

Spring 2023

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exchange

SEFYDLIAD
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FOUNDATION

Digital health care special
Nation of sanctuary
Educational attainment
Primary care





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About the Bevan Foundation

The Bevan Foundation is Wales' most influential think tank. We create insights, ideas and impact that help to end poverty and inequality.

We are independent, informed, inspiring and inclusive in everything we do.

We are funded by charitable trusts and foundations, donations by individuals, and by income from trading.

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CROESO FROM THE BEVAN FOUNDATION DIRECTOR



Welcome to the Spring 2023 issue of the Bevan Foundation magazine.

I am delighted to bring you a bumper issue of Exchange this spring. As well as news and views from the Bevan Foundation team, we've joined forces with Digital Health and Care Wales to include a special supplement on how digital technology is driving improvements in health. To complement the supplement, we also have some superb guest articles on different aspects of health and social care.

With the cost-of-living crisis showing few signs of easing, it is especially timely to be able to demonstrate the difference that the Bevan Foundation, together with you and our other funders, is making. We're informing public and political debate, with input into Senedd and UK Parliament business as this issue shows. But we haven't stopped there – we're making a real, measurable difference to people's lives. To give just two examples: we've won £10 a week extra for 16,000 16–18-year-old learners because we highlighted how freezing Education Maintenance Allowance was damaging students' prospects. We've secured more frequent emergency payments from the Discretionary Assistance



Fund for people in severe financial crisis, uplifted by inflation as we had urged. And our calls for a tourist tax or visitor levy are finally moving forward, seven years after we first proposed it.

But there is so much more to do. Two articles set out how changes to immigration law are eroding human rights. They are a salutary reminder that while 'illegal immigrants' are the current target, anyone could be next. Another article reminds us that the cost-of-living crisis is damaging people's physical and mental health, while a feature on primary care shows that – almost unbelievably – inequalities are embedded into NHS

provision. Our centre page infographic shows the big gaps in attainment between poor children and their better off classmates.

Last but not least we bring you news that the chair of our board of trustees, Vivienne Sugar, has stepped down after eight years at the helm. The Bevan Foundation has achieved its successes to date thanks to her leadership and she will be sorely missed.

As always, we hope that there is much to inform and inspire in this issue of Exchange and also in the special supplement. We thank Digital Health and Care Wales for working with us.

BEVAN NEWS

CHANGING CHAIRS

After eight years at the helm, Vivienne Sugar, chair of the board of trustees, has stepped aside. Viv brought a wealth of experience and expertise to the Foundation, overseeing a trebling of our income and guiding us through Covid-19 and beyond. She will be sorely missed. We are delighted that Tamsin Stirling will be taking over as interim chair pending recruitment of a new chairperson. Tamsin was a housing consultant and is also a trustee of Crisis, the homelessness charity. You can find out more about Tamsin in the 'meet the team' feature.



Vivienne Sugar.

NEWS IN BRIEF

> Cost of living

Victoria Winckler, Director of the Bevan Foundation, contributed to the Welsh Government's Cabinet Sub-Committee on the cost of living in March.

> Free school meals

Steffan Evans, Head of Policy at the Bevan Foundation, presented our work on free school meals to a National Education Union conference in London in March.

> Immigration advice

Isata Kanneh, access to justice project lead, outlined our work on immigration advice to a Welsh Refugee Council all-staff meeting.

> Child poverty

Steffan Evans delivered a keynote address at Powys County Council's Child Poverty Taskforce conference in February.

> Housing

Rob King, policy and research officer, presented our recent work on housing to Community Housing Cymru.

> Displaced people

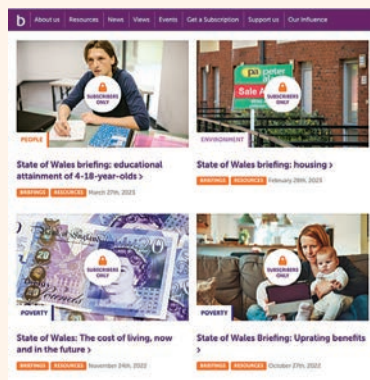
Elinor Matthey, policy and research officer, participated in a recent Displaced People in Action forum.

