volunteering at the school to help with the development of a literacy room and a reading café.

The Commissioner has agreed to return to the school and occupy the story telling chair in the schools new literacy room.

Adamsdown Communities First Homework Club

The Homework Club was established two years ago by Adamsdown Communities First and the Adamsdown African Association. The club aims to raise attainment and achievement with students in inner city schools, in particular children from families who have little to no history of going to university. Cardiff University student tutors support the children and young people in their homework and exam preparation. The Children's Commissioner visited the homework club where children and young people told him about how the homework club has helped their education and about maths and science being fun. The net result are big improvements in their grades at school. They have grown in confidence and are achieving in ways they

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did not think were possible. It's also clear that the University students have also grown and benefited from this initiative.

Glyncoch Communities First and the People and Work Unit

Glyncoch Communities First working in partnership with the People and Work Unit have developed a work stream firmly focused on raising the value of learning and achievement in the community. The community includes some great schools but poor GCSE results, low levels of literary and high rates of young people not in education, employment or training meant that the community was high on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation for education. School Focused Communities Glyncoch is an action-research programme following a cohort of children as they go through secondary education while providing support to them and their families. The project monitors their attendance, behaviour, attainment and family contact with the school. The impact of this project and of wider work in the community to build family and community capacity to support learning is starting to be seen.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales heard how some of the most disadvantaged young people have started going to college, truancy among some year groups has dropped by a third and three young people have recently entered university. At the same time 'Build it Glyncoch' has been working with young people who are not in education, training or employment to provide opportunities to develop skills in the built environment trades while working on improving community facilities. The next phase of work includes a Family Learning Worker for primary aged children funded through the Lottery through Oxfam.

Aim 3: enjoy the best possible physical, mental, social and emotional health

The National Service Framework (NSF) for Children, Young People and Maternity Services was launched in 2005 and set out important standards in support and service provision for children and young people in Wales. The NSF sets out standards for children and young people with mental health problems and disorders, disabled children and young people, children and young people in special circumstances and children and young people with acute and chronic illness or injury. All of these issues are associated with increased risk of poverty. There is, for example, a finely graded increase in childhood behavioural and emotional problems with increasing social disadvantage.⁶ Recent evidence supports the position that families with a disabled child continue to experience financial hardship.⁷ Children and young people in special circumstances include those living a range of circumstances such as children with a parent in prison. Research has suggested that criminal justice and social welfare policies combine to impoverish, disadvantage and exclude prisoners' families and their children in particular.⁸ Children with a prisoner in the family are likely to experience a range of issues including poor emotional well-being, disruptive behaviour, low self-esteem, poor education achievement and mental health difficulties.⁹

The National Service Framework (NSF) for Children, Young People and Maternity Services if robustly implemented could have a positive impact on the health and well-being of children and young people at risk of living in poverty. This would support the strategic aims for reducing health inequalities as set out in 'Fairer Outcomes for All' (2011). However at this time the current status of the NSF is unclear.

Children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing is important in its own right but also because it affects their physical health (both as a young person and as an adult). Good social, emotional and psychological health helps protect young people against emotional and behavioural problems, violence and crime, teenage pregnancy and the misuse of drugs and alcohol. It can also help them to learn and achieve academically, thus affecting their long-term social and economic wellbeing.¹⁰ There are some excellent examples of work taking place in and through schools to support and promote the emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young

people. The majority of children in Wales attend school and this provides a perfect opportunity for them to access support to improve their emotional well-being.

The inequitable gaps in health and wellbeing have been increasing over the past 20 years.¹¹ There are ten top priorities in Welsh Government's Our Healthy Future strategy (2009). These include:

- Reducing inequities in health;
- Reducing levels of smoking;
- Reducing unhealthy eating;
- Stopping the growing harm from alcohol and drugs;
- Reducing the number of teenage pregnancies;
- Increasing physical activity.

