Brexit & the Constitution
Mick Antoniw AM sounds warning bells

Citizens & the Ombudsman Bill
Simon Thomas AM explains

Plus...
Private Healthcare
Street Homelessness
1m Welsh speakers
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Who can help the people who need it most?

Who can be part of the positive response to the challenges we face?

The answer is very simple...all of us.

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Over the next 12 months the UK Parliament and the devolved Governments will be taking decisions that will rank amongst the most significant of political events in our post war history.

Leaving the UK has turned out to be more than a mere decision to leave a European-wide economic and social bloc and has brought into sharp focus the future role and status of the UK in the world. What do we represent and how are we perceived? How much influence in world economic and political affairs do we really have?

These questions, however, go even deeper in that they challenge the very purpose and the long term future and stability of the UK as a country.

For almost 50 years or so, since the passing of the 1972 European Communities Act, the answers to these questions have been masked by our membership of an EEC that with economic and technological globalisation was developing into a political and social union based on its collective economic strength.

The Social Chapter, the central role of the European Court of Justice, the developing role of the European Investment Bank and the development of the EU as a trading bloc in its own right created a legal as well as an economic framework for an expanding Europe. Within this context the UK’s increasingly dysfunctional and conflicting internal constitutional arrangements have been masked and constrained by the broader EU constitutional framework and jurisdiction.

Pandora’s Box has now been opened. The British Empire’s clothes have been exposed and our political and constitutional nudity is now there for all to see, exposed by the absence of any clear post Brexit plan.

Now compounded now by having a post general election government with no clear Parliamentary majority or constitutional mandate for the type of Brexit that should be pursued, the British negotiating position has taken on the semblance...
Our political and constitutional nudity is there for all to see, exposed by the absence of any clear post Brexit plan.

for many in the UK and internationally of a comic farce

Article 50 has been triggered. The countdown to leaving the UK has begun and on the 29th March 2019 we will be out of the EU, ready or not.

Could the Government withdraw its notice? I believe so. The reason there is no detailed provision for this in Article 50 is because it was never expected to happen. Furthermore, it is in any event very unlikely that the remaining 27 EU countries would want to block such a withdrawal, although there might be a price to pay. The ultimate arbiter in any dispute would, of course, be the European Court of Justice.

The triggering of Article 50 without any plan or preparation has led to the current constitutional chaos of the EU Withdrawal Bill which is now being considered by the House of Lords. The key and uncontroversial part of the Bill is the repeal of the European Communities Act of 1972. The bulk of the remainder of the Bill has turned out to be a constitutional pig’s ear.

It is essentially a continuity bill to ensure that post Brexit, existing EU law will be incorporated into UK law. This in itself is not contentious. However, it also establishes Westminster control over laws which are within the constitutional jurisdiction of Wales (and the other devolved governments), enabling the UK Government, by use of the Royal Prerogative, to amend, change and alter law as they consider appropriate with only limited reference to Parliament and without the requirement for the consent of the devolved administrations. It is this “power grab” that has caused such a constitutional furore not just in the Assembly and Holyrood, but amongst many respected Parliamentarians.

To date, in the absence of any significant concessions, the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament are unlikely to give legislative consent.

Refusal of Legislative Consent is a major constitutional obstacle. Westminster can override this refusal but there are significant political consequences to undermining this convention which is now enshrined in the Government of Wales Act 2017. The most significant of these might be the House of Lords taking up the mantle of protector of the UK Constitution and indeed the devolution statutes, particularly in the absence of any clear government electoral mandate, by amending the Bill.

Furthermore, the Welsh and Scottish Governments have now begun the process of tabling their own continuity legislation, to provide a statutory basis for the transfer of those powers and responsibilities currently residing in Brussels but which legally revert to them the moment we leave the EU - yet another indication of the breakdown of trust which has occurred UK Government handling of this Bill has been strategically and legally flawed from day one. It failed to properly engage the devolved governments in the drafting of the Bill. It has significantly misunderstood, deliberately or otherwise, the constitutional status of those powers within the ambit of the EU but which would legally and constitutionally revert to devolved governments once we leave the EU. Despite its assertions to the contrary, it has failed to recognise that in order to achieve progress it would need to build a consensus with the devolved governments over the way forward particularly in areas of subsequent law reform and areas of common interest, for example, in areas such as maritime and agricultural policy, state aid and trade.

Even if it does make concessions to the Bill to appease devolved governments there are a number of other red lines they will have to overcome. It is vital there is a long-term commitment to the direct allocation to Welsh Government of future former EU funding. It would be entirely unacceptable for the UK Government to undermine devolved responsibilities by assuming this function without consent.

There will need to be assurances that the Trades Bill and other Brexit-related legislation going through Westminster will uphold the principles of devolved responsibility. There also needs to be a recognition and assurance that the UK Government will modernise its constitutional arrangements. Post Brexit there is no idyllic pre-1972 Nirvana to return to. The current Joint Ministerial Council is not working. It is not fit for purpose. It needs to be replaced with a more formal and possibly statutory body with a clearly-defined function, supportive secretariat and disputes procedure – an idea which now has considerable cross-party support from Westminster and Welsh constitutional committees. It is vital the UK Government steps up to the mark and resolves all these anomalies.

If nothing changes we are heading to a constitutional crisis which could lead to a further loss of confidence in the UK Government which can only be resolved by a new general election mandate.

The EU Withdrawal Bill ... has turned out to be a constitutional pig’s ear.
2017 was a watershed for women’s rights. Lurid headlines came at us almost every day regarding behaviour of men involved in politics and the arts, giving birth to the powerful #MeToo movement. And now, a few weeks into 2018, we have the shocking revelations that sexual harassment was rife at the Presidents Club charity dinner. Meanwhile, Germaine Greer has bafflingly criticised the #MeToo movement for ‘whingeing.’

I cannot agree with Germaine Greer and believe she is totally wrong to say its ‘too late’ and the women should have spoken out at the time. She of all people knows about the patriarchy and the power relationships and the shame that stops women speaking out when the abuse or harassment happens. She has fallen into the worst trap – instead of calling out the men, she’s done what many men do and criticised her sisters instead.

#MeToo IS empowering and IS the right response to women’s suppression. The movement has allowed the flood gates to open with women feeling they are able to share their stories and know they will be supported when they do so. Brave women have been speaking up around the world. An American athletics coach has been convicted for multiple sexual assault due to the bravery of a group of women who had long been silenced but now felt they had the space to speak up. Financial Times journalist Madison Marriage has uncovered the awful truth of the men-only Presidents Club charity event, where the only...
women present were hostesses. In speaking out these brave people have stood up for women everywhere so that this country can one day have a future free from harassment and abuse.

For me, many of the TV and radio programmes got their response to #MeToo wrong. Contributors such as Edwina Currie and Clare Fox, and now even our feminist-in-chief Germaine Greer have insinuated that this is a storm in a tea cup and women are making a fuss. We are in danger of the national conversation entrenching views about how women and victims should react, instead of using the time to talk

**The debate should not be about women’s response but about stopping the sexual harassment in the first place.**

about misogyny in our society and how to tackle it, instead of talking about the men who are wrong to sexually assault and harass women, and instead of exposing the patriarchal society we live in.

The debate should not be about women’s response but about stopping the sexual harassment in the first place. Men therefore have to change. As Jonathan Freedland so eloquently put it, ‘men need to say to women, when it comes to sexual harassment, “the problem is not you, it’s us”’.  

We need to do this to move towards a society that is equal and where women can be free of gratuitous sexism or worse. We need to find solutions to stamp out misogyny. We need to talk about why society has seemingly turned a blind eye to events such as the Presidents Club until now. We need to discuss how we go about changing society so that men’s behavior changes. So how do we do this?

