

Spring 2020

Wales' best policy and politics magazine

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Sally Holland

Children educated outside school

Ruth Coombs

Our duty to reduce poverty

Hywel Ceri Jones

Disability and Brexit



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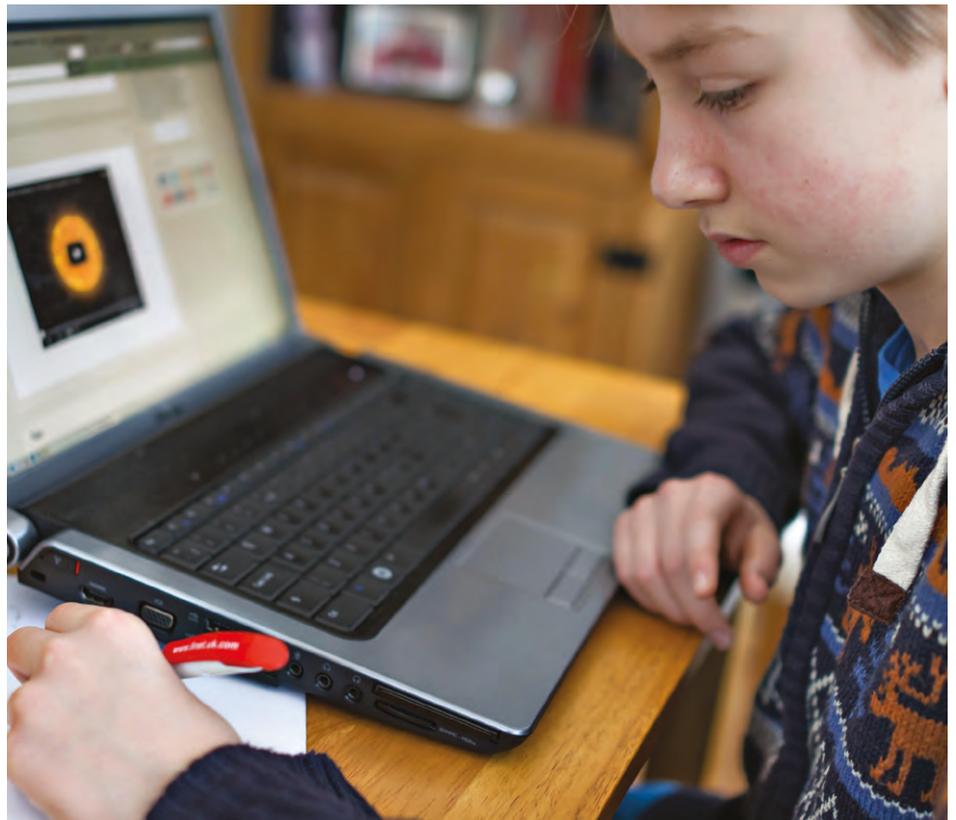
Challenges faced by children and young people receiving education other than at school

Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales, explores the barriers faced by children who are educated outside of school and the action needed to ensure all children and young people reach their full potential, wherever they are educated.

Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) is a term that includes lots of types of education provided by and paid for by the state. For some children this could be home tuition, for example due to physical or mental health issues. Other children may have struggled to thrive in a mainstream setting, or they may have been excluded from a school and these children and young people might be receiving EOTAS provision in a Pupil Referral Unit or they could be following vocational courses outside of school settings. Some young people will be receiving several different types of provision simultaneously.

Education other than at school (EOTAS) doesn't include children who are not registered with any state provided education and who are being educated at home by their families. This is classified in Wales as home education and families meet the financial costs of this themselves. This is an important distinction and this article focusses solely on EOTAS provision in Wales and not children who are home educated.

The number of pupils in Wales



receiving EOTAS has continuously risen in recent years, and some children are more likely than others to be educated outside of a school. Boys, children from poorer backgrounds and children with additional learning needs are all disproportionately represented

amongst children educated outside school.

Although some children thrive in EOTAS provision, this group can be more vulnerable than most other learners to not receiving their rights to a full education that enables them to fulfil their potential.

My office has the power to investigate individual cases where families or professionals are concerned about a child not receiving their rights, such as their rights to appropriate education. There are examples from our casework over the last four years that illustrate that EOTAS provision of a high standard can be highly beneficial and valuable for many children, in fact for some children it can have a hugely positive impact on their lives.

But this isn't the case for all. Often children's needs are not being met in terms of mental health or additional learning needs and this has led to children not being able to settle in their mainstream school but rather than a different provision being made available immediately children are waiting for long periods before their educational needs are met. My office has heard some shocking figures from casework. One family was told that their child was number 447 on a waiting list for an autism assessment, and another family was told of a 14-month wait for neurodevelopmental assessment, and in these cases this wait had a negative effect on their education. Children's rights to an education should not be delayed because they are waiting for a diagnosis.

In 2016, Estyn recommended that local authorities should '*provide pupils with suitable education within 15 days of a decision being made that they should receive EOTAS*' after finding that this was not being met for every young person. Gaps in

Some children and young people aren't being offered learning which is flexible or meaningful to them.

Children and young people receiving EOTAS need to have equitable opportunities to children in mainstream education.

provision demonstrate that the obligation to provide a suitable education, as well as the obligation to children's rights to education, are not being fulfilled by local authorities at present for all children and young people receiving EOTAS.

I am also aware of issues with the courses available. Sometimes courses are designed as short-term placements and young people can end up repeating the same courses again and again. A young person supported by my office took part in multiple placements focusing on outdoor and practical learning. The young person felt that they were repeating the same learning and were not getting the education in literacy and numeracy sufficient for their future goals.

Estyn's 2016 report shows the experience of this young person is not unique, drawing attention to the lack of a broad and balanced curriculum for many children and young people receiving EOTAS. Estyn notes that '*Overall, EOTAS provision does not give pupils the same access to their education entitlements as their peers*', that the curriculum is restricted, and that courses are 'not challenging enough'. Children and young people aren't always being offered learning which is flexible or meaningful to them and this is a clear violation of children's rights under the UN Convention on the

Rights of the Child.

As part of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children and young people have the right to a say in the decisions that affect them and also to appropriate information, so they have the tools to make informed decisions about their education. My office has been informed of children and young people receiving EOTAS who don't feel listened to or able to take part in decision making and they don't know why particular decisions have been made.

Isolation of young people is another big concern. Some children and young people are being taught at home for extended periods of time. While home tuition is valuable, it must be kept under constant review as a child taught on their own is potentially missing out from important social interactions and their wider participatory rights. My office has heard about one young child who was taught in isolation for two years, unnecessarily. After an intervention from my office they were provided with a placement with other children within weeks.

Welsh language provision is also lacking across Wales for children taught in EOTAS settings; young people often don't have the opportunity to continue their learning through the medium of Welsh, even if it's their first language. It is clear that there are a large number of barriers facing children and young people in Wales receiving EOTAS provision. Children and young people receiving EOTAS need to have equitable opportunities to children in mainstream education, and that their human rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are respected. This means giving them adequate support to develop their talents and skills to their optimum potential and respecting their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. It's crucial that amongst vast educational reforms the rights of these children are not forgotten.

Citizen voice in health and social care

Dan Bristow, Director of Policy and Practice at the Wales Centre for Public Policy, says that a public say in health and care services matters.

What's the role of the public in Welsh health and social care system? To those who don't live and breathe policy discussions, this may seem an odd question. Of course, the public fund it through taxation, and are the 'users' of the services that it provides. But beyond this?

The last twelve months have seen a number of issues hit the headlines that speak to the need for, and the challenges of, effective public engagement. Two stand out. First, the recent protests around the planned closure of A&E at the Royal Glamorgan. And second, the way in which the concerns of patients (and of staff) about maternity services in Cwm Taf took so long to filter through to the Board and to leaders in NHS Wales and the Welsh Government.

Both cases could be read as an argument for greater involvement of the public in the running of the NHS. And in fact the Welsh Government's plan for health and care envisages the public playing a much greater role in both the future of the health and care system and in the process of getting there.

A Healthier Wales, published in 2018, outlines a long-term plan for health and social care. In line with how developed countries around the world are thinking about the

The aspiration should be that we are all able to understand the answer to the question: what is the role of the public in the Welsh health and social care system?

future of health systems, this articulates a shift towards community-based care models, and a more preventative approach.