There are some powerful public health message resources being produced by children and young people for children and young people at a community level. More could be done to promote the sharing of these resources. The use of 'viral videos' as a means to spread public health messages have been identified as a growing phenomena.¹²

The Children's Commissioner for Wales will:

- **Review and monitor progress on the relevant health indicators contained in the Programme of Government. This evidence will inform the annual update of the CCfW Child Poverty Strategy;**
- **Request that Welsh Government provide an update on the current status of the National Service Framework for children, young people and maternity services and implementation of the NSF;**
- **The Commissioner is already aware of a range of well evidenced and effective programmes being delivered through primary schools to support the emotional well-being of pupils. There are some examples of a similar approach through secondary schools. The Commissioner will be seeking further information on the delivery of such programmes at a secondary level and will promote those that are effective;**

— The campaign ‘See Me! Dyma Fi’ has been launched by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales to smash negative stereotypes and help improve attitudes towards children and young people in Wales. The Commissioner now intends to develop a video and resource ‘swap shop’ facility through the campaign website www.seeme-dymafi.org.uk. Children, young people and the community or school groups that work with them will be able to submit films and other resources that they have developed in relation to public health (as well as other issues). This will provide a means through which the important public health work being created by children and young people and for children and young people to be shared. This facility will be promoted through Communities First networks in Wales.

Promoting good practice – support to increase the opportunities for children and young people living in poverty to realise their right to enjoy the best possible physical, mental, social and emotional health

Glyncoch Communities First, RCT, Cwm Taf Health Board, South Wales Police and the Safety Zone Treforest

Smalley Dee goes up in smoke - This is an anti-smoking film made by the young people of Glyncoch. A timebanking project supported by Glyncoch Communities First Partnership and Cwm Taf Local Health Board. Story, acting, music production, lyrics and performance was put together by a small group of extremely talented 6-11 year olds over the 2011 Easter and Summer Holidays. www.youtube.com/watch?v=xq5OZYXxQ1s&feature=relmfu

Smalley Dee 2 – Down With Drugs

Anti-drug rap video made by Glyncoch Youth Action Team during the 2012 Easter Holidays. All writing (story, lyrics and music) and performances (acting and singing) by a number of 8-14 yr old residents of Glyncoch, trying to make a difference. Supported by Glyncoch Communities First Partnership, South Wales Police and the Safety Zone Treforest. www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmA8jhbem20

Goetre Primary School, Merthyr Tydfil and the SEAL programme

The SEAL programme is based on curriculum materials which aim to develop the underpinning qualities that help promote positive behaviour and effective learning. Goetre Primary School participated in an Action Research project introduced as part of the Welsh Government RAISE programme work in schools in the Pen-Y-Dre school cluster. Goetre School developed a Whole School Approach to SEAL through the project. The school rewrote the behaviour policy with a focus on reward for making good choices and SEAL themes are used to develop motivation through activities to foster the achievement of personal, academic and pro-social goals. The school is able to evidence outcomes in terms of improved Emotional Literacy for pupils.

Townhill Community Primary School, Swansea

Townhill Community School is a restorative school. Restorative practice (RP) empowers teachers to be successful and effective practitioners within their classroom, raising standards and achievement across the school and developing aspirational, motivated and responsible pupils. All children sometimes come to school with worries and however big or small they may be, those worries can affect a child and then in turn, affect, their day’s education.

The Children’s Commissioner attended one of the schools morning ‘check-in’ circles where pupils are given the opportunity to talk about their feelings and any concerns they have. Each classroom has an individual feelings/mood board, with individual names that can be placed on their feeling for that day. At the end of each day, each class has an end of day ‘check-out’ to allow them to discuss how their day has been. The Children’s Commissioner was impressed with the ways in which the school works to ensure that the pupils feel happy and comfortable throughout their school day and makes their emotional wellbeing a priority.

Aim 4: have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural opportunities

The benefits of access to play in terms of promoting the wellbeing of children and young people are well evidenced¹³ as are the negative impacts of play deprivation.¹⁴ Children and young people from low income households are restricted in their access to structured play and leisure opportunities because of transport and access costs.¹⁵ The issue of cost as a barrier to participation in structured activities is accentuated where clubs or groups ask for a terms costs in advance, a cost that low income families on a tight weekly budget cannot meet. Although children and young people may have access to opportunities for community based freely chosen play, children and young people from disadvantaged communities commonly report that they do not feel safe and/or are not welcomed by adults in the community spaces where they would like to play.¹⁶