First, we need to educate children from a young age about healthy relationships and what is and isn’t acceptable. I’ve heard too many times the stories of 14-year-old girls in school at PE lessons being subjected to sexist comments and teachers doing nothing to stop it. At Women’s Equality Network (WEN) Wales one of the projects I am proudest of is our work to promote Healthy Relationships in schools. We support the work of the fantastic Professor Emma Renold (Cardiff University) who has developed a training resource with young people in collaboration with NSPCC Cymru, Welsh Women’s Aid, the Children’s Commissioner for Wales and Welsh Government. It’s called ‘Agenda’ and is used in schools to support young people to raise awareness of healthy and inclusive relationships and learn more about the harmful impacts of sexism and sexual harassment. As Professor Renolds puts it, ‘The programme is about listening to, and acting upon, young people’s anger, anxiety and desire to ‘do something’ about the increasingly visible and prevalent experiences of everyday sexism and sexual harassment, in their schools and communities, locally, nationally and globally.’ So let’s get this innovative programme into every school in Wales.

Second, we need to have strong rules and regulations in place – be it at the Senedd or in Parliament the

**Victims should feel that they can report behaviour that makes them uncomfortable and that they will be listened to.**

same standards of behaviour should be the same as in any workplace. Victims need to feel they can report instances of any kind of behaviour that makes them uncomfortable and that they will be listened to. That’s why we need complaints procedures in place in the Welsh Assembly that are totally independent of political parties. And it’s incumbent on us all to think about why powerful men still think they can exert control and pressure over younger women.

Third, we need to tackle the under-representation of women in public life. The more women there are, the less acceptable this behaviour becomes. From seats on governing bodies of schools and charity boards, to Assembly Members and County Councillors, Wales still does not have 50:50 representation of women and men in public life. We have only ever returned 19 female MPs to Westminster since 1918.

Our WEN Wales programme to deliver a mentoring scheme to get more women into public life follows on the heels of previous programmes with Presiding Officer Rosemary Butler, and will encourage women to come forward so we build-up our pool of talent. This will complement the work of Chwarae Teg which mentors business women to help them progress in their careers. But we can do all the mentoring we want but if political parties don’t select female candidates it won’t help. So I’d also like to see all political parties, as recommended by the Expert Panel on Electoral Reform, compelled to adopt a 50:50 system or a quota system for candidates so that we get true equality.

My big concern is that without a strong response focusing on the solutions to #MeToo and without a
As Chair of the Finance Committee, I was pleased to formally lay the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Bill and accompanying Explanatory Memorandum before the National Assembly for Wales on 2 October 2017. This is the first time that a Committee has introduced a Bill since the Assembly gained full primary law-making powers. This Bill represents a significant amount of work undertaken over a number of years by the Finance Committee of this Assembly and in the Fourth Assembly.

The Ombudsman in Wales has a vital role in ensuring that any member of the public who believes they have suffered injustice or hardship through maladministration or service failure by a public body is able to make a complaint with the reassurance that their complaint will be dealt with fairly and independently by the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman’s role is currently governed by the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2005. At the time it was enacted, it was considered to be at the cutting edge of Ombudsman legislation. However, the Act is now 12 years old and whilst it has facilitated public access to the Ombudsman’s services, enabling the resolution of disputes and providing redress for individuals, best practice and international standards for ombudsmen around the world has moved on. Developments include the strengthening of powers of ombudsmen in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Work on the Bill started in 2015 by the Finance Committee of the Fourth Assembly. The Committee undertook a public consultation to inform its inquiry into the proposals to extend the Ombudsman’s powers. Having been persuaded by the evidence it heard, the Committee agreed that changes were required to the legislation and in early October 2015, consulted on the draft Bill. Respondents to the consultation were generally very supportive of the provisions in the draft Bill and made valuable contributions and suggestions to improve the legislation. Due to time constraints towards the end of the Fourth Assembly, that Finance Committee was unable to introduce the Bill but recommended that a future Committee take it forward in the Fifth Assembly.

The Finance Committee of this Assembly was keen to continue with this work as we believe the Bill is necessary to future-proof the legislation. As a Committee, we believe it is more important than ever that public services deliver for the people of Wales and that the Public Services Ombudsman is empowered to ensure that our

The public needs to have confidence in the Ombudsman to investigate where they believe they have suffered injustice or hardship through maladministration or service delivery.
services are citizen-centred.

Over the last few months, we have considered the draft Bill, taken evidence from the Ombudsman, as well as considering the estimates of the costs and benefits of the new provisions in the Bill. There are four major changes to the legislation:

Accepting oral complaints – the new provisions would allow the Ombudsman to accept oral complaints which will improve social justice and equal opportunities and contribute to the Welsh Government’s commitment to create a fair and equitable Wales. It will facilitate and improve the making of complaints by the most vulnerable and deprived members of society, including people with learning difficulties, the homeless and the elderly.

By removing the requirement to make a complaint in writing, the Bill will also future proof access to the Ombudsman’s services, allowing his office to develop guidance to respond to future developments, such as advances in technology.

Power to investigate on own initiative – The seldom heard and vulnerable groups will also be supported without going through a complaints process since the Bill includes provision for the Ombudsman to conduct own-initiative investigations. While requiring criteria to be satisfied prior to beginning an investigation, the power to conduct own-initiative investigations will provide a mechanism to protect the most vulnerable and give attention to the dignity of individuals. It also has wider benefits, enabling the Ombudsman to be more responsive to citizens since it allows him to investigate matters reported anonymously, strengthening the citizen’s voice.

Investigating private health services – Under the 2005 Act, the Ombudsman has jurisdiction to investigate where the NHS commissions private medical treatment for patients but not where such treatment is commissioned by patients themselves. Where patients commission private treatment, they currently have to make separate complaints for the public and private elements to the Ombudsman and private sector provider respectively. This Bill will allow the Ombudsman to investigate matters relating to the private health services (which includes medical treatment and nursing care) element of a complaint in a public/private pathway. This will enable the Ombudsman to explore the whole of a complaint meaning that investigations can follow the citizen and not the sector.

Complaints-handling across public services – The provisions of the Bill will also drive improvements in public services and in complaint handling across Wales. Currently, a model complaints policy is in place to help achieve consistency across public services. Evidence shows that, while the position is improving, adoption across the public sector is not consistent. We hope the Bill will address this.

The Bill includes provision for the Ombudsman to conduct own-initiative investigations… enabling the Ombudsman to be more responsive to citizens.

The Bill is currently being considered by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee as part of its Stage 1 scrutiny. The Committee is expected to report on its findings by 9th March. The Finance Committee is very much looking forward to considering the report and recommendations with a view to proposing amendments to the Bill at Stage 2.

The public needs to have confidence in the Ombudsman to investigate where they believe they have suffered injustice or hardship through maladministration or service delivery. Hopefully this Bill will go some way to achieving this.

The provisions in the Bill for complaints-handling and procedures propose a similar approach for Wales as that in Scotland. This means that, for the first time, there will be regular, reliable and comparable data on complaints across the public sector. This will drive accountability and improvement in public services, transparency in reporting and empowering the scrutiny process for which data and information are critical.

The Bill includes provision for the Ombudsman to conduct own-initiative investigations… enabling the Ombudsman to be more responsive to citizens.
In September 2017, the team at Thompsons Solicitors finally secured compensation for over 500 former patients of the disgraced former breast surgeon Ian Paterson. It was a cruelly and unnecessarily prolonged fight for women (and men) who were disgracefully treated by a man who, in the words of one of our clients, ‘played God’ with his patients’ lives.