As part of this, the idea is that the public are more engaged, playing a greater role in a number of areas: managing their own health and wellbeing; co-designing the care that they receive; supporting the redesigning of services and potentially their reconfiguration; and in thinking about how society handles the grand challenges that the system faces. In short – a fundamental realignment of the relationship between citizens and the health and care service.

At the Wales Centre for Public Policy we recently published a report – Public Engagement and 'A Healthier Wales' – in which we sought to review the evidence base around each of these, and reflect on what this means for the ambitions articulated in the plan.

In the example of an A&E closure, the evidence we reviewed is clear

that with this kind of service reconfiguration there is value in engaging the public. Of course, even when engagement is done well, the change may still be controversial. I would be surprised, for example, if the closure of an A&E service didn't always trigger negative headlines and some kind of political push back.

But being transparent with the public about why a change is necessary; securing buy-in from staff who can then act as advocates (or at least not oppose) the change; and engaging the public on their concerns and how these might be addressed can all help to improve the outcome.

In the case of Cwm Taf, the implications both for the Health Board, and the wider governance system are still playing out. But central to the work that has been done to address the issues identified (and to rebuild trust with the community) has been a programme of public engagement. Again, this is



born out in the evidence. Involving patients and the public in the process of service design can help improve the resulting service.

In terms of the wider governance system, the role of the public has been a key part of the current Senedd debates around the Health and Social Care Quality and Engagement Bill. If, as seems likely, this legislation passes, it would replace the existing seven Community Health Councils with a single national citizen voice body covering health and care. Apart from expanding the remit to social care, the main difference will be that the new body will not have the same inspection powers currently held by CHCs nor will it have a duty to scrutinise service change.

Most of the discussion around these changes has focused on the inspection powers – whether the new body should have the right to access all care settings, when in some cases this will be a person's home. As it stands, the Welsh

Government is proposing to resolve this through developing a detailed 'code of practice' which will outline how the body will be able to arrange visits to different settings.

The loss of the role in scrutinising service change has received less attention. At the moment, CHCs have a formal role in shaping changes in health service provision in their area. Regulations dictate that Health Boards need to work with their CHC to ensure that the views of patients and public are taken into account. As it stands, the

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new citizen voice body will have no such role.

What is clear from our work, is that the voice of public is valuable both to the design and to the scrutiny of services. Of course, the new body needn't play these roles. There are other organisations that can ensure that this happens, and there are Health Boards who have impressive and effective programme of engagement to support this.

What will be important, however, is that there is clarity about this. As it stands, there are a number of bodies who, in different ways, have responsibility for engaging the public on health and care issues. The creation of a new organisation in a complex system, like health and social care, offers the potential for greater clarity but also the risk of the opposite.

Ultimately, the aspiration should be that we are all able to understand the answer to the question: what is the role of the public in the Welsh health and social care system?

Meeting the NHS's unique challenges

The NHS in Wales is charting a new course to meet its unique challenges, says Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Assistant Director of the Welsh NHS Confederation.

The NHS in Wales is at the start of a journey to transform services from those which treat people at the point they need care, to services which prevent ill health, make early interventions and support people in their communities. This approach, over time, will help reduce pressure on our emergency departments and other NHS settings to benefit everyone in Wales so we can stay happy, healthy and independent for longer. The NHS is now over 70 years old and has broadly worked in the same way since it was founded. Transforming the health service, therefore, is going to be no easy task and will not happen overnight.

This winter there have been multiple headlines on the pressures facing A&E, ambulance and social care services across Wales, and in many respects those headlines could suggest a crumbling system at breaking point. However, when you scratch beneath the surface, this isn't the whole story. This year's National Survey for Wales highlighted that nearly 80 per cent of people were satisfied with the care they received at hospital and 93 per cent were satisfied with the care they received at GP practices.

Despite incredible pressure, there is plenty of evidence to suggest the commitment and dedication of frontline staff is ensuring we can still



deliver high quality care for the majority of patients. But this is also why it is so important we change the way we deliver health services now. At the moment, we're fixing leaks in the boat while others spring up around us.

Wales faces a unique set of challenges. We have an aging population with more people living longer, but they are also living with more complex health and care needs. This also means the high-quality care people continue to receive today cannot last while these current trends in our population persist.

When the Welsh Government published their long-term plan for health and social care, *A Healthier Wales*, in June 2018, it set an ambitious vision and a new direction of travel. It said that we must develop integrated services, working more closely than ever before with our partners in local government, the wider public sector as well as the third and voluntary sector. This cross-sector working is designed to

achieve what leaders within the NHS have been calling out for. It aims to help us all live healthily for longer and therefore reducing the pressures on the health and care system. We are starting to see the green shoots of that transformation now. Community pharmacists can treat and test sore throats without the need for a GP appointment.

Advanced Paramedic Practitioners can now prevent unnecessary admissions to hospital by providing clinical leadership. And 'Community Connectors' in the most rural parts of Wales are helping people to access wellbeing services in their area. Advancements like these are pioneering, but we now need to deliver changes like these faster and at scale. A programme of engagement with the public is also required in order to raise awareness of the different services in our communities. We need to support and empower the public to manage their own health and provide an environment which is conducive to their health and wellbeing now and in the future. We know this is something the NHS cannot do alone.

Over the last year we've seen enough evidence across health and social care to prove we're on the right track but now it's time for us to show the people of Wales what we can really do to transform our health services for future generations.

Improving security for renters

Jennie Bibbings, Campaigns Manager at Shelter Cymru, welcomes the moves to increase security for renters, but argues the battle is not yet won.

There's a Bill currently going through the Senedd that has the potential to make a difference for more than half a million people who live in rented homes. But while the battle to increase renters' security has been hard-fought, it's not over yet.

'Security of tenure' is one of those bits of housing jargon that get bandied about along with the academics' favourite, 'ontological security', to describe something that is actually very simple and meaningful in everyday life. It's the right to live in your home.

Security is the opposite of what tenants feel when they worry about whether they can risk asking their landlord yet again to fix the bathroom leak that's coming through the kitchen ceiling. That weighing up of risks – will we get electrocuted or will we get evicted? – is familiar to too many people. The knowledge that a landlord can get possession with two months' notice, without having to justify why, hangs over tenants' lives as a continual reminder not to get too comfortable.

After years of campaigning for tenants at Shelter Cymru, we've finally had some success.

The current Bill won't completely remove landlords' rights to evict without giving a reason, but it will ensure that the 'no fault' route to



possession is no longer a quick fix.

By increasing the notice period from the current two months to six, it will give tenants a more realistic length of time to plan their move.

The other routes to possession are intact, so that if there have been serious rent arrears or anti-social behaviour the landlord is perfectly able to gain possession (with much shorter notice periods) as long as they provide evidence. This will ensure proper judicial oversight and,

for the first time in decades, real protections against the all-too-common phenomenon of eviction to avoid dealing with disrepair. There are noises from the landlord lobby – regulation to improve standards will always do that – but we've spoken to landlords who are in favour of the Bill. They recognise that two months is not long enough to up sticks, pack up your life, find a good home and raise the necessary finances.

Homelessness services are in favour of the change because, like us, they've seen the fallout from too many 'panic moves' where families have ended up in bad situations because it was the best they could find in a short timeframe.

This Bill is necessary because unlike in the 1970s there are a great number of people living in private rented housing. They do so not out of choice but because ownership and social renting are beyond reach. But even though this particular pendulum is finally starting to swing towards tenants, let's be clear: ending 'no fault' entirely and with it the use of fixed term tenancies is the only way to give tenants true security in their home. We still face huge challenges to improve housing conditions, challenge discrimination and enforce the law on illegal evictions. The battle continues.

Aiming for zero evictions

Claire Budden, Chief Executive of ClywdAlyn Housing, explains why they're ending evictions from their homes.

If we are serious about ending homelessness in Wales, then as housing providers we must consider where we can have the most significant impact and what we can do better for people and communities. That might mean tearing up the rule books and getting rid of traditional approaches which are now outdated.

Some evictions are, of course, unavoidable. But in the majority of cases they simply move the problem down the road. Another provider or agency picks up the tenant and the cost, and the underlying issue is rarely addressed.

In cases where people are evicted into homelessness, we exchange short-term challenge for a long-term calamity. Individuals and families come back into the system as a more complex and expensive case. Operationally and financially the approach makes little sense. And that's without considering the emotional and mental health impact.