Welsh Government is the first county in the world to establish a duty in relation to play within its legislative framework through the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. It is imperative that Welsh Government provide local authorities with the direction they need to implement the provisions for play within the 2010 Measure. In a period of financial constraint there is concern that provision for play may be viewed as an added extra rather than as the right of every child. The Welsh Government has issued draft regulations and statutory guidance setting out the range of matters that local authorities, and their partners, need to consider in completing a play sufficiency assessment in relation to the first part of the duty contained in the 2010 Measure. The second part of the duty on local authorities is to secure sufficient play opportunities in their areas for children, so far as reasonably practicable, having regard to the assessments, and the duty to publish information about play opportunities for children in their areas and keep the information up to date. This will be commenced after full consideration has been given to the assessments and the local authorities' plans for securing sufficient play opportunities.

Evidence gathered by Sports Wales¹⁷ identified that pupils in schools with a higher percentage of free school meal take up are less likely to be frequent participants in sport. They are also less likely to participate in regular sport at a club or to visit a leisure centre.

Sport encourages working in a team, it builds self-esteem, it helps children and young people to realise that they're good at something, and it gives them something to look forward to. It makes them healthy and happy. As adults we need to provide the opportunities and makes offers to children and young people so that they can find and enjoy the sport that interests them.

Museums have a central role in providing children and young people with the knowledge and experiences that can support an understanding of their cultural heritage and of cultural diversity. The challenge now is to make sure that the right to a wide range of cultural activities is enjoyed by all children and young people including children living in poverty. Research tells us that there are many barriers to be overcome in order to engage children and young people from deprived backgrounds in museum activities.¹⁸ In Wales there is a commitment to free entry to exhibitions in addition to free entry to the museum itself and there is evidence that since free entry was introduced in 2001 there has been an increase in the numbers of people from disadvantaged communities visiting the National Museums of Wales. Estyn's report on tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools services' was published last year. The report noted that effective schools in disadvantaged areas attach great importance to extra-curricular and out-of-school hours provision, including cultural enrichment.¹⁹

Youth services and community projects play a vital role in providing young people in disadvantaged communities with pro-social opportunities to engage in activities that can help them to build their confidence and self-esteem and to make a contribution to this communities.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales will:

- **Review the outcomes of the implementation of the Play Sufficiency Duty across local authorities in Wales with a particular focus on the attention given to the needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities and households; this evidence will inform the annual update of the CCfW Child Poverty Strategy;**

- Monitor the information brought to the attention of the office of the Commissioner in relation to any loss of play provision, including provision for disabled children and young people as a result of changes in funding, planning and partnership arrangements and this evidence will inform the annual update of the CCfW Child Poverty Strategy;
- Engage with Sport Wales in relation to opportunities for joint working in taking forward the aims of Sport Wales Child Poverty Strategy and the Children’s Commissioner for Wales Child Poverty Strategy;
- Work with Welsh Government and ‘Kids in Museums’ to develop the participation of children and young people in museums in Wales. The drive of this work is all about making museums child, young people and family friendly and driving forward more and more engagement;
- Work with the Film Agency for Wales and the National Museum of Wales in delivering the Children’s Commissioner for Wales Community Ambassador Pilot scheme;
- The Children’s Commissioner has used his annual report to call on Welsh Government to address the delay in progress of key guidance in the area of youth support. The Children’s Commissioners forward workplan will include a focus on gathering evidence about the stability and security of adequate engagement with and support for young people in Wales. This work will include distinct work on the impact of any planning or funding processes on provision for young people from disadvantaged communities.

Promoting good practice – support to increase the opportunities for children and young people living in poverty to realise their right to play, leisure, sporting and cultural opportunities.

Purple Routes Play Project, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire

The Purple Routes Play project is a BIG Lottery Funded project to support children’s play in the community. The project provides free open access play sessions for children and young people aged 5-15 years in parks and open spaces across 16 areas in Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, including 4 Communities First areas. The Children’s Commissioner visited Morfa Spray and Play park in Llanelli where he met children enjoying an open access play session. The Commissioner also met elected members, Communities First staff and board members and a Carmarthenshire Play Development Officer. It was clear that the Purple Routes project is providing a valuable resource to children and young people and that this work sits within a wider commitment to the importance of play as evidenced in the Carmarthenshire Children and Young People’s Play Strategy. Importantly the decisions about what to provide are partly based on a community consultation which involved children and young people across communities in Carmarthenshire in making short films about play opportunities.