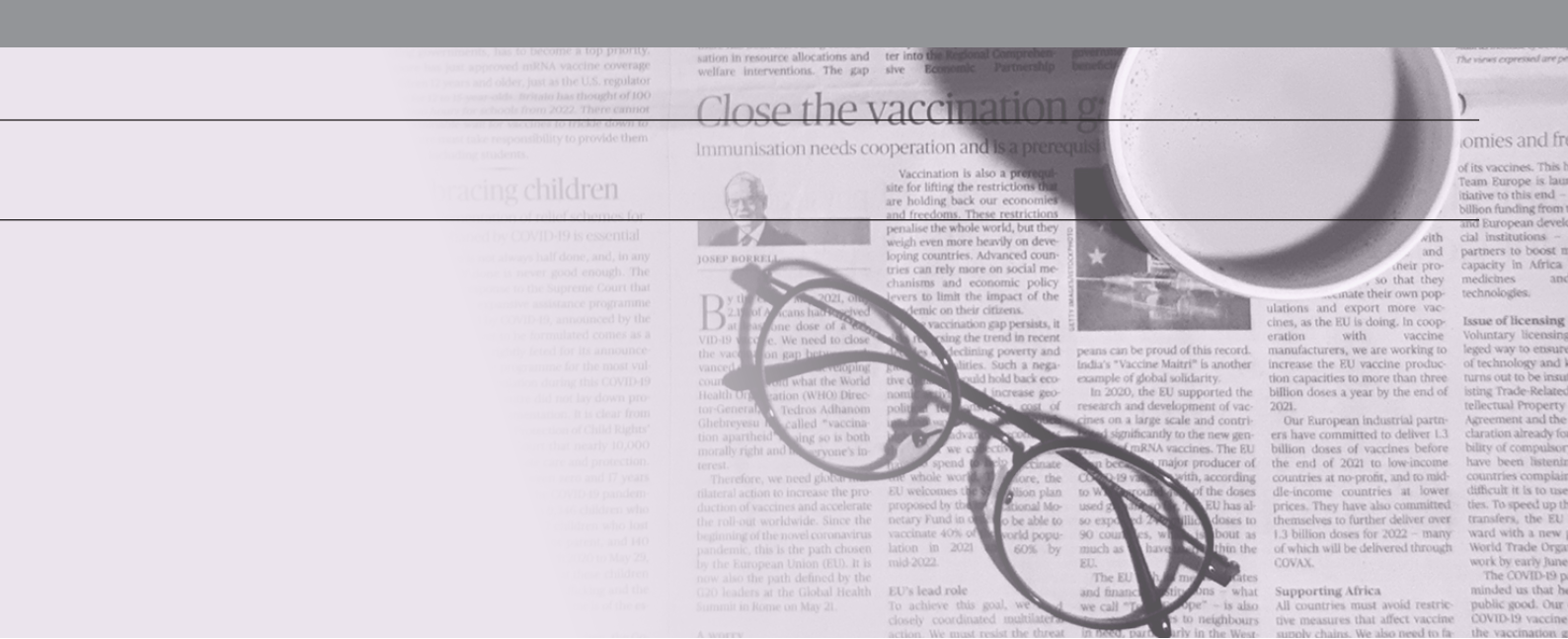
NEW STATE OF WALES BRIEFINGS

Our State of Wales briefings are a really popular resource. The latest updates are on our website and cover:

- Housing
- Deep poverty and destitution
- Education attainment of 4-18 year olds.

Briefings are emailed direct to subscribers' inboxes and are available on our website for all.