Mr. Paterson carried out totally unnecessary surgical procedures and operations on patients both in the NHS and at hospitals run by private healthcare provider Spire. These ranged from invasive lumpectomies when biopsies would have sufficed, all the way through to full mastectomies on women it later transpired did not have breast cancer. A number of the injuries that he inflicted on his patients are very serious and there have been a significant number of fatalities.

Watching the reaction to publicity on this case was astonishing and profoundly moving. Every time Mr Paterson was featured in the national press – with whom we worked closely – more claimants came forward from all parts of the UK, and even from abroad. Even though he only operated from two private hospitals in the West Midlands (as well as one NHS Trust), as the news got around more and
more people started questioning what it had never occurred them to question before – did they really need to have gone through what they went through, did a surgeon (described as ‘charming’ by some) whom they trusted operate on them purely to get more money?

It is deeply shocking how many people have been affected by his actions. While working on the case and analysing the issues, it seemed to us that there is a flaw at the heart of the private healthcare industry. Paterson was able to continue operating for far too long, Spire’s monitoring and auditing of his activities appeared lacking and there was no effective system to review his work. He pulled the wool over the eyes of his patients but he appears to have done the same to Spire too.

This is why we developed our Patients before Profits campaign. The NHS put its hands up and moved swiftly to deal with Mr Paterson when his abuse began to emerge. We need legislation to ensure private healthcare providers take the same responsibility for surgeons who operate within their hospitals and have the same high standards of governance and audits as the NHS. It cannot happen again that a patient – the victim of clinical negligence – can be told, as one of our clients was, that Spire had no responsibility for Paterson as they ‘only rented him a room’.

And there needs to be adequate insurance cover in place in case things go wrong. Paterson only had £10m worth of insurance cover. It cannot be acceptable that, whereas the NHS picks up the bill for the malpractice of their doctors, private consultants – whose actions can equally destroy or take lives and in whom it could be said people place greater trust as they are paying privately for their care – have insurance that wouldn’t cover major catastrophes such as this. £10m wouldn’t cover even one catastrophic brain injury case.

Spire also had a policy which covered £10m, however they didn’t agree a settlement until five weeks before the civil trial, years after we started pursuing him. In December 2017, the UK government announced that from January 2018 there is to be an independent, non-statutory inquiry into the medical negligence of Ian Paterson. We welcomed that decision and believe that the inquiry needs to be detailed and swiftly concluded. We have previously expressed doubt about the current recommendations of this inquiry will not be binding and it could simply ‘kick the can down the road’.

There are steps we have called for that could, with political will, have been taken by now. There is nothing to stop any government immediately insisting on parity between private healthcare providers and the NHS so that private hospitals have to take the same responsibility for surgeons as the NHS, and require private hospitals to adhere to the same high standards of governance and audits as the NHS.

It has been an honour to act for the victims of Mr Paterson and to assist in bringing about a settlement. For the sake of those whose lives have been devastated and to ensure that no one else needlessly suffers, there needs to be real change and we will continue to campaign alongside our clients for that.

For the sake of those whose lives have been devastated and to ensure that no one else needlessly suffers, there needs to be real change.

There is a flaw at the heart of the private healthcare industry.

We need legislation to ensure private healthcare providers take the same responsibility... as the NHS.
Street homelessness: what needs to change?

An Assembly Committee inquiry is looking into street homelessness. Jennie Bibbings, campaigns manager at Shelter Cymru, argues that it’s time everyone has a decent, affordable and permanent home.

G riff* has been living on the streets for the past six months. Before then, he was living with and caring for a family member who went into a care home, leaving Griff homeless as his name wasn’t on the tenancy.

Griff has never been homeless before. He doesn’t have any support needs or issues with substances. He and his pet dog sleep in various locations in the city centre, moving round often. If he manages to raise enough money, he pays for a night in a B&B. He says he tried the council but was told he was ‘no priority’. He’s tried to get into the various hostels but says he has been turned away because they don’t take dogs.

When we spoke to Griff, he described the fundamental difficulty of being unable to get a bank account without an address, and therefore being unable to work. Since becoming homeless he has approached several employers but keeps running into judgemental attitudes.

‘I know I am a bit scruffy,’ he said, ‘but if I could just work for a few weeks, until my first pay packet, then that would sort itself out. So I thought about starting my own business, maybe gardening in the summer and then clearance when it gets colder, but I need money for tools and a van.

‘I really had a plan to make it work – but I can’t get started, because I don’t have any money or a home.’

During this winter Shelter Cymru researchers have been on the streets of Wales talking to people who are currently sleeping rough in three local authority areas. Not one of the 100 or so people we have spoken with is content to be homeless. Everyone wants a roof over their head. We have found that the reasons why people become street
homeless are the same as they ever were: relationship breakdown, loss of a tenancy, loss of a job, mental health issues sometimes triggered by life events such as bereavement. Many people are homeless having left prison with nowhere to go.

What is relatively unusual about Griff’s situation is that he doesn’t have any support needs. Most of the people we spoke to are in more complex situations, some struggling with substance misuse and many experiencing severe depression.

Many people have a chequered tenancy history. Some can’t apply for social housing due to past arrears. Some have been banned from local hostels and supported accommodation, having fallen foul of the ‘house rules’. Sometimes it was clear that people shouldn’t have been in that accommodation in the first place as it obviously wasn’t the right environment. Having been set up to fail, some people have now gained a reputation locally among housing providers and this has closed down their accommodation options to virtually nil.

Access to emergency accommodation varies in different parts of Wales. In some areas emergency beds are thin on the ground and all but unavailable for anyone deemed medium to high risk. People beg to raise £15 for a B&B, or they sleep in tents.

In other parts of Wales there are plenty of emergency spaces but many people still choose to sleep on the streets because they feel safer there. We spoke to people who said they’d been offered ‘floor space’ but couldn’t take it up because they needed to stay away from drugs.

But even if we managed to completely transform our emergency provision to make it suitable for every homeless person’s particular needs, we would still have a homelessness crisis on our hands. Fundamentally, hostels aren’t the answer. Thanks to a strong policy steer from Welsh Government, most local authorities are currently setting up Housing First pilots. These projects will provide permanent homes to people with histories of homelessness and complex, unmet support needs. In these pilots a decent home is the first step, not the last step, towards recovery.

However, by and large mainstream services are still set up in the opposite model: ‘staircasing’ people from the street, into supported accommodation where they may be required to keep to rules about avoiding drugs and alcohol until they are deemed ready to take on a tenancy of their own. This is the model that many other countries are turning away from as the Housing First model proves its value worldwide.

So what should Wales do?
Clearly Housing First is a crucial part of the solution. But other changes need to happen too. Our research uncovered numerous examples of enforcement being used in heavy-handed ways by police officers and local authority rangers. One man was banned from the city centre on Christmas Eve, which meant he had to miss Christmas dinner and in fact had nothing to eat on Christmas Day.

Another woman told us her tent and belongings were confiscated, which included personal items such as her baby’s hospital wristband, baby photos, and her own birth certificate. Another man told how he and a friend were banned from the city centre for nothing more than ‘looking homeless’ – they weren’t begging or even sitting down at the time they were banned.

These incidents are making people feel hunted and victimised. Banning people from the city centre doesn’t solve anything. Over time, its effect is to break down any chance of services gaining people’s trust in future. Ironically, many people told us that officers on their own were helpful and kind, but that the attitude changed when a colleague arrived.

Finally, there’s the question of our homelessness legislation, lately copied by England. There’s no doubt that the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has led to great improvements in the way we help people to avoid homelessness. But there’s a strong argument that the legislation works better for people who aren’t homeless yet.

Although the Act creates a duty on councils to ‘help to secure’ accommodation for all homeless households, regardless of priority status, our study still found that priority need was frequently cited as a reason for people’s homelessness.