Bettws Communities First, Newport: Junior Community Sports Leader Award and Community Sports Leader Award Accreditation

As part of their work to increase access to training, education and employment the Communities First work in Bettws, Newport includes supporting young people in working towards Junior Sports Leader Award (JSLA) accreditation (14-18 year olds) and Community Sports Leader Award (CSLA) accreditation (16-25 year olds). The young people are also involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. The Children’s Commissioner met

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young people involved in the scheme and heard from them that without the opportunity it offered they 'would be doing nothing'. Despite some complex issues around the venue at which this work can be delivered and questions about funding to secure consistency in staff support the Commissioner was impressed by the motivation and commitment of the young people and staff involved in this work. The young people are hopeful that the accredited skills they are gaining will help them into employment opportunities in the future.

Just Bling? – Learning Through Culture and Creativity

Just Bling? is designed to offer young people opportunities they might not otherwise have. Each individual aspect of the project has at its core a commitment to supporting vocational and community learning, extending personal and social education, assisting the development of participation and citizenship skills, strengthening outreach support to disadvantaged young people, improving the range and quality of support for young people and developing initiatives to encourage engagement in learning and training. Just Bling? combined the arts, museums and the Communities First vision framework in an innovative way to provide new opportunities for young people. The project created a range of experiences that enable participants to gain skills as they explore issues surrounding their own culture and heritage, together with the culture and heritage of others. The participants created objects, displays, images, films, exhibitions and multimedia resources, all presenting the views and ideas of young people themselves on jewellery and 'bling'. Amgueddfa Cymru brought together groups of young people from Communities First areas to museums around Wales, to work with artists and museum professionals to create their own 'bling' – anything from a simple ring to complex body adornments. The young people's work was displayed at the National Museums during July-September 2012. The project was funded through the Communities First Outcomes Fund. Staff from the office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales visited the exhibition at Swansea Waterfront Museum and saw the impressive work that had been produced and displayed.

Aim 5: treated with respect and have their race and cultural identity recognised

Disadvantaged or 'vulnerable' children and young people often face barriers to participation.²⁰ Research evidence suggests that organisations that succeed in engaging with disadvantaged young people do so because they rely heavily on outreach work, established a positive reputation in the local community and link with other agencies who have contact with specific groups of young people.²¹ As well as ensuring that children and young people have opportunities to become involved in strategic development and service delivery, services have to consider how they can participate in decision-making on an individual level.

The Welsh Government has developed and adopted National Standards for Participation, for providers of services to children and young people and Section 12 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 puts local participation strategies on a statutory basis. Local authorities and their partners are required to produce a Local Participation Strategy, so that children and young people have opportunities to have their views heard and to be involved in decisions that affect their lives at the local level.

Gypsies and Travellers are recognised ethnic minority groups and are therefore protected under race relations legislation, however many organisations, and the professionals working on their behalf, including statutory, private and voluntary sectors fail to recognise these communities as such. Gypsy and Traveller communities are commonly presented with prejudicial and condemning attitudes with a lack of cultural understanding or interest when they attempt to engage with mainstream services including education, health, children and young peoples services. Welsh Government published their strategic policy framework, 'Travelling to better Future' in 2011. The Equality and Human Rights Commission produced a comprehensive review of inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities in 2009²² and the high levels of poverty amongst the population was one of their key areas of concern.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales will:

- Review Local Participation Strategies in relation to evidence of actions designed to increase opportunities for the participation for children and young people from low-income households and disadvantaged communities;
- Undertake a targeted awareness raising campaign across Communities First clusters in Wales to raise awareness of the Children's Commissioner for Wales Investigation and Advice service. This service offers practical advice and ensures that appropriate agencies are involved with children, young people and those raising concerns on their behalf so that they can have their views heard by services. As a last resort where there is evidence that services are not following processes or procedures in the way that they should or that complaints are not being taken seriously the Investigation and Advice service take forward their concerns directly with providers on a case work basis;
- Engage with key stakeholders working with and on behalf of Gypsy Traveller children and young people to identify the issues that the Children's Commissioner should tackle in relation to the needs of this group of children and young people and to raise awareness of the Children's Commissioner for Wales' Advice and Support service.