POLICY AND POLITICS

Shaping the Welsh Government's budget

Each year the Senedd's Finance Committee scrutinises the Welsh Government's draft budget before it is debated in plenary. The Bevan Foundation submitted written evidence to the committee and later gave oral evidence to both the Finance Committee and the Senedd Equality and Social Justice Committee.

In our evidence, we recognised that the Welsh Government's budget has been produced at a time of significant social, economic and environmental challenges, and that its block grant has required some tough choices.



Welcome for Senedd committee findings on homelessness

The Bevan Foundation has welcomed the Senedd's Local Government and Housing Committee's recent recommendations on homelessness. We were especially pleased to see the Committee echo our calls for the Welsh Government to influence the UK Government to increase Local Housing Allowance.

The Bevan Foundation's work has highlighted that freezing LHA rates has limited the number of properties available to rent for people on low incomes. In addition, we highlighted how the lack of data on the rental market is limiting understanding of the current position and affecting the development of practice and policy solutions.

We are pleased that the Committee has made several recommendations to remedy this, including making greater use of data from Rent Smart Wales – a key Bevan Foundation proposal.

The Bevan Foundation will be monitoring progress to increase the availability and affordability of housing over the coming months.

Welsh Government Expert Group

As the cost of living crisis deepens, the Bevan Foundation is pleased to join the Welsh Government's Expert Group, whose work will inform a Welsh Government's Cabinet committee. The group, chaired by Prof Rachel Ashworth of Cardiff University, also includes experts from academia, charities, local government and UK think tanks.

The group made its first presentation to the Cabinet Committee on 6th March 2023, with the Foundation's Director, Victoria Winckler, outlining recent Bevan Foundation findings and forecasts for the next twelve months. Other speakers included Cardiff University, National Energy Action Cymru and Citizen's Advice Cymru.

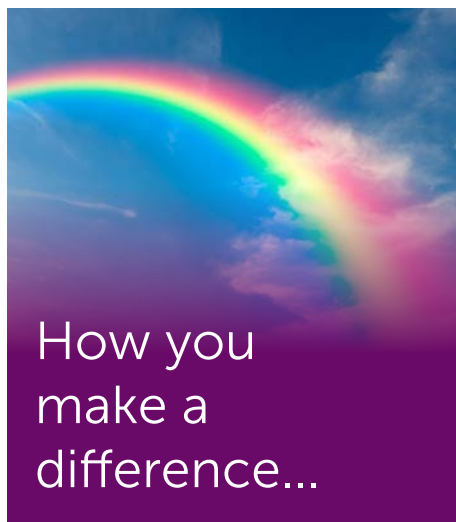
The group is expected to continue its work for several months.



INSIDER INFORMATION

Award from The National Lottery Community Fund!

The Bevan Foundation is delighted to have been awarded a small grant from The National Lottery Community Fund. The grant will support a new project to develop practical ways of supporting people with No Recourse to Public Funds during the cost of living crisis. About 65,000 people in Wales have 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) as a condition of their visa entitling them to live in Wales. It means that they are unable to access support such as social security benefits, and so are at risk of experiencing destitution. The project will explore the experiences of people with NPRF and public bodies' practices. It will then make recommendations about how the help that can be legally given can be clarified and strengthened. It is due to report in autumn 2023.



New rates for 2023/24

Like everyone the Bevan Foundation has been hit by rising prices and we have had to make some difficult decisions for the new financial year.

The minimum we ask our individual supporters to give is increasing to £4.25 a month or £50 a year. The increase is the first in three years and is unfortunately unavoidable given inflation. You do not need to do anything now - we will contact you about the change when your next payment is due.

The rate for organisations which benefit from our subscription service is also increasing, to £330 for charities and £440 for standard organisations (plus VAT). The rate remains highly competitive and offers some great benefits. We'll contact you when your subscription is due for renewal.