It’s true that there is a legislative gap here – if you’re not priority need, the council doesn’t have a duty to provide you with suitable interim accommodation while they work with you on your case. Put simply, it’s a lot harder to work effectively with people if they don’t have an address.

Ending priority need is the next logical step in the Welsh Government’s drive to create a better homelessness system. With the preventative approach well established, it’s time to make a long-term plan to break down the barriers that remain, until there’s a decent, affordable permanent home for everyone.

*Griff’s name has been changed.
The Welsh Government has set out a vision of creating a million Welsh speakers by 2050. The current government will not be the one to achieve this goal, if indeed any government ever does, but in the meantime it has outlined a programme of work for the period 2017 to 2021 that is designed to lay the foundations for doing so. As part of this the government has published its intent to revise the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

The government has set for itself, and its successors, a very challenging task. Simply, the goal of creating one million Welsh speakers by 2050 means that very considerable numbers of individuals in Wales that would otherwise be English speakers must, by then, become Welsh speakers.

There are currently just over half a million Welsh speakers in Wales, according to the 2011 Census. The government’s projections indicate that by 2050 there will be around 666,000 Welsh speakers, without doing anything new whatsoever. This means that between now and 2050 successive governments are committed to creating in excess of 300,000 new speakers of the language.

That the government is largely depending upon statutory education in this task throws the precise nature of the challenge into sharp focus. Historically, statutory education has not made any meaningful difference to significantly increasing
Historically, statutory education has not made any meaningful difference to the numbers of Welsh speakers.

the numbers of Welsh speakers, and this is despite the following: Welsh becoming a core subject in the sector subsequent to the Education Reform Act 1988; the expansion of Welsh medium education; and, the development of Welsh as a second language in the sector. Rather, one of its effects has been to create a cohort of young people that are Welsh speakers only whilst they remain in statutory education.

For example, the government’s data indicates that around 20 per cent of pre-school children (3-4 years) are Welsh speakers; also, around 20 per cent of post-school young adults are Welsh speakers (17-19 years). In contrast, over 40 per cent of children aged 14 years are Welsh speakers. Therefore, the teaching and learning of Welsh in statutory education has succeeded only in creating an additional population described as Welsh speakers while they remain in statutory education and little more. If the aim of the Welsh language in statutory education, whether in the form of Welsh medium education or Welsh as a second language, is to produce new Welsh speakers then it is not working.

If the effect of the government’s plans is simply to expand Welsh medium education then the most likely outcome of this is to create merely an even bigger bulge of Welsh speakers in statutory education. While quantitatively different, there is no reason for this new bulge to be qualitatively different to the current bulge: it will not translate into substantial numbers of new Welsh speakers outside of the education system.

Expansion would work only if the teaching and learning of Welsh in statutory education already has the effect of turning children 3-4 years of age who do not speak Welsh into adults who will describe themselves as Welsh speakers well beyond the time they have left statutory education: the current system is not having that effect. Therefore, if the target of creating one million Welsh speakers by 2050 is going to be met then radical change is required to the teaching and learning of Welsh in statutory education.

It may well be important that the government is in the process of looking at language immersion techniques and other models to inform future policy development. However, there is little in the research to suggest that there exists an educational model that will systematically produce, into adulthood, significant numbers of new speakers of a language when that language is a minority language in the social context beyond statutory education. Also, the government has committed to developing a single continuum for Welsh language teaching and learning, a ‘controversial idea’ in the words of Professor Sioned Davies. It is certainly a brave experiment – meeting the target for Cymraeg 2050 requires bravery.

That said, the government’s plans are on much more secure ground in relation to increasing the use of the Welsh language by those who are already Welsh speakers and in creating more favourable conditions for the Welsh language in a range of societal contexts, including in relation to public services.

The government has indicated its willingness to replace the Welsh Language Commissioner with a Commission and to simplify Welsh Language Standards. Creating a Commission would allow the government to address a number of problems that have beset Welsh language public policy since the 2011 Measure, including confusion regarding the appropriate level of independence from and accountability to the government on the part of the Commissioner on the one hand and to the Assembly on the other, and, uncertainty regarding the extent to which the Commissioner sets public policy and whether such a body may scrutinize and criticise government policy and hold the government to account.

A Commission has the potential to have greater breadth of expertise as well as allowing for the smoother implementation of public policy, whether in promoting or regulating the Welsh language, or indeed both. In addition, it would be useful were the legislative framework for the Welsh language revised so as to allow for a greater role for the Ombudsman in handling Welsh language complaints in relation to not just the Assembly but the government as well.

Any simplification of standards ought to be welcomed by everybody actively involved in public administration. Moreover, if there is going to be greater use of public services in the Welsh language by individual members of the public then it is crucial that it be more easily understood by the citizen which services specifically are available to them in Welsh.

Simplicity aside, it is important for public bodies that commitments to the delivery of public services in the Welsh language are not only appropriately ambitious but also sensitive to the local demography of the language so that public bodies can be confident they are able to deliver the services required of them by law. The changes to Standards are necessary.

Were one required to prioritize the aims of the government then it is the case that greater numbers of new Welsh speakers, while desirable, are not necessary to the ongoing vitality of the language: ensuring the more widespread use of the language by Welsh speakers most certainly is. There is no merit in adding half a million individuals to the body of Welsh speakers if they are in reality passive, non-users of the language.
The start to 2018 has been dismal for commuters so far. Poor weather conditions have been compounded by engineering works on rail and road while rail users have been handed the biggest fare increase in five years. What we have traditionally relied on to get us to work is buckling under the strain. Our infrastructure is a hot political topic in the UK, and especially in Wales. The M4 relief road costs have increased again, the remaining tenders for the South Wales Metro are being evaluated – one bidder now without its key construction partner. But why are we focusing on our travel to work rather than where we work? Why isn’t it the norm to work far more locally, in the town where you live in wherever it may be. Who benefits most from this daily migration?

A vast amount of modern, office-based city-centre work is done using a keyboard and a screen. Yet we continue to move people around the country, often to work in increasingly built-up and harder-to-access city centres, to work that could be done anywhere? It begs the question why are you doing that there?

Surely it would be better to start investing in the infrastructure in our communities rather than spending billions on high-end engineering to simply move people from A to B? Let’s not forget the current subsidies that mean we pay to move people around also. Instead, why not get people working where they live again. People could walk or cycle to work – cycling to work is proven to reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease and early death by 40%.

**Working locally has many benefits.**

**Cash**

Take a valleys town like Aberdare. Someone travelling into Cardiff using a daily ticket could save nearly £60 a week in train fares alone by...
working locally. Yes, employees may need one day a week with the wider organisation or line manager, but that ticket saving adds up nonetheless. And that saving is more likely to be spent locally too.

Environment
Less travel is better for the environment, carbon emissions and air quality, both locally and along the route of the journey. Trains and buses are better environmentally than individuals in cars, but still emit carbon and affect air quality even with electrification.

Time
Along with health, time could be our most precious commodity, and yet an employee’s time is all too frequently not a consideration for an employer. That Aberdare to Cardiff commute takes two hours a day – over a week, that’s ten hours spent commuting. Imagine what you could do with that ten hours every week if it were given back to you! Childcare, visiting elderly relatives and exercise would all become easier, not to mention the time you’d have for leisurely activities and other hobbies. And recent studies into commuting and personal wellbeing found that each minute added to a commute affects anxiety, happiness and general wellbeing.