In April 2019 we launched our new mission for ClywdAlyn that centres around ending poverty. One of our first acts was to set a new target of working towards no evictions.

In October that year, the Welsh Government set out its own strategy with the aim that homelessness is rare, brief and unrepeatable. It was good to see the call for a pact between providers to ensure no

The majority of evictions simply move the tenant down the road – the underlying issue is rarely addressed.

evictions from social housing into homelessness.

Our experience of moving towards a zero evictions approach has been a positive one. Overall evictions are down 85 per cent on last year with only three evictions for rent arrears this year.

Where possible we've looked for positive solutions. For example, we recently had to take possession proceedings for a tenant in a four-bedroom property where we faced a number of issues including non-payment of rent. The property was much bigger than he needed so we found him another smaller and more suitable property which we know will also help him to alleviate some of his issues with family members.

Operationally, we've switched our approach so that it is now much more focused on prevention and on acting quickly to address low-level

arrears. We have appointed an Early Intervention Officer who focuses on all new tenancies and who works with tenants who have modest arrears to prevent them escalating. Our Welfare Rights Team has been refocused on providing priority referrals for people who are in arrears, and our Crisis Fund enables housing officers and other frontline staff to use this money for any tenant who is in financial hardship. This can be used for a multitude of needs, from repairing a vehicle to enable the tenant to get to work, to purchasing travel cards, to providing carpets or white goods.

We've also reviewed our approach to income collection, with new case management software and a project with Voicescape that will contact all tenants with low-level arrears and missed payments. Our income officers now run arrears meetings where they discuss all cases where

Our approach is focused on prevention and on acting quickly to address low-level arrears.



we are not getting engagement from a tenant. We work together with teams across the business to share knowledge of the tenant, make enquiries about other agencies and look for ways that we can understand an individual's circumstances. We have had a high rate of initial success with this approach.

We are also nearing the end of a pilot project where income officers have reversed the way that they work. They now focus on tenants with relatively small arrears instead of those with the highest debt.

Prior to any eviction being authorised, a final face to face visit between the tenant and one of our senior officers is arranged to see what we can do to avoid possession proceedings. If we reach the end of our options and we are at the point of making a warrant application, we identify an alternative housing option for the tenant should the eviction go ahead.

Evictions are down 85 per cent on last year with only three evictions for rent arrears this year.

If a tenancy ends with an eviction, a review of the case takes place to look at what we could have done differently and whether there were options to provide support at a much earlier stage that would have enabled us to resolve issues.

Looking ahead, we want to reduce the three evictions this year to zero next year. The reduction this year shows that our approach is working. We believe that in the longer term any additional resources needed will be more than covered by savings on

void properties, lost rent, repairs and reletting costs and legal costs.

Now we are starting to look at how we can end evictions from temporary accommodation, where some of the most vulnerable people in our communities live. We know that in these properties, behaviours can be challenging and the threshold for evictions is much lower. However, the same issues apply. We can't keep moving people down the road and making them someone else's problem. While there was more money for housing delivery in the latest budget, calls for an increase to the Housing Support Grant to enable local authorities to commission more housing-related support services have not yet been met. This must be reviewed in the future.

Homelessness is one of the shameful challenges facing our generation. At ClwydAlyn we think we are developing a credible plan to show leadership in tackling it.

The end of austerity?

Guto Ifan, research associate at the Wales Governance Centre, asks if recent public spending decisions herald the end of austerity.

Wales' public finances and public services face a period of unprecedented uncertainty. Brexit stasis and a general election had already delayed publication of firm spending plans by the UK government. When a budget was finally delivered, it coincided with a global pandemic which will throw budget plans and the forecasts that underpinned them totally off-course.

The first half of the UK's 2020 Budget, delivered on 11 March, set out the UK government's initial fiscal response to the coronavirus outbreak. At the time, the £12 billion of extra spending and tax cuts seemed substantial and proportional. The measures were quickly superseded by a much larger response, and at the time of writing, the crisis will likely require further fiscal actions over coming weeks and months.

The crisis comes after a decade of public spending restraint, initiated at the "emergency budget" of June 2010. In the second half of his first budget, Rishi Sunak became the third successive chancellor to declare an end to austerity, announcing increased budgets for all government departments for next year and a huge boost in capital spending as part of a plan to "level up" underperforming economic regions.

When we emerge from the crisis, the fiscal mistakes of a decade ago should not be repeated.

However, claims of an "end to austerity" for the Welsh budget need to be put in the context of previously implemented cuts, increasing cost and demand pressures, and the uncertain outlook for all of Wales' public services.

Day-to-day spending on public services

Recent years have seen a significant loosening of the UK's fiscal rules and fiscal policy, which along with significant upward revisions in the public finances, have led to increased planned spending by the UK government. Funding increases for the NHS and schools in England transformed the path of the Welsh Government's budget for day-to-day spending.

The Welsh Government 2020-21 Final Budget, set in February 2020, represented the largest increase in day-to-day spending for well over a decade.

However, on current plans,

spending on public services next year will be around three per cent below its 2010-11 level in real terms on a like-for-like basis. If we account for Wales' growing population, on a per-person basis the Welsh Government's spending power will remain six per cent below its 2010-11 level.

Over the course of the decade, the Welsh population has also aged significantly, with the population over 65 increasing by over a fifth since 2010. Controlling for inflation, population growth and the costs associated with an ageing population – on an 'age-adjusted per-capita' measure – spending will remain around eight per cent below pre-austerity levels.

Health and the rest

The consequences of the decade-long squeeze on public finances are best illustrated when we look at spending outside of the NHS.

The Welsh Government's budget for 2020-21 contained real term increases in funding for all main expenditure groups. However, in most areas, this increase will barely reverse a fraction of previously implemented cuts. Non-NHS spending will remain around 13 per cent below 2010-11 levels in real terms.

Total support for local authorities fell by almost £1 billion in today's

prices between 2010-11 and 2018-19, before recovering slightly this year and next. In the face of falling revenues, local authorities prioritised social services and – to a lesser extent – education. Spending on non-protected areas has in some cases been halved, re-shaping the role of local government and the range of public services it could offer. Regressive increases to council tax levels mitigated some of the cuts, but at an increasing cost to the disposable incomes of Welsh households.

Unlike in other UK countries, the Welsh NHS was famously not spared from cuts over the first years of austerity. Since 2012-13, NHS spending increased by an average of 2.3 per cent a year and was planned to be around 16 per cent higher in real terms next year compared to 2010-11. Its share of day-to-day spending increased from 42 per cent to 48 per cent.

However, even the relatively generous settlements awarded to the health service over the last decade pale in comparison to historic growth in health spending. Uplifts averaged six per cent a year in Wales over the first decade of devolution and has averaged 3.6 per cent a year across the UK since the formation of the NHS in the 1940s. All but around seven per cent of the real terms increase in health spending since 2010-11 will have gone towards costs associated with a growing and ageing population.

Health costs tend to rise as technological advances enables more medical treatments – a key factor in why health spending has grown as a share of the economy over time. Before the likely increase associated with coronavirus, planned health spending as a share of Welsh GDP was barely above 2010-11 levels.

An uncertain future

The UK budget and subsequent measures to dampen the impact of coronavirus will provide further resources for the Welsh Government



Wales' public finances and public services face a period of unprecedented uncertainty.

to boost spending on public services and to allow rates relief for businesses next year.

For the first time, the UK budget also set a total 'envelope' for departmental spending to 2023-24. On these plans, making assumptions about the distribution of spending across UK government departments and the consequential allocation for Wales, we estimate that day-to-day spending in the Welsh budget would increase by around 2.1 per cent on average to 2023-24. By 2024-25, spending would be around five per cent higher than 2010-11 levels.

This increased funding will allow the Welsh Government to grow health spending in line with recent trends. Other areas of the budget may increase slightly in real terms, but non-NHS spending will remain

substantially below pre-austerity levels. Reversing austerity across the Welsh budget would require substantially more spending by the UK government, or extensive use of limited devolved fiscal levers.

The effects of the coronavirus and the fiscal response will result in far greater fiscal deficits for the UK government than forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility, as should be the case in times of crisis. When we emerge from the crisis, the fiscal mistakes of a decade ago should not be repeated. Cutting public spending during the recession delayed economic recovery and caused a myriad of social hardships.

Austerity may have come to an end, but its effects will continue. From a shortage of hospital beds to depleted local authority workforces, the ability of our public services to respond effectively to this crisis has been impaired by previously implemented cuts.