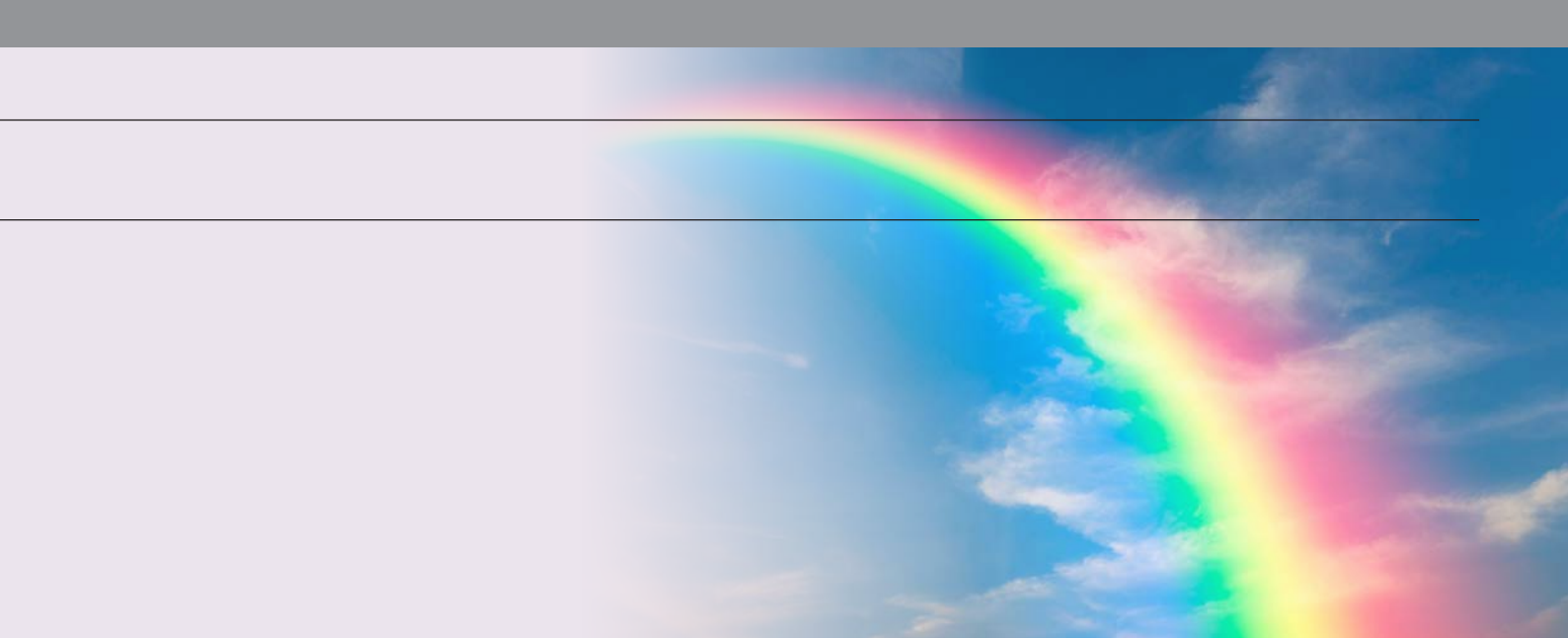


Bevan Beacon

We're delighted to introduce a new-look e-newsletter especially for our supporters and subscribers. The Beacon will bring you a monthly round-up of the latest articles published on the Bevan Foundation website. Written by subscribers and the Bevan Foundation team, the articles are a timely and topical read, all just a click away.

You'll continue to get regular updates on our other activity too, including new reports and briefings, online and in person events, and – most important of all – find out how we are making a real difference. Look out for the Beacon in your inbox soon!

Subscribers interested in contributing should email Alice Peters on alice.peters@bevanfoundation.org



WILL YOU SOW THE SEEDS OF CHANGE?

The Bevan Foundation has launched a month-long campaign to 'sow the seeds of change' during which we are asking people to support our work with a donation of £4.25 a month. Find out more about the campaign and what you can do as part of it. You might even grow a Welsh poppy too!