Community
Our aim at IndyCube is to open co-working spaces in communities across the country, not just city-centres. Generally, when someone works in a community they spend their money there and the local economy benefits. Spending more time within our communities might also change our shopping habits – we’re more likely to buy from independent businesses, and take the time to source locally-produced items. There’s also an opportunity to reuse community buildings. Often these historical, or cultural assets have been left to decay, but they could be re-purposed to house modern offices and workplaces. The Pryce Jones building in Newtown is an example of a prized historic asset that needs to be maintained and which IndyCube have repurposed as co-working space. These buildings have social and cultural capital for our communities and need more than just token support.

So what am I suggesting?
Let’s look again at why we have a daily migration of thousands of people around the country when we don’t have to. Instead let’s invest in our communities and develop shared office space open to all sectors with the tech available to support all types of modern keyboard and screen-based jobs. If trust is an issue, and we are told that it is, we can address that. We can put in the tech so that a nervous employer can know that an employee is in work on time and doing what they are paid for.

Let’s look at where our infrastructure millions are going. Perhaps instead of new roads and hundreds of millions of pounds going into already subsidised rail, we should develop locally-provided co-working spaces. These buildings in our town centres to which Indycube have repurposed as co-working space. These buildings need to be maintained and which IndyCube have repurposed as co-working space. These buildings have social and cultural capital for our communities and need more than just token support.

Surely it would be better to invest in our communities rather than spend billions to simply move people from A to B.

or community-owned office complexes that can then be let out to office workers from all sectors. It’s co-working on a grand scale, but one which should also have many benefits. There are productivity benefits to cutting commuting too. As a workforce we are siloed; perhaps if the various sectors in society mixed more frequently there would be other benefits? I work from an office where this happens and can see the advantages for myself. Public, private and third sector workers all sharing insights and thoughts over a coffee. We need improved transport links, I recognise that, and this is not a piece suggesting otherwise. Let’s invest, but let’s fundamentally look at what transport is for and what the future of transport will be. If we are moving people to jobs, we should look again and if those jobs can be done outside our city centres then isn’t that a plus for all concerned? Reducing demand for travel is as much a win, if not more, so than building new infrastructure. If we could reduce the number of cars on the M4, A470 and A55 what would that do for investment cases, not to mention air quality, in areas that are recognised as some of the worst in the UK?

The fanfare of the South West Wales Metro was a thirty-minute journey between Cardiff and Swansea. Why? If the state is paying billions – and through a variety of projects it does – why not put some of that money into our communities? We could return old buildings in our town centres to their former glories. The state has funds for such projects but often it’s the sustainability of these schemes that lets them down. Guaranteed office workers would provide it. Is this high-end idealism? No.
A wide range of societal changes are leading to fundamental changes in labour markets around the globe. Technological progress and increased connectivity; austerity and political uncertainty; demographic and climate change; shifting attitudes to working and more flexible patterns of employment; globalisation and urbanisation – are all reshaping what we recognise as work and our understanding of the kinds of employment that will be available in the future.

The effects of many of these factors have been well documented, but the potential impacts of technological changes are less well understood. Digitisation and converging technologies are accelerating advances in the application of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, precision

The Future of Work

Mair Bell, Senior Research Officer at the Wales Centre for Public Policy, sets out the challenges to work brought by Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and the Internet of Things.
A workforce equipped with transferable and in-demand skills will allow workers choice and a measure of control over their careers.

Some experts predict that automation could lead to the destruction of one in three jobs in the UK.

Research looking at harnessing employment opportunities in growth sectors emphasised the need for real prospects for career progression and is trying to address this issue. While a ‘work first’ approach may get those far from the labour market into employment, a ‘careers first’ approach that supports people onto a career path that is best suited to them is more likely to result in sustained employment with better opportunities for progression.

Ministers, the unions and employers are, of course, well aware of the challenges. A Fair Work Board was established by the Welsh Government with its social partners, Wales TUC and business representative bodies, to drive the Welsh Government’s commitment to make Wales a ‘Fair Work Nation’. Their first report, due in the spring, will set out a vision of what constitutes fair work. Fair opportunities to paid progression will be a central tenet. Last December’s Economic Action Plan also refers to fair work and job progression, primarily with reference to skills policy and the foundational economy, which includes sectors such as tourism, food, retail and care. Driving this is an increasing focus on inclusive growth as a way to overcome stubborn and debilitating inequality. We anticipate that the Welsh Government’s Employability Delivery Plan will also look closely at in-work progression.

The think tank Future Advocacy notes that automating industries will affect different geographies, genders, and socioeconomic classes differently. In an attempt to stimulate debate and “encourage MPs to pay more attention to this critical issue” it has developed a map highlighting those UK constituencies where jobs are most at risk of automation. The public also deserves to be kept informed of the latest trends, particularly as existing surveys show huge variation in people’s attitudes towards technology in the workplace.

The scale of the unknowns associated with forecasting the future and predicting how the incidence and nature of jobs will change emphasises the need for a flexible, agile and resilient government programme, high quality research to inform policy and evidence-based discussions.

Whatever happens, a workforce equipped with transferable and in-demand skills will allow workers choice and a measure of control over their careers and the adaptability they will need in the face of the anticipated but as yet undefined job change, destruction and creation. Building on our recent report on ‘The Future of Work in Wales’, the Wales Centre for Public Policy is embarking on a programme of applied research into skills and employability. To begin, we will be exploring the evidence on career entry and looking at what works in enabling job progression in key foundational sectors such as social care.

Join the conversation at #FoWWales. Read our report and watch the talks from the Wales Centre for Public Policy conference on the Future of Work in Wales online at: www.wcpp.org.uk

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Rising to the challenge

We know that approximately 60 per cent of people living in poverty in the UK are living in working households. A loss of semi-skilled jobs on the scale that some experts predict will only exacerbate the problem because it will cut off opportunities for career progression thus widening social and economic inequalities. Our programme of automation, and innovations in transport, health and connectivity (think autonomous vehicles and the Internet of Things).

By one estimate, this ‘fourth industrial revolution’ could add up to £654 billion to the UK economy by 2035 and create a wide range of new jobs. But others are more pessimistic. Some experts predict that automation could lead to the destruction of one in three jobs in the UK, and even the lowest-end estimates anticipate that 10 per cent of current jobs will disappear. The key policy question is whether existing labour markets have the capacity to respond to the displacement of existing jobs by creating new kinds of employment opportunities, and how workers are equipped to thrive in this new world of work.

Most experts agree that workers lacking high level qualifications and living in poorer regions are most ‘at risk’. This could pose challenges for Wales. According to PwC, sectors such as transportation and storage, manufacturing, wholesale and retail will be the most affected by automation. We know that approximately a third of the Welsh workforce is employed in the kinds of relatively low productivity, low wage sectors that are most likely to feel the full force of technological advances. Many of the occupations that are most at risk are semi-skilled jobs, which makes it vital that we think carefully about how unskilled workers in Wales can achieve career progression. This is a theme that has emerged strongly from the work which we have done at the Wales Centre for Public Policy.

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ELWa, PCET, HEFCW, and TERC! These acronyms probably mean little or nothing to anyone outside the world of education and skills. They are, though, proof that if you stick around long enough then old ideas will eventually come back into fashion.

This feels (at least partly) the case with Welsh Government plans to create a new body to replace the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and which will be responsible for planning, funding and overseeing the entire post-compulsory education sector. The new body, to be called the Tertiary Education and Research Commission (TERC), could potentially be responsible for school sixth forms, further and higher education, work-based learning and adult and community education. Details were published in a recent White Paper, while a more technical consultation is expected later this year.

If implemented, it will represent the most significant shake-up of post-16 education of the devolution era. It follows a Welsh Government-commissioned report from Professor Ellen Hazelkorn in 2016 which looked at different models of planning and overseeing post-16 education systems. As well as creating a new body, the Welsh Government also accepted a recommendation to develop a new master plan and vision for the post-compulsory sector. Although separate recommendations, to be successful we need to do both.