Promoting good practice – support to increase the opportunities for children and young people living in poverty to be treated with respect and have their race and cultural identity recognised

Participation

All of the Communities First projects that the Children's Commissioner for Wales visited clearly demonstrated that they work in a way that aims to provide meaningful opportunities for the views and experiences of children and young people to inform decisions about the ways in which community projects are developed. There were also examples of areas where children and young people have been provided with training to undertake their own community consultations and where decisions about the activities and projects to be taken forward are led by young people themselves.

Ministry of Life, Cardiff

Ministry of Life, is a youth outreach and skills development programme, which aims to equip youngsters to perform, organise and run youth events. The project is based in Adamsdown resource centre and although now stand alone it started life as a Communities First project. Ministry of Life provides workshops in relation to MC, DJ skills, sound production and performance. Members have the chance to gain or improve a range of skills including event hosting, advertising, time keeping, health and safety, sound technology, finance, catering, stewarding and others. The Children's Commissioner met the founder of the project and heard about the success the project is having in attracting Czech Roma young people. Children and young people from the local Czech Roma community are particularly disadvantaged and marginalised. Traditionally they have been seen by organisations and services as a group who are 'hard to engage'. However the sessions offered by the Ministry of Life have been attracting a growing number of Czech Roma young people and this is providing a positive opportunity to engage them in the life of the wider community.

Aim 6: have a safe home and community

There has been a general trend of increase in the number of households accepted as homeless since the end of 2009. Recent comparisons in the press suggesting rates of increase are particularly high in Wales may be misleading as a direct comparison with the English regions does not take account of differences in the way homelessness applications are dealt with in Wales. However the presence of dependent children or a pregnant woman in the household continues to be the most commonly stated priority need category in latest figures available (for January to March 2012)²³ accounting for 42% of all acceptances. The number of 16 to 17 year olds accepted as homeless has been falling since the peak of 13% seen in 2009-2010. The Welsh Government statistical release suggests that this may be the result of increased family mediation work. Welfare reform changes from UK Government combined with the current economic situation may mean that families struggle to support young people to remain in the family home because of financial hardship.

The '2011 Children and Young People's Wellbeing Monitor for Wales' states that the 'fitness standard', against which homes were judged fit for human habitation, is no longer in use, but in 2008 the Living in Wales stock survey assessed for the last time how many homes were unfit and who their occupants were. It found that 18,994 households containing one or more people aged under 25 were living in unfit homes.

Welsh Government have recently consulted on a Housing Bill that aims to improve the housing system in Wales. The role of housing in tackling poverty is set out throughout the White Paper and that there is direct reference to the Tackling Poverty Action Plan (2012). Attention is also given within the White Paper to fuel poverty, a considerable issue for families with children and of vulnerable young people living independently.

The National Assembly Children and Young People's Committee report of their inquiry into the provision of safe places to play and hang out was published in 2010.²⁴ The report consolidates the evidence that children, young people and organisations have been presenting for some time. The fact is that children and young people,

and in particular those living in disadvantaged communities have real concerns about community safety. Living in community spaces that are full of dog mess, litter and drug paraphernalia, sharing public spaces with traffic traveling above 20mph and feeling that they are not welcomed by adults or that adults are involved in frightening behaviour are all issues that children and young people continue to express their concern about.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales will:

- **Seek a Welsh Government response to his call for a reference to the role of housing in relation to the Child Poverty Duty on the face of the Housing Bill;**
- **Use his campaign 'See Me/Dyma Fi' to smash negative stereotypes and help improve attitudes towards children and young people in Wales so that children and young people are better understood by their communities and in support of better inter-generational community cohesion;**
- **Engage with the new Police and Crime Commissioners once in post to draw their attention to the positive impact that community development approaches that directly involve children and young people can have on improving community safety.**

Promoting good practice – support to increase the opportunities for children and young people to realise their right to a safe home and community

Graigfelen Residents in Action and Communities First, Swansea

The Children's Commissioner visited Graigfelen Community Hall and met the volunteers of Graigfelen Residents in Action and heard about the work they are doing in partnership with Communities First, Clydach Community Development Trust and

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Craigfelen Primary School. Graigfelen in Clydach, Swansea used to have high rates of drink and drug related crime. Lots of crime went unreported and the Commissioner was told that many residents lived in fear of local drug dealers and criminals. The Graigfelen Residents in Action group came together in 2001 and try and change things around in the community and since securing a community hall as a hub of community action they have gone from strength to strength. The Graigfelen volunteer committee members and Communities First have been working closely with their local Police Community Support Officer to change things around in the community. The PSCO offers a 'cuppa with a copper' surgery in the community hall.