Why are supporters important to the Bevan Foundation?

Supporters are the bedrock of the Bevan Foundation. You give us vital financial support, without which we would not exist, and you have a voice in how we run and what we do.

Like all charities, we want more people to support the Bevan Foundation.

There is no limit on numbers and we are definitely not full! It's even more important to have loyal supporters when the external environment for all charities is challenging, when fewer people are giving to good causes and there is much more competition for other funding.



Why are asking me to 'sow the seeds'?

Supporters help to spread the word about our work, sharing our insights and ideas with friends, family and colleagues. And because you're trusted, people will listen to you.

Sharing ideas helps to build backing for the changes needed for a fairer economy and society. That's why we're calling it sowing the seeds of change.

What can I do?

If you're able to help, all you need to do is ask someone you know if they will support our work with a donation of just £4.25 a month. It's that simple!

To help you, please pass on the postcard enclosed in this issue to someone who might be interested.

What's with the poppy?

As a thank you for introducing a new supporter, we'll send you and the new supporter some free seeds of either the Welsh poppy or the Welsh onion. Both are native plants that are well adapted to our damp climate, so you can sprinkle them in your garden, in some pots or on waste ground. As perennials, they're also a sign of the lasting changes that the Bevan Foundation can bring!

The seeds were kindly donated so it's a green, cost-free, and fun way of saying how much we appreciate your support.

The Fundraising Regulator's website is at www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk

IS WALES MORE THAN A NATION OF SANCTUARY?



Wales is the world's first Nation of Sanctuary. The Bevan Foundation's Access to Justice Project Lead, Isata Kanneh, highlights why Welsh Government policy needs to go further, to reflect the needs and rights of all migrants.

Immigration law in Wales in context

Immigration law is not devolved, and the Senedd and Welsh Government have no power to change it. They can, however, use devolved powers to mitigate some of its social effects: by challenging UK government policy, taking a proactive approach to Welsh policy, and making special provision to meet identified needs.

Where the Welsh Government has used its powers in this way it has largely focused on recognised refugees and people seeking sanctuary, guided by the Nation of Sanctuary Plan. Refugees have a distinct legal status under international law, and there are important reasons why they are in particular need of protection. But there are other migrant groups in Wales whose position is extremely insecure and who face significant and complex challenges related to their immigration status. There are no categories of 'good migrants' or 'bad migrants', only similar people arriving in the UK by different routes.

People with no recourse to public funds (NRPf)

The No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPf) restriction is a pervasive and confusing policy that has repeatedly been challenged in court and declared unlawful. Most visas have an NRPf restriction, which bars access to most state benefits. The rules are complex, leading to people being denied funds and services that they are entitled to receive. Most people with NRPf work. They are excluded from in-work benefits, leaving those on low incomes worse off than



colleagues working the same hours. Moments of crisis – a relationship breakdown, loss of a job, domestic violence, a family death – can throw them suddenly into extreme poverty with no welfare safety net. Homelessness, destitution, an inability to buy basics like food, school uniforms and shoes, are common amongst families seeking emergency support. Insecure accommodation and limited options place people at risk of exploitation and abuse. The NRPf restriction has a greatly disproportionate effect on women, disabled people, and children. Most children whose parents have no recourse to public funds are of Black and minoritised ethnicities. Children of parents with NRPf are excluded from Child Benefit, even though a high proportion of them are not subject to the

restriction themselves. Because of this, NRPf has severe impacts on British and settled children as well as those subject to immigration control.

Further, it is doubtful whether the policy cuts costs. Emergency support is expensive and time-intensive to administer, and charities and local authorities, rather than central government, pick up the bill. Keeping people in poverty ultimately costs the state in increased health provision and the long-term impacts of social and financial exclusion.