For those who were around in the earlier days of devolution this will sound like a beefed up ELWa (Education and Learning Wales). In fact, the truth is far more nuanced. ELWa was an attempt to provide greater coherence to parts of the post-16 sector so in that sense TERC is an old idea whose time has come again. Although TERC was inspired by searching international experience for evidence of what works (for example, New Zealand, Finland, Ontario and
The new body is a chance to create flexible opportunities for learners and to gain a closer alignment with the needs of business.

coherence to the sector. It is the chance to create flexible progression opportunities for learners and to gain a closer alignment with the needs of business. Obviously, detail will be important and the commission needs to resist mistaking coherence for centralisation and uniformity. Institutions should be allowed the space to flourish and succeed by meeting the needs of their local communities and their distinct regional economies. They should work within an overall policy framework but be allowed to innovate to respond to need.

It is also vital that while the sector immerses itself in the detail of establishing a new body that we don’t lose sight of the second part of the Hazelkorn report: developing a master plan for the future development of the sector, based

One area of policy which needs to be addressed is a vision for adults in the post-compulsory sector. Adult learning has barely featured in the debate so far, with adult learners and the adult and community learning sector barely referenced in the recent White Paper. Disadvantaged learners too, including groups such as care leavers, carers and Gypsy Travellers, need to have a voice within the new system. While there was a genuine attempt to achieve this in the numerous learner voice sessions the Welsh Government held, engaging with a wider range of learner voices can’t start and finish there.

The demographic challenge of an ageing workforce and an ageing society needs to drive the work of the commission. The post-compulsory system needs to be reshaped and opportunities for lifelong learning enshrined as one of the high-level targets. This must include second chance opportunities for adults who didn’t fulfil their potential at school, the chance for people in work to learn new skills, and for learning to flourish to contribute to the health and well-being of the nation. This will require opportunities that are flexible so that people can dip in and out of education, a real focus on breaking down the practical barriers to learning, an expansion of digital learning opportunities and pathways to enable people to move through the levels of learning and to transition between providers.

There will be plenty of voices urging caution in both policy and structure. The risk with caution is that we will end up here again in another generation wondering why we haven’t learned the lesson from past reforms. Ministers should be bold and should focus on getting it right for the long-term.
There is now overwhelming evidence of a strong connection between socio-economic deprivation and suicidal behaviour. Areas of higher socio-economic disadvantage tend to have higher rates of suicide and the greater the level of deprivation experienced by an individual, the higher their risk of suicidal behaviour.

Each year, between 300 and 350 people die by suicide in Wales, which is around three times the number killed in road accidents. It is the most common cause of death for men aged 20-49 and the leading cause of death of people under 35. Alongside this, almost a quarter of the Welsh population (23%) live in poverty. It costs Wales £3.6bn a year; a fifth of the Welsh Government budget.

In 2016, Samaritans commissioned eight leading social scientists to review and extend the existing body of knowledge on the connection between socio-economic disadvantage and suicidal behaviour. The report, titled ‘Dying from Inequality’ was launched in March 2017 and included key findings – recommendations for mitigating the connection between disadvantage and suicide.

The key findings were:

• Suicide risk increases during periods of economic recession, particularly when recessions are associated with a steep rise in unemployment. This risk remains high when crises end, especially for individuals whose economic circumstances do not improve.
• Countries with higher levels of per capita spending on active labour market programmes and which have more generous unemployment benefits experience lower recession-related rises in suicides.
• During the most recent recession (2008-09), there was a 0.54 per cent increase in suicides for every 1 per cent increase in indebtedness across 20 EU countries, including the UK and Ireland.
• Social and employment protection for the most vulnerable in society and labour market programmes to help unemployed people find work can reduce suicidal behaviour by reducing both the real and perceived risks of job insecurity and by increasing protective factors, such as social contact. In order to be effective, however, programmes must be meaningful to participants and felt to be non-stigmatising.
• There is a strong association between area-level deprivation and

The Assembly’s Health, Social Care and Sport Committee is examining the problem of suicide and what can be done to address it. Sarah Stone, Executive Director for Samaritans in Wales, explores the links between suicide and deprivation.
suicidal behaviour: as area-level deprivation increases, so does suicidal behaviour. Suicide rates are two to three times higher in the most deprived neighbourhoods compared to the most affluent.

- Admissions to hospital following self-harm are two times higher in the most deprived neighbourhoods compared to the most affluent.
- Multiple and large employer closures resulting in unemployment can increase stress in a local community, breakdown social connections and increase feelings of hopelessness and depression, all of which are recognised risk factors for suicidal behaviour.

We invited key partners, stakeholders and experts to explore the implications, challenges and opportunities of these findings. All participants recognised the reality of the link between poverty, distress and suicide and the urgency of doing all we can to tackle it.

Poverty means facing constant insecurity and uncertainty. Its features include inadequate housing, poor mental health, low educational attainment, unemployment, loneliness and low social mobility. Knowing that these are also risk factors for suicide should add urgency and energy to efforts to mitigate both poverty and its impact on individuals and communities.

One of the comments from our seminar was that everyone wants to be a competent member of society and to feel a sense of belonging and meaning. This emphasis on connection between people is close to our own values as an organisation. The power of communities in Wales and the skills and abilities of the people within them are a major asset which needs to be recognised, supported and utilised.

The seminar considered issues such as community engagement, compassion and empathy in welfare policy, mental health and suicide awareness training and the link between poverty and education. On community engagement, participants felt that feeling part of a network, a community and a society is a vital part of good mental health. Despite the lack of community engagement in areas of socio-economic deprivation, the power of communities overall was highlighted as a major asset which needs to be utilised. Throughout the session there was agreement that those individuals experiencing high levels of poverty don’t have the means to engage in society in the most typical ways. Activities such as going to the pub or meeting for a coffee can be impossible for those experiencing poverty, therefore reducing the likelihood of engaging with others. Loneliness and isolation were described as leading and underpinning causes of distress for individuals living in areas of socio-economic deprivation. Referrals to mental health and secondary services can often be attributed to loneliness and lack of engagement.

A community approach to loneliness and isolation, one which specifically focuses on reintegrating individuals into community networks, particularly through volunteering, was described as being very successful. An investment in community groups and a social community directory for Wales was proposed as a solution to the lack of engagement in deprived areas.

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A community approach to loneliness and isolation, one which specifically focuses on reintegrating individuals into community networks, particularly through volunteering, was described as being very successful. An investment in community groups and a social community directory for Wales was proposed as a solution to the lack of engagement in deprived areas. The current funding for community groups was said to be inadequate, even though they play a crucial part in public mental health and wellbeing.

The report, which will be launched this February, concludes with ten recommendations:

Suicide rates are two to three times higher in the most deprived neighbourhoods compared to the most affluent.

Suicide is the leading cause of death of people under 35.

- the Welsh Government should set out a Wales Poverty Strategy;
- there must be local implementation of Talk to me 2, the suicide and self-harm prevention strategy;
- local health services, local authorities, public services and the wider public sector must invest and work to prevent and reduce adverse childhood experiences;
- there should be better public information to support financial literacy and help to reduce unmanageable debt;
- community groups and outreach should be promoted and supported as a means of early intervention;
- there should be mental health and suicide awareness training for frontline staff;
- there should be better support for those bereaved by suicide;
- we need to address the stigma attached to poverty and vulnerability;
- we need a compassionate approach to poverty;
- we need to address the cost of exclusion from education.

Suicide is preventable. It is crucial that we have effective collaboration across central and local government, multi-agency groups, communities and all the local agencies which can play a role in preventing suicides in Wales. We must remember that behind the figures on suicide there are individuals who have left behind a family and community devastated by their loss. By taking action together, we can reduce suicide.