The long-term political and economic impact of the coronavirus are unknowable. But we will eventually need an honest conversation about the level of public services we want to see in Wales and how we adequately fund them.

The Valleys Taskforce – is it working and what do we do next?

Russell George, Chair of the Assembly's Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, talks about scrutinising the Welsh Government's effort to stimulate the economy in the south Wales valleys.

Holding the Welsh Government to account for its economic development policies is the bread and butter of the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee. The Committee has recently spent a lot of time looking at the Welsh Government's Bus Services (Wales) Bill, but that is only a small element of the Committee's work.

Other recent work has included close examination of how Transport for Wales is delivering its vision to transform rail services. We've also looked at Regional Skills Partnerships and identified roles they could play in addressing the low skills traps that inhibit innovation and stop employers from investing in a highly-skilled workforce.

We've questioned if government is fully taking advantage of public procurement to generate community wealth. By leveraging the foundational economy, public procurement spending can be used to maintain and create jobs where people currently live and nurture vibrant communities.

Currently we are carrying out an inquiry into the performance of the Valleys Taskforce. This kicked off in February and will run until the summer. We have already held our public consultation and will soon be engaging with local people and plan to hold a formal meeting in a



Valleys community.

Some valleys communities face deep-rooted and long-standing economic and social challenges. The Taskforce was set up as a catalyst for delivering regeneration and sustainable growth in order to address these issues. We are asking whether the Taskforce's specific policy initiatives are delivering successful outcomes to help create sustainable growth and reduce poverty.

We're looking at a number of areas, including whether activities and projects are being targeted in the areas that most need it. We hope to reveal how well the Taskforce is

working with and adding value to other economic development initiatives, as well as how it is addressing ingrained gender inequality.

Four years is not long to try to reverse decades of economic stagnation, deprivation and poverty, but we are keen to identify any short-term measures that could deliver positive outcomes before the Taskforce disbands next March. We are also hoping to influence the Welsh Government's forthcoming economic strategy for the Heads of the Valleys. We'll be looking to make recommendations where changes are needed, and what should be prioritised by the next Welsh Government. The Bevan Foundation's recent report 'Prosperous Valleys, Resilient Communities' explored these issues, and we are looking forward to speaking to a range of people and groups with a vested interest in the Taskforce's goals.

Our public consultation is open until 9 April and I hope everyone with an interest in securing a prosperous future for the valleys will give us their views.

You can follow or participate in all the Committee's work
@SeneddEIS @SeneddESS

Why work doesn't pay for self-employed people

Universal Credit is supposed to make work pay, but holds back self-employed people, says founder and Chief Executive of the charity Purple Shoots, Karen Davies.

Purple Shoots supports the 'hidden entrepreneurs' in Welsh communities. They have been written off by other funders because their credit score is not good enough or because they have no cash to put into their business or assets for security. We have proved that all that is needed for people to flourish is an opportunity and some funds. But all too often, it is the benefits system which prevents them from starting a business and which sometimes derails them once they are operating. While it has some strengths, there are flaws in Universal Credit that need to be addressed before it can encourage people to work.

This is often seen with savings. A claimant can hold only a minimal amount of savings before their benefits are reduced, encouraging him or her to spend any savings above the threshold. This means it is impossible for someone who want to start a business to save up funds to invest or to provide a cushion for their families when times are tough.

The Enterprise Allowance Scheme is a good concept, but entrepreneurs have only a limited window in which to prepare their business. At the end of that period they have to start up, ready or not. Enterprise Allowance payments do not last for nearly long enough – three months at the



equivalent of Job Seekers' Allowance and three months at half that rate. Yet few new businesses can deliver their owner a meaningful income after only three months.

Enterprise Allowance can be supplemented by Universal Credit, with payments tapering as income from the business increases. This is fine, although a bit disheartening as there is no reward for business success. The real problem arises after 12 months when Universal Credit assumes that the business can pay its owner the minimum wage and is reduced accordingly. This can cause great hardship and frequently results in business failure.

The five week wait for Universal Credit works against people trying out a new business because if it fails the entrepreneur has no income for a long time. This is particularly an issue for people with long-term health conditions who want to work

but aren't sure what level of work they could manage. They should be able to try without jeopardising all their hard-won benefits.

The final problem is stigma. The view that people on benefits are lazy and scroungers is widely held. In six years of working with benefits claimants, I have never met anyone who wanted to be in that position. They all wanted to be independent, to be using their skills and to have the dignity of earning their own money. Many of them feel crushed by the negative attitudes towards them.

So whilst we battle on to get some of the barriers addressed, one thing everyone can do is change the narrative around people in poverty. Most of them are people with skills and aspirations in need of opportunity and respect.

Purple Shoots is a registered charity and a Responsible Finance Provider, working to tackle unemployment, social isolation and financial exclusion through the provision of small ethical loans to enable people to start businesses and self-reliant groups to enable people to move towards income generation and community action. www.purpleshoots.org

Working towards Welsh renewable energy targets

Wales currently generates approximately half of its electricity consumption from renewables but Jeremy Smith, Head of Development Strategy (Wales) at Innogy Renewables UK Ltd, asks what will it take to reach Government's ambition to reach net zero by 2050?

Wales has a strong wind resource, long coastline, a skilled workforce and a track-record as an innovator in renewable energy, attributes that provide us with the opportunity to lead on decarbonisation and respond with urgency to the climate crisis. Success depends on addressing a number of challenges.

Wales' grid network needs serious review. We are pleased to see that the National Infrastructure Commission intends to examine how the lack of electricity grid is constraining the growth of renewables and consider solutions. Grid upgrade, especially in Mid Wales, is needed to ensure that communities in rural Wales can benefit from a future where heat and transport are decarbonised. Lack of electricity grid infrastructure also hampers economic development, with companies who might otherwise have based manufacturing operations in mid Wales being forced to invest elsewhere.

Wales' onshore turbine fleets are amongst the least efficient in Europe, operating with smaller turbines which are now being phased out elsewhere. Wales' tallest turbines are 145m to tip: by contrast in Sweden nearly half of all applications in planning are for tip heights of up to 200m.



Taller turbines with longer blades capture more energy, and in a policy environment where it's unlikely that many future onshore wind projects will be subsidised, the financial viability of the industry – and the Welsh Government's ability to meet its decarbonisation targets – depends on bigger machines that are more efficient.

There is a positive story on local benefit. Innogy alone will deliver £2.2m into community projects in Wales this year and Brechfa Forest West Wind Farm in Carmarthenshire saw approximately £40 million of the total £105 million capital expenditure spent in Wales.

We are also working with Community Energy Wales to deliver local shared ownership for an onshore development project in north Wales.

Shared ownership with local communities is a great way both to deliver local benefits and enable communities to engage with a project throughout its lifecycle, whilst maintaining the high level of investment needed to meet renewables targets. Innogy wants to foster links with local authorities which host wind farm projects to explore investment and ownership opportunities – partnerships that are commonplace on the continent. We were pleased to explore some of these themes at a recent Bevan Foundation seminar on renewable energy and local benefits.

Whilst the consenting regime in Wales is now more streamlined for renewables, Welsh Ministers need to ensure that the policies of the forthcoming National Development Framework are as enabling and ambitious as possible.

With the right investment in infrastructure and a positive regulatory environment, a fully decarbonised electricity system, where shared ownership brings local benefit, could be within our grasp. To do this though, we need strong political leadership and a resolve that responds with urgency to the climate crisis.

The air we breathe

Mike Hedges, Assembly Member for Swansea East and chair of the Assembly's Environment Committee, outlines its inquiry into air quality.

Wales has some of the worst air quality in the UK. Cardiff and Port Talbot both have higher air pollution than Birmingham, and a road in Caerphilly county borough is the most polluted outside of London. Public Health Wales figures show that air pollution contributes to around 2,000 deaths in Wales each year.

The primary air pollutants that affect health are nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), ozone (O₃) and other small, particulate matter. These pollutants come from a range of sources, but the vast majority arise from the burning of fuels. This makes road transport the primary mobile source of emissions, and industrial combustion or production processes the main static sources.

Unlike the London smog of the 1950s, this pollution cannot be seen but we know it is very bad for people's health. The main risk occurs through the making worse of existing cardiovascular diseases, as well as being a cause of asthma and lung cancer. The long-term impacts of air pollution are not well understood. Children are particularly vulnerable, meaning the effects of today's air pollution may be seen well into the future. The effects of air pollution disproportionately affect those in deprived areas.