People with insecure status

In 2012, the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, announced the UK government's intention to create "a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants". Since, restrictions have been placed on the right

to rent, work, and receive public funds, for people without regular immigration status. Private landlords, employers, police officers, local authorities, and HS staff, have all become de facto immigration officers. They are required, sometimes under threat of prosecution, to check immigration status before allowing people to do basic, essential things: to rent properties, take up jobs, receive health care.

The term “illegal immigrant” is inaccurate and misleading. Most people without secure status arrive through formal routes with legitimate visas. Most have been in the UK for over five years. They may have arrived as spouses, workers or refugees. They may be children, born or having lived most of their lives in Wales and the UK. People are not “illegal”: they acquire and lose Leave to Remain, sometimes managing to regularise their status only to become undocumented again.

The cost of an application for Leave to Remain in the UK is currently £1,048 per person for a family application, plus the health surcharge (£624 per year for adults, £470 for children). Temporary leave must be periodically renewed, as often as every 30 months for a family visa. With fees multiplied several times over for families with children, it is no wonder that some cannot keep up with the cost.

The immigration system in the UK is complex and difficult to navigate. Immigration advice provision is inadequate and Wales has been described as an “advice desert”. The few available routes to regularisation can take as much as twenty years. They are long and complex and difficult to achieve without high level, consistent, legal advice.

The ten-year route is like a dystopian game of snakes and ladders: working hard, scraping together the costs of visa application after visa application, only to fall back down to square one.

A recent Welsh Government-commissioned report by Dr. Jo Wilding estimates that there are approximately 5,400 people in Wales with a legal basis to remain but who are nonetheless undocumented. They are excluded from accessing their legal rights and prevented from taking up regular employment, renting homes, or accessing healthcare.

The Ten-Year Route to Settlement

The ten-year route to settlement is one of the pathways to Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK. It exists under an exception to the immigration rules, where removing someone from the UK would breach their right to private and family life. People applying under this route therefore have a legal, human rights basis to remain. (There are other categories of migrants who might apply under the ten-year route, but we focus here on private and family life applications.) The phrase ‘ten-year route’ refers to the number of years that the person must be in the UK before they can apply for

Indefinite Leave to Remain. They must demonstrate an unbroken chain of leave and residence that lasts for the whole ten years. There are many things that break the chain and cause the count to start again. Some are:

- A late application to renew a temporary visa at any time in the ten qualifying years.
- Any period of undocumented status during the ten qualifying years.
- A long period spent outside of the UK within the ten qualifying years.

The many reasons that a chain of residence and leave can be broken mean that the ten-year route can take much longer. We have seen how easy it is to fail to renew a visa and slip into undocumented status. Applying on the ten-year route can feel like a dystopian game of snakes and ladders: working hard, getting through years of No Recourse to Public Funds, scraping together the costs of visa application after visa application, only to fall back down to square one.

“A Wales that we all want to live in”

Most people who come to Wales through the immigration system support themselves and their families without assistance. Some, largely due to restrictions imposed by immigration law, have complex needs. They need a broad, proactive and inclusive policy approach that recognises their rights and offers essential protection and support. People with complex immigration needs belong in Wales. They are part of our communities and families. We urge the Welsh Government to broaden its policy approach to reflect the needs of all migrants. This would align with the goals of the Nation of Sanctuary and the Well-Being of Future Generations Act and better reflect the diverse needs of people living in Wales.

SUCCESS FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS AS EMA INCREASES

Learners from low-income families are set to gain an extra £10 a week Education Maintenance Allowance, thanks to your support.

Learners from low-income families who are aged 16 to 18 years old are set to gain an extra £10 a week to help with the cost of living. The boost comes because the Welsh Government announced in April that the weekly amount of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) will increase from £30 to £40 a week.

The increase comes after the Bevan Foundation highlighted that the value of EMA has been frozen since the mid-2000s, leaving more than 17,000 sixth form and college students struggling to afford food, travel costs and college essentials. We heard of young people either not going to college or leaving their studies in order to get a job to support themselves and their families. This was a worry for the young people themselves, who often went without, and for the Welsh labour market, which needs more skilled workers.