The committee told the Commissioner about the real improvements in relationships between the generations in the community and the growing sense of mutual respect and the feeling of community spirit that now pervades. Recently the Neighbourhood Policing Team and Communities First came together with the volunteers to hold a Community Safety Day and children and young people have designed their own community safety posters to get messages across about road safety, substance misuse and anti-social behaviour. Importantly the organisations working together in the community come up with pro-active ways of working with troubled children and young people to raise their aspirations and their self esteem.

Glyncoch Communities First and the People and Work Unit, Rhondda Cynon Taf

Glyncoch Communities First has been working in partnership with the People and Work Unit –an independent Welsh charity set up nearly 30 years ago. A wide range of work has been developed across the community to raise aspirations, increase opportunities, and support achievement has been delivered within a framework that aims to facilitate positive cultural change in the community. The Children's Commissioner visited the community and heard about the aims and outcomes of this approach – one notable outcome has been that the community now has the lowest crime rate in the Pontypridd district.

Bettws in Bloom, Bettws, Newport

The Children's Commissioner visited this community facility and met the core members of the community group that established the centre and who run it 364 days a year (it is closed on Christmas day only). The facility consists of impressive gardens and a community building. Classes, clubs and activities related to the environment, education and recreation all take place on site. Providing a welcoming and positive space for children and young people is one of the main reasons the volunteers who run this facility work so hard day in day out and there have been no problems with vandalism. The building on the site is also used to deliver alternative education to children and young people from the local high school.

Aim 7: not disadvantaged by poverty

Child poverty in Wales is a significant problem and looks set to affect the lives of growing numbers of children and young people. These children and young people will have their childhood opportunities limited, may be restricted in their ability to access their rights and are at risk of entering adulthood with limited opportunities to realise their potential all because they are from low income households. Ensuring that children and young people in Wales are not disadvantaged by poverty must involve us in making sure they are able to realise their rights as represented through all of the Welsh Government's Core Aims for children and young people.

Poverty is the result of an insufficient household income and children and young people who live in families where parents, carers or children are disabled, where the family is benefit dependent, where parents are in low-income employment, where there is only one parent, or as part of a large family are at risk of being disadvantaged by poverty. The current global economic crisis and changes to the UK welfare system mean that growing numbers of children and young people are part of families who are finding it increasingly difficult to cope financially on a day to day basis. One result of this situation is evidence that food poverty as an issue facing growing numbers of families in Wales.

Welsh Government funds a Community Food Co-operative Programme that aims to increase access to fresh fruit and vegetables on a weekly basis at wholesale prices. There are over 300 Food Co-ops operating across Wales and areas of social, economic and rural deprivation are a priority focus. Foodbanks have reported huge increases in demand over the past 12 months there are now 23 foodbanks in Wales. Food is donated by members of the public and collected by schools, businesses and through supermarket collection points. Frontline professionals such as doctors, health visitors, and social workers provide people in crisis with foodbank vouchers which they can exchange for three days emergency food.

Many children entitled to free school meals do not claim them due to fear of stigma and bullying.²⁵ The Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure 2009 gives legislative foundation to the approach that the Welsh Government is taking forward via Appetite for Life, for improving the food and drink provided in schools. Regulations under the Measure come into force in September 2013 and include a duty on a local authority, or the governing body of a maintained school which provides school meals or milk, to encourage the take up of school meals or milk, and also to take reasonable steps to ensure that every pupil who is entitled to receive free school lunches and free school milk does receive them. There is also a duty on a local authority or governing body to take reasonable steps to ensure that a pupil cannot be identified by any person as a pupil who receives a free school lunch or free school milk, other than by an authorised person.