To read or download ‘Socioeconomic disadvantage and suicidal behaviour – Finding a way forward for Wales’ please visit www.samaritans.org/wales or email wales@samaritans.org
For the last eighteen months, the Big Lottery Fund in Wales has been encouraging a national conversation about the future of ‘doing good’. Working in partnership with the Bevan Foundation, we have reached out to a broad cross section of Welsh society in thinking about what the ‘doing good’ might look like in Wales in the next decade. While we had a good idea of the challenges, we certainly didn’t have all the answers.

The context for ‘doing good’ – creating social value – has changed beyond recognition in recent years. We’ve experienced financial crisis and global economic slowdown, corporate scandals in industries like banking, government significantly cutting back on public spending, and charities facing increasing debate about their role in creating a good society.

It was in this context that we wanted to facilitate a debate across the whole of society – including communities, charities, social enterprises, businesses and the state – about how ‘doing good’ should evolve in the future. We wanted to ask:

- What does it mean for how we support people to build better communities, and improve their own lives and the lives of those who live around them?
- What’s the role of charities, businesses, government and communities?
- How should we all be working together?

So what is ‘doing good’? For me, ‘doing good’ is a concern for the wellbeing of citizens, supporting them to take action, and empowering them to participate in making the decisions that affect them.
As such ‘doing good’ is arguably everyone’s business. Communities, individuals, and the third, public and private sectors all have a stake in the agenda of making Wales a better place in which to live. The Big Lottery Fund believes that people should lead that change to improve their lives by drawing upon the skills, assets and energy in their communities. We distribute around £40 million every year in Wales to projects that make the changes that communities want to see.

In the findings, published in December, I was particularly struck by the clear perception that ‘doing good’ is the natural domain of the third sector. While the conversation reached many, the voice of the Welsh third sector was the loudest, and we found it particularly difficult to engage with public and private organisations. This is strange given that all three sectors have an essential role to play in creating greater social value in a vibrant and future-focused Wales.

The private sector needs to be part of this conversation. Yes, it does exist to make profits, but by creating jobs, engaging in philanthropic activities, delivering essential services and corporate social responsibility it creates social value as well as wealth. This is sometimes driven by the expectations of customers who increasingly expect the companies they do business with to be more ethical in their approach. Whatever their motivations, businesses are very much key players in this agenda, and we need to combat some of the negativity towards the private sector that the discussion unearthed.

The public sector, particularly local level agreements and competitive procurement processes have replaced them. The resulting tensions between the two sectors are clear to see. It seems to me there is a real need to think about how commissioning takes into account the full value of what a service can provide as opposed to being primarily driven by reducing costs.

Ultimately, aren’t the public and third sectors both there to serve the public’s needs? While their approaches to delivery may be different, both are funded by the public either through taxation or donations, so in that sense both are public servants. Just because something has been delivered in a certain way does not mean that it needs to continue to be so. They say that necessity is the mother of invention, so perhaps now is the time for a new paradigm, one that sees a much closer relationship between public sector bodies and charities that redesigns the way that services are delivered to improve the outcomes for the public as a whole?

‘Doing good’ is often driven by need, and the default position is usually that it is met by specific organisations or services, but we should not lose sight of the potential for active and engaged communities to take action to address the issues that matter to them.

There are already thousands of volunteers across Wales who commit their own time every week through either formal or informal volunteering who don’t see themselves as part of any sector. They are the football coaches, the befrienders and the community groups with many and varied motives. They are the bedrock of a mutually supportive civil society that strengthens our social fabric. They exist on the will of those participating and small incomes derived from donations or modest contributions for the activities they deliver.

The Big Lottery Fund’s ambition of putting people in the lead is driven by our desire to unlock this potential further and equip communities to take action on their own terms to address that which matters the most to them. Perhaps we should not be asking what the third, private and public sectors can do for us, we should be asking what it is that we can do for ourselves.

The private sector needs to be part of this conversation … it inevitably creates social value as well as wealth.
Tell us a bit about who you are?
I have worked in roles supporting Wales for the last 16 years; firstly, as a Non-Executive Director at the Intellectual Property Office in Newport, then at the Welsh Government and most recently, while acting as the Civil Service Commissioner for Wales.
I have come to appreciate the Welsh approach to public service and have great respect for the many talented and committed people working in roles supporting Wales. In addition to my role as WRA Chair, I teach at the Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford, where I am an Associate Fellow. I live just over the border in England and when I drive over the bridge into Wales from Gloucestershire, the sun always seems to come out which makes my day!

What's your big ambition for the Welsh Revenue Authority?
We will be a small and specialised, digitally-led organization, with the aspiration of becoming a hub for tax administration expertise based in Wales. As our Charter will set out once finalised later this spring, we will seek to work in partnership with our customers, the Welsh public and with our partners to help to deliver a fair tax system for Wales. We aim to offer our customers a service that's effective and easy to use, and we believe the data and understanding we gather could play an important role in helping Welsh Ministers and senior officials to develop future tax policy in Wales.

Why has a Welsh Revenue Authority been set up and why did you decide to become its chair?
The WRA was established by the Welsh Government last October to collect and manage two new devolved Welsh taxes – the first in around 800 years – marking a major milestone in the journey towards devolution in Wales. This follows the introduction of the Tax and Collection and Management (Wales) Act 2016, which devolved tax powers to Wales, and resulted in the creation of land transaction tax, replacing stamp duty land tax, and landfill disposals tax.

As the first non-ministerial government department in Wales, this is an exciting opportunity to be involved in the development of a new institution responsible for the administration of tax. Revenue raising is an important part of the role of government along with its responsibility for public expenditure, so I’m very supportive of the role the WRA will play, from 1st April onwards, in helping to raise revenue which will help to fund public services in Wales.

Do you see taxes as a burden or a joy?
Last year, I attended the British Isles and Northern Ireland Tax Authorities Forum. This was the first time tax authorities from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey had come together with HMRC to share best practice. At that meeting, we were reminded of Oliver Wendell Holmes’ quote: “Taxes are the price we pay for civilization”.
An important part of our work therefore is to make the process of tax payments easier and more accessible for customers. We want to make sure that the WRA is a user-friendly service that customers can use with confidence, knowing that their taxes are being collected fairly and efficiently.

The WRA will seek ... to deliver a fair tax system for Wales.
paying tax less of a burden for citizens. We have already engaged with a wide range of stakeholders across Wales to try and do that, developing and adapting our systems and processes based on feedback. This engagement work will continue to be vital for us as we work towards formalising our Charter, which will be at the heart of all that we do at the WRA.

How will people get to know about Wales’ new taxes and the WRA?
Although the WRA was formed in October, we will not start collecting and managing taxes until 1st April. There are two different taxes, land transaction tax and landfill disposals tax, which have different customer bases. For land transaction tax, our engagement is mostly with professional advisers, such as solicitors and conveyancers, so that they can complete transactions on behalf of customers purchasing or leasing properties, residential and commercial, from 1 April. From that date, stamp duty land tax will be replaced by land transaction tax for land transactions in Wales. We have been working closely with the Law Society and other key bodies to help inform members about the changes. We have carried out various events to test our systems and will continue to do so in the run-up to registration, which will open in late February.

Regarding Landfill Disposals Tax, we are also engaging directly with landfill site operators to help them register ahead of the new taxes coming into effect in April.