We initially called for the value of EMA to be restored to its original level, although we recognised that the Welsh Government's tough financial settlement for 2023-24 made it difficult to find the necessary funds. We suggested that even an inflation-linked uplift of just £3 a week would help the least well-off students to afford a bus fare or lunch. It is great that the Welsh Government has gone further with a £10 increase.

Our call was taken up by Senedd Members across the political spectrum,



with questions and debates about EMA for the first time in years. Uplifting the value of EMA was also a key recommendation of three Senedd Committee reports on the draft Welsh budget.

The issue came to a head in the Senedd in February, with a debate calling for a review of EMA. Several of the politicians contributing to the debates had themselves benefited from EMA in the past, and so had direct experience of the difference it made. While the Minister for Education, Jeremy Miles MS, pointed out that eligibility for EMA had been extended to more students, including

refugees from Ukraine, he promised to look again at the value and thresholds for all eligible learners.

The Minister's decision will make a real difference to Wales' least well-off learners. They'll be able to afford lunch, a bus to college and materials such as books, overalls and data for their laptops. The challenge now is to ensure that the value of EMA is not allowed to fall behind again, by annual uprating in line with inflation.

The Bevan Foundation's work on EMA was only possible because of the generosity of our supporters and subscribers. Your kind donations and subscriptions helped us to understand the difficulties faced by learners from low-income families, raise awareness of the problem and persuade decision-makers to take action.

We heard of young people either not going to college or leaving their studies in order to get a job to support themselves and their families.

VICTORY FOR A VISITOR LEVY

The Bevan Foundation's recommendation that the Welsh Government should introduce a visitor levy is going ahead. This FAQ tells you what you need to know.

Can the Welsh Government introduce new taxes?

Yes! The Government of Wales Act 2014 devolved Stamp Duty, Landfill Tax and one aspect of income tax to the Welsh Government. It also allowed the Welsh Government to introduce other new taxes, subject to certain conditions including approval by the UK Treasury.

What has happened since then?

There was very little recognition of this important new power at first. The Bevan Foundation played a major role in raising the profile and potential of new taxes. Our year-long project not only got people talking it also recommended a total of eight new, devolved taxes. Our aim was that the taxes would achieve good social, economic and environmental outcomes rather than raise revenue. The Bevan Foundation's recommendations included a levy on polystyrene packaging, a tax on sugary drinks and a tourist tax.

The Welsh Government was interested in our ideas but faced big hurdles in taking any new tax forward especially in a wider climate that was generally anti-tax. They undertook research, held a public consultation and looked at the mechanics of introducing and collecting different types of taxes. They found that tourism taxes are common around the world and were also popular with the public.

In 2021, a tourism tax was included in



the Cooperation Agreement between Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru, with the Welsh Government announcing in March 2023 that it is soon to introduce legislation for the tax.

Why a tourist tax?

The Bevan Foundation recognised the importance of tourism to the Welsh economy. The industry supports thousands of jobs and businesses across Wales, mainly through tourist spending on things like accommodation, food and visitor attractions. However, tourism can also bring significant costs to some areas, needing extra services such as car parking and toilets for example, and creating litter, pollution and congestion. Spending on these services takes money away from other local services such as social care. We felt that a tax on visitors helps to get a fairer balance between the costs and benefits of tourism.

How would it work?

The Welsh Government proposes that there would be a modest levy paid by visitors staying overnight in commercial accommodation. So, it would be paid if someone stays in a hotel or rents a caravan, but would not be payable if someone stays with family or in their own accommodation.

The Welsh Government is proposing to empower local authorities to charge a visitor levy rather than doing so itself. We anticipate that local authorities will be able to choose whether or not to impose a levy, and it is hoped that they will be able to retain the revenue raised in full.

Will it put people off visiting Wales?