On 18 June 2019, the Minister for



Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs made a statement in the Assembly on clean air. During the statement she said she had been working with the Minister for Economy and Transport on actions to address NO₂ at five points on the motorway and trunk road network. She also outlined a range of other actions, including a commitment to bring forward a Clean Air Act, increasing investment in active

travel, and development of a technical advisory note on air quality for planners and developers.

The Assembly's Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, of which I am chair, is undertaking an enquiry into clean air. It aims to explore the Welsh Government's legislative proposals relating to clean air including the regulatory gaps or issues that will need to be addressed after the UK leaves the EU and the Welsh Government's proposals for a Clean Air Act. We are also seeking views on the regulatory proposals in the Local Air Quality Management regime and on domestic combustion.

We have a duty to our children to ensure that the air they breathe is clean and is not doing them harm. We know that trees absorb pollutant gases (nitrogen oxides, ammonia, sulphur dioxide and ozone) and filter particulates out of the air by trapping them on their leaves and bark, so planting trees in badly affected areas could help.

The committee would be pleased to hear the views of readers on air pollution especially their answers to the questions above. Find out more here: <http://senedd.assembly.wales/mgConsultationDisplay.aspx?ID=379>

Our duty to reduce poverty

Reverend Ruth Coombs, Head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales, outlines a new approach to reducing poverty and inequality.

There is a clear link between poverty and equality of outcome across all areas of life in Wales. Research shows that the poverty attainment gap in Wales emerges as young as three. By the age of 14, children living in poverty are well behind their more affluent peers. Children eligible for free school meals have higher exclusion rates than others. Adults living in the most deprived areas of Wales have far lower life expectancies than those living in the least deprived areas.

These statistics, from *Is Wales Fairer? 2018*, show unfairness at the heart of our society.

The Equality Act 2010 made provision in its Section 1 to ensure that public bodies, when taking strategic decisions, exercise their functions in such a way as to reduce these inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage. But that provision – the socio-economic duty – was not commenced by the UK Government of the time nor by successive ones.

The Wales Act 2017 passed powers over the duty's commencement in Wales to Welsh Government. And, after calls from us and others, it is pleasing that Welsh Government has committed to introducing the duty. Its consultation on its plans for the duty recently closed, with the duty expected to come into force this year.



At the Equality and Human Commission, our work is often based around the protected characteristics (such as age, disability and race) set out in the Equality Act 2010. You may be surprised to know that inequalities of outcome are exacerbated when we consider people's protected characteristics. Disabled people's employment rate in Wales is less than half that for non-disabled people. And disabled adults in Wales are far more likely to be living in poverty than non-disabled adults (32.1 per cent do so compared with 22.4 per cent). Thirty-eight per cent of people from ethnic minorities in

Wales were living in poverty in 2013 compared to 23 per cent of the population. And four out of ten lone parents, nine out of ten of whom are women, live below the poverty threshold.

The incoming duty gives us a crucial new lever that helps join the dots to tackling disadvantage. We at the Commission have a role to play in assisting Welsh Government and other public bodies to take forward the duty in an effective way. And we have a role to challenge public bodies if they don't. We want to see the duty influencing budget-setting and service provision in public bodies so that they prioritise tackling the deepest inequalities experienced by people in Wales.

We want to ensure the duty is shaped so that it is not just about process but about improving people's outcomes and making a real difference to their lives. Organisations should focus on changing people's lives, rather than just be able to show they have ticked a box. Of course, the duty is not a panacea. That is why we are calling for Welsh Government to take forward the duty as part of a wider, strategic approach to tackling poverty. But the duty does offer a new way of thinking about and reducing entrenched inequalities. And it is an opportunity that Wales can ill afford not to take.

Preventing problem debt

Debt affects a quarter of people in Wales. Peter Tutton, , Head of Policy at StepChange Debt Charity, explains the underlying causes and sets out some ideas for action.

Our recent *Wales in the Red* report estimates that around eight per cent of adults (193,000 people) living in Wales are facing severe debt problems, with another sixteen per cent (412,000 people) showing signs of financial distress. Problem debt damages mental and physical health, shatters wellbeing and creates significant external social costs, so it is vital for policy makers to understand the drivers of debt problems for an effective prevention and harm reduction strategy.

Threats to the financial stability of Welsh households are common and widespread. Seventy per cent of our clients say that their financial difficulties were triggered by a life event, like reduced income from work or benefits, illness, unemployment or relationship breakdown. People seeking help from StepChange are disproportionately younger than the population, more likely to be single parents and renters. They lack the resilience to cope with negative life events and struggle with low and insecure incomes.

Over half of our clients in Wales are in arrears on at least one household bill when they seek advice. More than a third, 36 per cent, of clients with responsibility for paying council tax were in arrears, 30 per cent were in arrears with



water, 27 per cent with rent, and 22 per cent and 16 per cent for electricity and gas respectively.

Around two in five of our clients have a negative budget – their income is less than expenditure after budget counselling. More than two in five also have an additional vulnerability such as mental or physical health problems that make dealing with debt problems more challenging.

The average unsecured debt of clients in Wales is £10,415, with credit cards, overdrafts and personal loans most common. Some 700,000 people in Wales use credit to meet essential expenditure like groceries and household bills. Using credit to cope with low or reduced income is super risky – we found that people who use credit cards or overdrafts to cope with an income shock were ten times more likely to have severe debt problems than others.

So faced with all this what can

policy makers do? Here are a few thoughts.

The Welsh Government and local authorities should build on progress to make council tax recovery fairer in Wales. They should deliver the debt management standards that financially vulnerable people need and work to reduce bailiff use. There is a pressing need for independent regulation of bailiffs enforcing council tax.

The Welsh Government should also consider ways to reduce debt-related harm as it explores further devolution of social security administration and by extending access to safe, affordable credit through its Financial Inclusion programme. We've found that 43 per cent of people getting working age social security support use credit for essentials. Among our clients, one in ten said they had used very high cost credit or even loan sharks as a result of benefit problems like the Universal Credit five week wait.

We urgently need to build the longer-term financial resilience of single parents, young adults and people most likely to be struggling with household bills. People do not have the savings or safety nets to cope with common income shocks, and so are turning to harmful credit to fill the gaps in household budgets.

Culture helps us find common ground

Abigail Scott Paul, Deputy Director of Advocacy and Public Engagement at Joseph Rowntree Foundation, writes about a new photographic exhibition on poverty that is touring the UK.

It can feel like there is more that divides us, than unites us; but culture can be a bridge to understanding between factions, often when language fails. It's something one of our collaborators, Lesley Hodgson, understands. She's one of the founders of Merthyr Tydfil Global Village, a community art project that provides an annual festival. She also offers drop-in advice alongside significant bridge building between local Welsh residents and the Portuguese and Eastern European workers in a bid to overcome community tensions.

Lesley says: "We've got great things happening in and around Merthyr – I've always seen it as a place of safety, a place where people respect each other even if they don't always agree. There's so much potential to build a cohesive world. We just need to work at it!"

With this in mind, in February we launched our first public-facing photographic exhibition *Picture Britain: Our People, Our Poverty*.

Using our framing research, we can have a more effective conversation about poverty with the public: we need to appeal to people's sense of compassion and justice, values the British public hold dear. But images also matter: photos and visual stories that are used in the mainstream are powerful tools. Unfortunately, many of the visual images used in the media

associated with poverty reinforce a perception that feels inauthentic and stigmatising to those people and communities the images are meant to represent.

We wanted to reframe the picture of people caught in the riptide of poverty. We have worked with the photographer Jillian Edelstein and people from communities up and down the country to create a stunning series of photographs that shows the strength, resilience and hope of people who are working hard to unlock opportunities for themselves and others trapped in poverty.

Jillian also came up with an ingenious way of finding our common ground: she asked participants one simple question: "What is the one thing you could not live without?" The answers reveal universal values, hopes and dreams that all of us can identify with: love, hope and faith are among some of the answers.

Picture Britain: Our People, Our Poverty is our attempt to use culture to find the common ground on the issue of poverty in the UK and one, we hope, that can start to build understanding and connection with more people, so that we can find a solution to this injustice.