The number of children entitled to school meals has a direct bearing on the amount of Revenue Support Grant payable to a local authority and on payment of the Pupil Deprivation Grant to schools. Take up of free school meals can also lead to children being entitled to a number of other benefits such as a school clothing grant. The current eligibility for free school meals means that parents working 16 (or 24 hours for couples) per week lose their entitlement, no matter how little they earn. This is particularly worrying in the Welsh context as analysis published in 2011 suggests that half the children in poverty in Wales belong to working families.²⁶ The introduction of Universal Credit from October 2013 will mean that the current criteria for identifying entitlement for free school meals will no longer exist. Welsh Government has to find an alternative way of determining entitlement that aligns with the Universal Credit system. The School Standards

and Organisation (Wales) Bill 2012, includes proposals to allow for flexible charging arrangements in relation to school meals. Additional support through reduced costs for school meals could make a real difference to low-income families. The explanatory memorandum notes particular groups who may benefit from such initiatives.

The Welsh Government free school breakfasts programme was introduced due to well established evidence of its nutritional and educational benefits. In view of the current economic situation and the Welsh Government commitment to tackle child poverty as a priority the decision to leave further implementation of local discretion through the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill, 2012 is questionable, when just under a third of schools across Wales still do not offer free school breakfasts. UK research highlights the need to address breakfast consumption amongst school children. In school surveys, 5% of pupils have been found to have gone without breakfast and 10% to have only eaten low nutrition food such as crisps or chocolate. Furthermore, skipping breakfast has been found to be significantly higher amongst obese children and those from more deprived backgrounds.²⁷ The universal offer of free school breakfasts in primary school in Wales therefore has an important role to play in supporting the realisation of children's rights to be healthy and to participate fully in learning.

Research has also shown that parents may be under particular pressure during the school holidays because of the absence of free school meals.²⁸ The food budget is often the only flexible part of the family budget and suffers if there is an unexpected expense.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales will:

- **Work with the other UK Children's Commissioners to raise concerns with the UK Government about the impact of welfare reform changes on the welfare of children and young people;**
- **Call on Welsh Government to consider the needs of children and young people in poverty who belong to working families as well as those who are in workless families when identifying the alternative criteria for identifying entitlement for free school meals;**

- Call on Welsh Government to give consideration to the issue of food poverty during the school holidays for families entitled to free school meals and to include measures in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan to address food poverty in the school holidays.

Promoting good practice – support to ensure that children and young people are not disadvantaged by poverty

Bettws Cares, Foodbank, Newport

The Children's Commissioner visited the foodbank that is delivered by the Churches in Bettws in association with Communities First and Raven House Trust. The foodbank is supporting families in financial crisis in the community. The families they are supporting include a single mother with 3 young children who has recently been assessed as fit for work and has lost ESA. This left her with £20 to feed her family over a 3 week period until her benefit changes were in place. Another family receiving support includes a disabled father and a mother working on the minimum wage with 2 children. As the mother works for less than 24 hours a week recent welfare reforms mean that the family have lost entitlement to working tax credit. The foodbank also supplies food so that lunch can be provided for students in Bettws Alternative Six Form for young people aged 16-18 years and not in employment, education or training. The Communities First Youth Worker asked for help because some of the young people were regularly arriving for sessions hungry because of irregular meals.

Graigfelen Residents in Action and Communities First, Swansea

A holiday lunch club was established in Graigfelen community hall after a child said that they hated the summer holidays because they are always hungry in the holidays. Children and young people contribute to the lunch club, growing their own

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produce to sell to the club, getting involved in the cooking and then enjoying a good lunch. Work has been underway to get parents involved and the Children's Commissioner was told that children are working hard to get their parents to cook the recipes from lunch club at home.

Children have also been leading the way in encouraging saving with Craigfelen Primary School becoming home to the Spiders Junior Saver's Club to help children start saving early and lay the foundations for successful management of their future finances while also teaching them vital numeracy skills. The Children's Commissioner was told about the pride children are taking in being involved in the scheme and how involvement can make a big difference to the way they experience the classroom.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales three key commitments on child poverty

1. To deliver on the actions set out in this Child Poverty Strategy and to review these on an annual basis.
2. To continue to speak out about and promote the need for a rights based approach to tackling child poverty in Wales.
3. To target work through functions such as the Ambassadors programmes, See Me/Dyma Fi programme, and through the annual workplan on addressing socio economic equalities issues for children and young people.

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