What’s your favourite piece of business advice?
The age of ‘the hero leader with all the answers’ is over. Psychologists know that there are no perfect, well-rounded leaders – only well-rounded leadership teams. A team of people with different experiences and perspectives, who know how to collaborate, will produce a better outcome than one individual, no matter how skilled that individual may be. The issues we face today are complex, unique and can rarely be solved by a single person working alone. My advice – build a diverse team and then work together. From the work we have done so far to establish the WRA, I’m confident we have talented people with the skills, experience and expertise needed to form a strong leadership team.

For further information on the Welsh Revenue Authority, visit: www.gov.wales/wra
Tough times ahead? What 2018 might hold for Wales

Our forward look at 2018 brought together a wide range of expert forecasts on the economy, society and politics to set out the challenges Wales faces.

With a double page spread in the Western Mail, numerous mentions in National Assembly for Wales debates and lively exchanges on social media, the Bevan Foundation once again set the agenda of public debate.

State of Wales Briefing: Health

Did you see the latest briefing on the State of Wales, on health?

Published at the end of 2017, it uses the following measures to paint a picture of Wales today:

- Life expectancy
- Lifestyle
- Health status
- Access to and satisfaction with the NHS

After Brexit: an agenda for public services in Wales

We are delighted that the second of our reports on Brexit, prepared in partnership with Wales Public Services 2025, was issued in November. It includes essential solutions to address the possible effects of Brexit on the public sector workforce, finances and demand for services. We were privileged to contribute the solutions the Assembly’s External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee’s inquiry the Welsh Government’s administrative and financial response to Brexit. The findings were also referenced in the Assembly research service’s Brexit Briefing.

Inclusive growth at centre of new economic action plan

We were very pleased that the Welsh Government’s Economic Action Plan, issued just before Christmas, puts ‘growing our economy inclusively, spreading opportunity and promoting well-being … at the heart of this Plan’. The Bevan Foundation has argued for some time that the Welsh Government should focus on economic inclusion, so this is a major achievement.

There is much more the Welsh Government can do and we are continuing to work on economic inclusion in the coming year.

After Brexit: Housing the nation

Shortly afterwards, the third report on Brexit, prepared with the kind support of the umbrella body for social landlords in Wales, Community Housing Cymru, set out possible solutions to problems in the supply of construction materials, construction skill shortages and lack of affordable housing created by Brexit. We were pleased that the proposals were covered in the UK publication ‘Inside Housing’.

Taxing Times

The Bevan Foundation is again making a difference as some out proposals for new, devolved taxes are taken forward by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance. As well as giving evidence to the Assembly’s Finance Committee on the Welsh Government’s draft budget, the idea of a tourist tax is generating lively debate across Wales. Watch this space!
Subscribers’ News

**New Police & Crime Plan for South Wales**

Police & Crime Commissioner Alun Michael and new Chief Constable Matt Jukes have relaunched the South Wales Police & Crime Plan.

You can view a copy at: southwalescommissioner.org.uk.

**Free online learning resources for a bilingual Wales**

The Open University in Wales and the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol are working in partnership to provide free online resources in Welsh and English for learners to try something new, increase their skills or sample a Higher Education course.

Visit: open.edu/openlearnwymru to find out more or try a course.

**Low pay in older industrial areas**

The National Assembly for Wales Cross-Party Group on Industrial Communities, chaired by Cynon Valley AM Vikki Howells, has considered the conclusions of the Industrial Communities Alliance’s latest report on Low Pay in Older Industrial Britain. The report says that too many new jobs in older industrial Britain are insecure, short-term and pay low wages.

Professor Steve Fothergill of Sheffield Hallam University also presented the conclusions of his research into the real levels of unemployment to the Group. The research looks at the relationship between the rates of hidden unemployment and Britain’s weakest economies.

**A Thriving Third Sector**

Preparing for the future is vital if the third sector is to thrive, or even survive. Are you ready? WCVA is holding a free Third Sector Futures panel discussion.

Find out more at: gofod3.cymru

**Co-producing public services**

Cartrefi Cymru Co-operative is hosting the Co-production Network for Wales. The Network is working to bring positive change to public services and communities through co-production.

For more information visit. copronet.wales

**Rural Enterprise**

Congl Meinciau enterprise centre in Botwnnog on the Llŷn Peninsula is owned by Grŵp Cynefin housing association. It was established as part of a project in the rural village to offer housing and employment opportunities.

Find out more at: conglmeinciau.org.uk

**Lasting solutions for Wales’ most challenging problems**
In 140 characters describe the NEA Cymru:

Working collaboratively with partners and supporters to enable everyone, particularly the most vulnerable people in Wales, to have access to a warm and healthy home.

What is your role at NEA Cymru?

My role is to lead the dedicated and enthusiastic team of five staff based in Cardiff to deliver a wide ranging fuel poverty work programme which includes training and upskilling frontline workers to enable them to help households in fuel debt; delivering practical projects to help households to manage their energy bills more effectively; providing direct advice at community events; and hosting networks, forums and conferences to enable stakeholders to discuss and share best practice across Wales. In addition, my role is to help raise awareness of fuel poverty at a strategic level, working with Assembly Members through the Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency Cross Party Group and members of the Fuel Poverty Coalition in Wales to drive political debate and influence policy within the Welsh Government.

What do you enjoy most about working at NEA Cymru?

I truly believe in what the charity is trying to achieve. NEA began over 35 years ago in the North East of England where our headquarters is still based and we work across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Having access to affordable warmth, food and shelter should be a basic human right. I have been at NEA for the past 5 years and the charity has the most fantastically committed staff as well as supporters and members working at a local level to help some of the most vulnerable people right across Wales. Through our Wales fuel debt and mentoring project we have trained over 800 advisors and community workers throughout Wales to enable them to help clients struggling to pay their energy bills and assisted hundreds of people in Wales’s most deprived areas with practical energy help at community events. Some of the case studies I read of how advisors we have trained are helping households living in freezing homes and worried to death about affording their heating bills, are truly inspiring. It brings to life the impact we are having and makes you realise that there is still more to be done. We have a small team in Wales but we constantly punching above our weight.

What are the biggest challenges in fuel poverty?

The multi-faceted nature of fuel poverty means that there are a number of policy drivers which need to be addressed to tackle fuel poverty in a holistic way. There are currently around 4 million UK households who struggle to heat their homes, and latest estimates suggest nearly 300,000 households in Wales, or almost 1 in 4. Although radically improving the energy efficiency and heating of our homes represents the most cost-effective and sustainable solution for tackling high energy bills and fuel poverty, major investment is needed to make the necessary impact to improve the housing stock and bring it up to a suitable standard. Whilst fuel poverty is a devolved policy area to the Welsh Government, other areas which impact on fuel poverty include energy prices and low incomes, which are not devolved. Energy prices have doubled since 2005 and with welfare cuts and low wages; the poorest households are seeing the greatest impact. The issue is also mirroring income poverty in that we are seeing more and more working families in fuel poverty.

What piece of advice would you give to your younger self?

Oh dear, this is hard. I think it would be to have more confidence to grasp opportunities that come your way. Sometimes they might not work out as you planned but don’t be afraid to try.

If NEA Cymru were a biscuit, what would it be?

I do like my biscuits – any biscuit in fact, so it was hard to choose! The team collectively decided that we would be a jaffa cake, primarily because they are relatively low fat, represent good value for money, and once tasted, you are left wanting more!

Why are NEA Cymru Bevan Foundation subscribers?

As a tackling poverty charity NEA Cymru values and supports the work that the Bevan Foundation does in raising awareness of the issue of poverty and the solutions available to ensure everyone in Wales can have a decent standard of living. The Foundation’s work is very well respected and when Victoria speaks – people listen!
Gofod3 is organised by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) in collaboration with the third sector in Wales.

Gofod3.cymru

8 Mawrth | March 2018
Stadiwm Dinas Caerdydd | Cardiff City Stadium

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