The exhibition will now be touring the UK so please search *Picture Britain: Our People, Our Poverty* for more information: www.jrf.org.uk/event/picture-britain-our-people-our-poverty

"It's easy to lose sight of the big picture in divided times, but we must find the common ground, and culture could hold the key"





CIVILITY

Brexit and disabled people

Disability organisations must ensure their rights are not lost when Wales leaves the EU, says Hywel Ceri Jones, former Director General of social and employment policy and industrial relations at the European Commission.

The Welsh and UK public are still unaware of the likely social and economic impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. This should be a matter of special concern to the millions of disabled persons living in the UK who, together with disabled persons in the EU, make up one fifth of the total EU population. Disabled persons make up 26 per cent of the population in Wales, 40 per cent of whom live in poverty – the highest proportion in the UK. In cooperation with disability organisations, the National Assembly for Wales needs to redouble efforts to protect the rights of disabled people. The added value of EU membership to disabled people in Wales was given considerable impetus in the mid-1990s with the significant shift of emphasis in EU disability policy away from an approach based on charity and welfare towards the objectives of equality and human rights. This then led to adoption of the EU Employment Equality Directive legislation of 2000 requiring all Member States to prohibit discrimination against disability in the workplace. This dramatically strengthened UK disability equality laws.

On the global stage, the EU helped to shape and drive adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, confirming



the shift away from the general policy aim to maintain people rather than to forge pathways for disabled persons into the mainstream of society. The adoption of this Convention in 2008 placed disability at the heart of the UN human rights agenda and influenced the overall development of international standards in equality and human rights law. It underlined the importance of mainstreaming concern for disability as an integral part of the relevant strategies of sustainable development.

The Convention was a truly landmark treaty and is the only UN human rights treaty which the EU has itself ratified to date. It includes the obligation to repeal or amend EU laws and policies which do not comply with the UN Treaty and to harness all its legislative and other tools to benefit disabled persons.

From 2010 to 2020 this UN Treaty guided EU disability strategy. It had a significant impact on the reform of the EU regulations governing the application of its structural and investment funds, which helped to move disabled persons out of institutions and to develop appropriate community alternatives that gave practical support to the efforts of people to live independently.

During 2020 we expect the EU to continue its drive to reform its structural and cohesion policies and their funding criteria, the very policies and funds from which Wales has greatly benefited over the past 20 years. The result of these reforms will feature in the EU's 2021-2027 programming arrangements and will be reflected in its future budget. It will be in the interests of Wales to monitor closely the positive impacts flowing from these arrangements so as to inspire further innovation and progress within the UK. This will be critically important to ensuring that the UK Government's proposed shared prosperity fund fully

recognises needs in Wales and fully respects the powers and responsibilities devolved to Wales.

A crucial feature of the EU's work in the field of disability over the past 30 years has been the European Commission's strong commitment to consult disability organisations. This has helped ground EU action in the needs of disabled people and has enhanced the legitimacy of EU disability initiatives. Furthermore, the Commission has provided financial support for civil society organisations to meet and cooperate at European level, facilitating their participation in decision making. This has been paralleled by the introduction of EU-wide machinery for senior government officials to share innovative ideas about equality and disability policy and practice. It will be important for the UK, with its new EU status as a 'third country', to maintain this involvement. The arrangements will be defined during negotiations with the EU.

Negotiations on this new partnership have started and will involve defining precisely the scope, content and terms of the Political Declaration annexed to the Withdrawal Agreement. Media attention has focused almost exclusively so far on the terms of a likely future trade deal, although it will also involve a range of economic, social and cultural issues that were not covered by the Withdrawal Agreement.

The Johnson political declaration sets out the Prime Minister's ambition for this future relationship. It leaves many vital issues, especially security and foreign affairs cooperation, wide open at this very difficult time in terms of peace and stability in our world. Those like me who are also deeply concerned about future participation of young people and students, our universities and higher and further education institutions in the Erasmus and Horizon research programmes are still scratching our heads in dismay at what was and remains a blind Brexit.

Civil society needs to be ready and willing to stand up for principles they hold dear.

What we do know is that Johnson has several times declared his own and his government's opposition to the inclusion of social and environmental conditional clauses. Whether or not this approach will lead to attempts to water down or revisit social legislation and policies deriving from the EU remains to be seen. What is clear is that civil society needs to be alert to these dangers and ready and willing to stand up for principles they hold dear.

The challenge posed by the UN Convention had been to embed a new dynamic of reform in all Member States of the EU and into their regional and local processes of governance. Article 33 of the Convention is its lynchpin, requiring governments to designate one or more focal points coordinating responsibility for implementation and also an independent monitoring mechanism. Key questions now arise in the wake of Brexit as to the extent to which the UK and Wales will continue to commit to implement the Convention and repeal non-compliant laws and practices to apply it.

The future is very unclear on the substance of the new relationship which the UK will enjoy with the EU. This is the time for civil society in Wales and across the UK to be vigilant and fearless in articulating the importance of our continued European collaboration to protect and promote the rights of disabled persons and their families.

I recommend five follow-up action points. First, ensure there is a united front or alliance of human rights and disability organisations throughout the UK to press the government with one voice on its negotiating stance with the EU to confirm the commitment to apply the substance of the different disability-related laws and measures adopted during

membership of the EU.

Second, reinforce partnership with and between disability and human rights organisations throughout the UK and create the necessary mechanism to develop regular cooperation with the European Disability Forum and other EU level social platforms.

Third, I recommend that the UK Government should establish with the EU a special schematic working group, to include representation of disability organisations, so as to identify the scope for continuing cooperation to exchange good practice and enhance disability policies as well as to monitor the effectiveness of implementation of the UN Convention. This should take into account the commitment of the EU and the UK to deliver the UN's sustainable development goals.

Fourth, I recommend that governments seek continued participation in the EU's Horizon Research and Erasmus programmes, with the special attention they are giving to the global problems of climate change and healthcare, including scaling up research into infectious diseases.

Fifth, I recommend governments build explicitly on the policies applied through the EU's Structural Funding (including both the ERDF and ESF) to attack poverty and promote social inclusion, including support for disabled people, and incorporate such policy provision in any replacement funding formula established in the proposed Shared Prosperity Fund, taking fully into account devolved responsibilities in these fields.

A version of this article was presented to Disability Wales' National Summit in Cardiff on February 13, 2020.

Film Review: Knock Down the House

Catherine Fookes, Director of WEN Wales, says that the film *Knock Down the House* is about giving power back to real people.

Watching *Knock Down the House* is an absolute roller coaster. If you've stood for political office and lost, as I and countless others have, it's incredibly emotional viewing. It shows the relentlessness of knocking on doors; the never-ending phone calls, press releases, social media content to be produced; the team you have to motivate and the huge sacrifices of time and money that most 'ordinary people' have to make including time away from your family. It shows the huge mountain we have to climb to get more women and specifically more women of colour into political office.

However, it's also a film full of hope and it's galvanising: ultimately its real message is that we just have to believe in the impossible. We have to use the anger we feel to propel us forward to make change. Activists and agitators need to watch this film and see how the women in it and their supporters made something incredible happen by forming a massive movement for change.

The film gave me hope, and it begged the question 'what would it take in Wales to have our own 'Knock Down the House' movement?'

A key message of the film is to take the power back. Alexandria



Ocasio-Cortez said that her father had taken her on a trip to Washington when she was a young girl: "He pointed at everything and he said, you know, this all belongs to us. He said, this is our government, it belongs to us, so all of this stuff is yours."

I thought the film was going to centre on Democrat women standing against Republicans, however the major part of the film centres around four Democrats taking on the 'male, pale and stale' career politicians from their own political party. They were having to battle for the nomination before they could even stand and fight in a general election.

Groups of mainly young people calling, cajoling, door knocking, planning and plotting were truly inspirational. This was an organised movement – not women working in isolation.

What they lacked in political experience they made up for in enthusiasm and a desire for change. Amy Vilela's daughter had died and she was standing to overhaul health care in the US. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez got involved after the anger she felt at Donald Trump's election as President. Cori Bush, a nurse and pastor, was moved to stand due to the shooting of an unarmed black man in her area. Paula Jean Swearengin stood as she could see the horrendous effects of the coal mining industry around her. All of them were angry about injustice and inequality and used that anger to propel them to make changes in society.

Ultimately its real message is that we just have to believe in the impossible.

The film shares the highs and lows of their campaigns and what struck me was the community 'campaign office' behind each of them. Groups of mainly young people calling, cajoling, door knocking, planning and plotting were truly inspirational. This was an organised movement – not women working in isolation.

How can Wales have its 'Knock Down the House' moment?

I believe we need to do three things to ensure our Senedd and local government reflects our society – we need to create the pipeline, change our laws and the culture. Taking the pipeline first. Groups like WEN Wales and EYST are running successful mentoring schemes which are already creating in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women and disabled women the desire to stand and the tools to stand. Trade unions do a great job supporting and training women to take the lead in politics. But currently, when potential candidates come out of our schemes they are met with the horrendous realisation that no one who looks like them is currently in the Senedd. So why would they want to put themselves through social media abuse, stress and the pain if they lose?

The second thing we need to do

The second thing we need to do is change the law so that there are women of colour and disabled women in both the Senedd and local government.

is change the law so that there are women of colour and disabled women in both the Senedd and local government. WEN Wales would like to see legally binding quotas so all political parties are compelled to change and put forward equal candidates and diverse candidates. This has been done in 100 other countries – why can't we now lead the way in Wales and do it here? It is possible, as envisaged by the expert panel on electoral reform chaired by Laura McAllister, along with the work reforming the electoral system and enlarging the Assembly to make it a more effective legislature. We also need an 'access to elected office' fund as soon as possible to ensure that people from all socio-economic backgrounds and disabled women can afford to stand.

Finally, we need to change the culture and come together across all parties to ensure that women of colour, disabled women, women from different socio-economic backgrounds are able to stand and win. It will take concerted action by all of us working together across Wales – political parties, unions, businesses, NGOs and citizens – we all need to come together to ensure that our politicians truly reflect the people of Wales.

As Lord Simon Woolley recently said at the launch of Welsh Government's new strategy to tackle diversity in public appointments, 'We are demanding change, not asking for it.' Join our WEN Wales coalition and let's make this happen!

WEN Wales' vision is a Wales free from gender discrimination. Find out more at <https://wenwales.org.uk/>

Bevan Foundation News

Insights

Better access to GP services for older people



Together with the Age Alliance Wales, we've been looking into older people's experiences of accessing GP services. We found that many had difficulty making an appointment because they had to make multiple phone calls or queue outside. Disabled patients in particular had difficulty getting the care they need.

We concluded that recent Welsh Government commitments to improve phone access need to go further. Outdoor queuing should be stopped and all appointment booking methods should be available. Patient concerns about telephone triage should be addressed, and adjustments made for people with sensory or communications impairments.

Appointments themselves should be available of different lengths and patients should be able to discuss more than one issue per appointment. Penalties for lateness should be stopped, and all GP practices should comply with GPs duties under the Equality Act 2010.

The report is available at:
www.bevanfoundation.org/publications/access-to-gp-services-by-older-people

Trapped: women's experiences of poverty

Women's poverty is hidden by the way that it is measured. Our report with Chwarae Teg lifts the lid on women's experiences of poverty and makes some ground-breaking recommendations for change. The report calls for support for women to enter and progress at work, the real Living Wage and more widespread flexible working arrangements. It urges the Welsh Government to seek flexibility and choice in payment of social security benefits, and increased investment in community-based learning. Most radically, it calls for a new childcare offer that provides free, part-time childcare from age 9 months to school entry for 48 weeks a year, coupled with free out of school care up to the age of 14. The new offer should be available for every child whose parents want one.

The report is available at:
www.bevanfoundation.org/publications/trapped-poverty-amongst-women-in-wales-today



Up rate EMA now!



Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) provides vital income for learners aged 16-18 from low-income families. Yet it has been frozen for nearly 10 years, leaving thousands unable to get help and forcing young people to choose between buying items they need for learning or lunch.

We're calling for the value of EMA to be restored, with an increase to £45 a week. We're also calling for major changes to the Welsh Government Learning Grant so that adults in further education get the same support as those in higher education. These recommendations are part of our work on creating a Welsh Benefits System.

Read our suggestions in full at
www.bevanfoundation.org/publications/learning-a-living-better-support-for-post-16-learners

Making a difference

Debating anchor towns



Our idea of 'anchor towns' – places which have a sizeable population and which offer a range of public and private services – has really taken off.

Hefin David AM chose the idea for his short debate in the National Assembly for Wales on 22nd January 2020, and we were delighted to present our proposals to a meeting of the Valleys Taskforce a few days later.

We've also shared them at a fringe debate at the Welsh Conservatives conference on 7th March as well as on BBC Radio Wales. Some local authorities are exploring how to adopt the idea in their local plans.

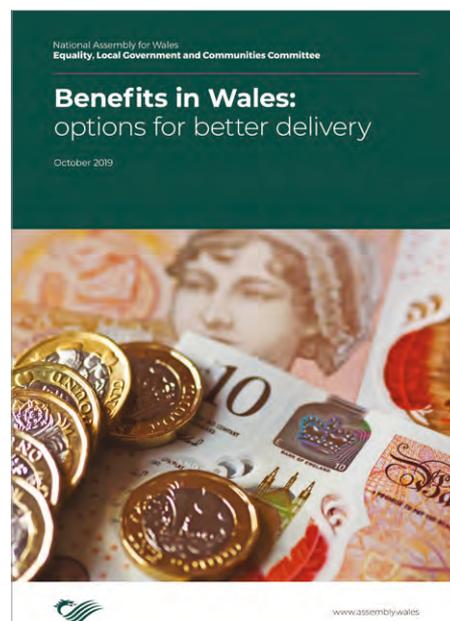
In case you missed the report you can catch up here:
www.bevanfoundation.org/publications/anchor-towns

Welsh Benefits System

We are delighted that the National Assembly for Wales' Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee has endorsed our proposals for a Welsh Benefits System. A Welsh Benefits System would bring together the many different means-tested schemes run by the Welsh Government and local authorities into a coherent whole. The committee's recommendation that the idea be adopted has now been accepted in principle by the Welsh Government.

The challenge is now to make sure that a Welsh Benefits System lifts people out of poverty and is as seamless as possible.

You can read our case for a Welsh Benefits System here:
www.bevanfoundation.org/publications/the-case-for-a-welsh-benefits-system/



Coronavirus

Protect the least well off

We're deeply concerned that coronavirus will hit people on low incomes or with certain protected characteristics hardest.

We're urging the Welsh Government to mitigate the impact of emergency measures by encouraging local authorities to provide families whose children receive free school meals with an allowance in lieu and by providing financial support for emergency food aid e.g. via food banks.

We've asked that the Discretionary Assistance Fund be increased and rules relaxed so more cash can go to households affected by sudden job losses. We're urging landlords to offer 'rent holidays' to tenants faced with a sudden drop in income and we're asking that nobody should be evicted for rent arrears during the current crisis.

Hidden consequences

While efforts to contain the spread of the virus and treat people affected rightly have priority, there are many unforeseen consequences that are passing unnoticed.

Over the coming weeks, we're publishing online articles by guest contributors as well as a special State of Wales briefing.

Check out our special coronavirus page on our website where you'll see a variety of resources:
www.bevanfoundation.org/coronavirus

Subscribers' News

Transforming Welsh eye care services must be a priority



Every day in Wales five more people begin to lose their sight. Essential eye clinic appointments are being cancelled and delayed, causing some patients to suffer irreversible sight loss which could have been avoided with timely treatment.

The hospital eye care service is struggling to meet demand. Continuing delays are leading to too many people in Wales losing their sight unnecessarily, risking their mental health and wellbeing.

In response, RNIB Cymru is calling on AMs across Wales to prioritise preventing needless sight loss ahead of the 2021 Senedd Elections.

The charity is currently promoting its key manifesto asks to ensure that transforming eye care services is a priority and that health boards have a clear improvement plan in place to achieve their targets.

Contact RNIB Cymru on 029 2082 8500 or cymru@rnib.org.uk

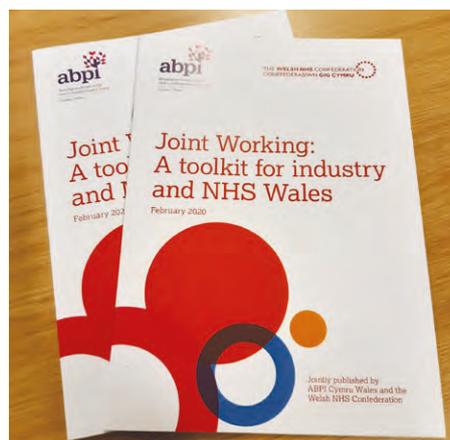
Working Together for better health

ABPI Cymru Wales and the Welsh NHS Confederation recently launched a toolkit to support joint working between the pharmaceutical industry and NHS Wales.

Joint working is already bringing benefits to patients in Wales. For example, the pharmaceutical companies of Johnson & Johnson, Welsh Government, NHS Wales and Myeloma UK have partnered to co-create an 'All Wales Haematological Malignancy Data Solution'. This will capture real-world evidence to help deliver improved outcomes for patients whilst facilitating a value-based healthcare environment.

Dr Rick Greville, Director ABPI Cymru Wales, commented: "When the industry and NHS work together, the benefits are significant for all concerned – higher quality care, lower hospital admissions and more appropriate use of medicines. We want to help more people in Wales benefit from this triple win."

Visit www.abpi.org.uk/media-centre/news/2020/february/new-toolkit-for-welsh-nhs-and-industry-to-work-together-for-patients



Community campaign to end veteran homelessness



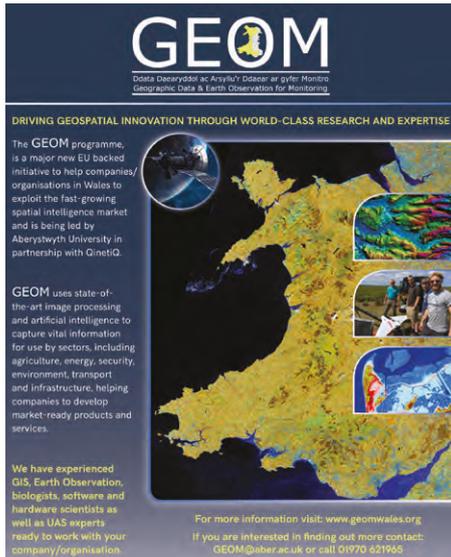
The Community trade union is campaigning to end veteran homelessness. Through the winter it has been encouraging union reps and members to donate warm winter clothing that can be passed on to local charities.

Following the collections in South Wales, Alan Coombs, National Executive Council member for Community, said: "Our union highlighted that there are over 6,000 men and women who served in the armed forces currently living on the street in the UK. We just wanted to do something about it and our members have been fully on board." "Collecting items of clothing, sleeping bags and duvets to keep people warm through the winter nights seemed the least we could do when you think about what these men and women sacrificed for our country."

NEWS

All the latest from our subscribers

Free support for Welsh businesses



GEOM
Ddeta Ddearyddol ac Arlyfio' Ddacear ar gyfer Monitro
Geographic Data & Earth Observation for Monitoring

DRIVING GEOSPATIAL INNOVATION THROUGH WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH AND EXPERTISE

The GEOM programme, is a major new EU backed initiative to help companies/organisations in Wales to exploit the fast-growing spatial intelligence market and is being led by Aberystwyth University in partnership with QinetiQ.

GEOM uses state-of-the-art image processing and artificial intelligence to capture vital information for use by sectors, including agriculture, energy, security, environment, transport and infrastructure, helping companies to develop market-ready products and services.

We have experienced GIS, Earth Observation, biologists, software and hardware scientists as well as UAV experts ready to work with your company/organisation.

For more information visit: www.geomwales.org
if you are interested in finding out more contact: GEOM@aber.ac.uk or call 01970 621965

The Geographical Data and Earth Observation for Monitoring (GEOM), an EU funded initiative led by Aberystwyth University in collaboration with QinetiQ, is helping businesses (including charities and other non-profits) to exploit the fast-growing spatial intelligence market. GEOM uses state-of-the-art satellite, drone and other geographic and earth observation data technologies to support businesses working in a range of sectors to develop market-ready products and services. They can include environment, conservation, tourism, archaeology and heritage, transport, logistics and infrastructure, health, renewable energy organisations. GEOM's experienced scientists provide support through feasibility studies, field work and laboratory experiments. They help make sense of your business data using geospatial data analytics. The support is free. **For enquiries and expressions of interest phone 01970 621 965 or email GEOM@aber.ac.uk**

A right to adequate housing

In May 2021 voters in Wales will for the first time elect Members to the Welsh Parliament. It has taken us the best part of 20 years for Wales to get equivalent powers to the Scottish Parliament – we now have them and why shouldn't we! The Welsh Assembly will change its name to reflect that change.

The Chartered Institute of Housing, along with Tai Pawb and Shelter Cymru, is asking all political parties in Wales to commit to bringing forward legislation in the next Welsh Parliamentary term to enshrine the Right to Adequate Housing – as set out in the United Nation's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – in Welsh law.



Become a Friend of Community Foundation Wales



Community Foundation Wales inspires people to give, helps Welsh communities to thrive and changes lives together. Friends of Community Foundation Wales is an alliance of like-minded people and organisations who want to build stronger communities in Wales.

By becoming a Friend, you will help Community Foundation Wales to become more resilient and boost our grant-making role, enabling us to support more community groups and grassroots projects to create positive change across the country.

Friends of Community Foundation Wales already has ex-Controller of BBC Cymru Wales Menna Richards, Co-Founder & Director at Moneypenny Rachel Clacher, Williams Ross Chartered Accountants and Roperhurst Specialist Plastic Engineering signed up. Why not join them and show your commitment to changing lives in Wales?

You can join online at <https://communityfoundationwales.org.uk> or contact **Katy Hales**, Manager, Donor Advised Giving on **029 2037 9580** or katy@communityfoundationwales.org.uk



Spotlight On

Sue Husband

Director, Business in the Community Cymru

In 140 characters describe Business in the Community

We are the oldest and largest business-led organisation dedicated to responsible business, founded by HRH The Prince of Wales.

What is your role at Business in the Community (BITC)?

I am fortunate to have the interesting and rewarding role of Director of Business in the Community, Cymru. I lead a small but perfectly formed team of ten in Cardiff and I represent BITC in Wales. I am tasked with growing our network of responsible businesses here in Wales and encouraging them to work collaboratively for the greatest impact.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

The opportunity to work with fantastic people who work in brilliant businesses across Wales, many of whom are our members. I am acutely aware of the privileged position I am in and the responsibility of inspiring, engaging and challenging these businesses to help tackle some of society's biggest challenges. And of course, no two days are the same! I have only been in role for six weeks but already I have visited many schools to see the brilliant work of our members supporting their local communities. I have had the opportunity to travel more across south and north Wales, and more recently met HRH, The Prince of Wales, our patron, when he visited flood-hit Pontypridd.

What's been your biggest leadership challenge?

The urgency and imperative to continually grow the responsible business movement. We need more businesses to think and act in a responsible manner so we can create the greatest impact. There are three ways in which we are working with businesses to do this, by helping them to:

- develop a skilled and inclusive workforce for today and tomorrow;
- build thriving communities where people want to live and work;
- innovate to sustain and repair our planet.

What's your hope for the next five years?

That Wales, as a nation, clearly emerges as a strong leader in responsible business, showing other nations how we can and must act together for a brighter future for all.

If you could invite anyone, dead or alive, to a dinner party who would you invite?

Alain de Botton, a modern-day philosopher and author. He's written on love, travel, architecture and literature. He also started a school in London called The School of Life, dedicated to a new vision of education. I love the way he writes about life, work and all the things that affect us all.

Why does BITC support the Bevan Foundation?

The Bevan Foundation works hard to find long-term solutions to Wales' most pressing challenges. Like Business in the Community, it relies on generous people and organisations, giving time, energy, and resources to help society more widely to deliver positive impact.

About Business in the Community Cymru

Business in the Community (BITC) Cymru leads a growing movement and work with more than 200 companies in Wales, from small and medium-sized businesses to leading brands.

We offer tailored advice and support to help companies to improve their responsible business practices, to align them with local social issues where they can really make a difference, along with the Welsh policy agenda.

We also offer a variety of ways for companies to come together to collaborate on key social issues as well as learn from each other.

Contact:
BITC Cymru,
2nd Floor,
33 – 35 Cathedral Road,
Cardiff CF11 9HB
Email: wales@bitc.org.uk

Vaughan Gething AM / AC

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If you need to contact me or would like a surgery appointment please get in touch...

Os oes angen i chi gysylltu â mi neu os hoffech gael apwyntiad llawdriniaeth, cysylltwch â ni...



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