The tourism industry is very concerned that the levy will deter visitors. This is unlikely as research shows that a modest charge does not deter people from visiting. If a tourist is on such a tight budget that they cannot pay £1 a night then their spending was unlikely to add much to the local economy anyway.

What next?

The Bevan Foundation will watch the implementation of a visitor levy with keen interest. It matters not only to get a fair balance between visitors and residents, it's also part of building the infrastructure of a modern nation. New taxes are not the only way to drive social, economic and environmental change, but they are a vital part of the tool kit.

A LIFELINE IN HARD TIMES

The Discretionary Assistance Fund provides vital help to people in severe hardship. In the coming financial year, it will include many of the recommendations made by the Bevan Foundation. Victoria Winckler, Director of the Bevan Foundation, explains more.

As the cost of living crisis has deepened, the Discretionary Assistance Fund or DAF has provided a lifeline to thousands of people across Wales. In the last year alone, it has provided more than £23m in emergency cash payments to people in severe financial crisis. The payments – typically around £60 – have meant that people can turn on a light and put food on the table. The fund has also provided more than £12m in individual assistance payments, which provide household essentials such as a bed or fridge to enable people to live independently for example if they have been homeless.

The DAF is a vital tool in the fight against poverty. It was created in 2013 following the devolution by the UK Government of Community Care grants and Crisis Loans to the Welsh Government. Yet despite its importance over the next six years, the DAF really only came to the fore during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As the pandemic hit, the Bevan Foundation anticipated the potentially huge importance of DAF as people lost their jobs or were furloughed on 80 per cent pay. We called for the DAF's rules to be relaxed to meet the likely increase in demand, and we were delighted that the Welsh Government responded by increasing its expenditure and allowing people to claim more emergency payments in some circumstances.



As the pandemic morphed into a cost-of-living crisis, we called for the Covid-19 flexibilities to be retained and were pleased that the Welsh Government reacted by continuing to offer up extra payments to some people.

Over the last three years the DAF has become a central plank in Wales' welfare system. The number of payments to people seeking emergency help has soared from around 52,000 a

year in 2018-19 to 215,000 in 2020-21. Rising costs have further increased demand: in the first ten months of 2022-23 alone more than 258,000 payments were made.

Given the scheme has become more important than ever, last year the Bevan Foundation looked at how the DAF could be strengthened. People working in front-line services told us that the average emergency payment of £60 was



The Bevan Foundation is pleased that the Welsh Government has taken on board many of the Bevan Foundation's calls for action.

quickly spent on food, gas and electricity, and that the 28-day gap between payments for most people was too long. We also found some confusion about how the variations in DAF rules were applied in practice.

We therefore urged the Welsh Government to make changes to DAF to ensure it meets the emergency needs of households now and in the future. We proposed four key changes: first, we called for an increase in the DAF budget in 2023-24 to enable it to meet continued high levels of demand; second, we asked that the value of emergency payments keep pace with the huge rises in prices since the DAF was introduced ten years ago; third, we argued that the frequency of payments should be every seven days for all groups of people rather than every 28 days, with up to five payments a year; and last, we urged that the rules around eligibility should be clearer and simpler.

The Bevan Foundation is pleased that the Welsh Government has taken on



board many of our calls for action. Its 2023-24 budget allocates an additional £18.8m to the Discretionary Assistance Fund compared with before the pandemic, so that a total of £38.5m will be available for emergency and individual assistance payments. The scheme will be simpler, with the same arrangements for all applicants including people in work or who have No Recourse to Public Funds.

The Bevan Foundation has also welcomed the Welsh Government's decision to increase the average payment by eleven per cent in line with inflation, and to allow a household to receive an emergency payment every seven days. While we are disappointed that the number of payments that can be received in a rolling twelve month is capped at three, we recognise that the budget is limited.

With no sign of standards of living

improving, the Discretionary Assistance Fund is set to continue to provide a lifeline for people in financial crisis. We are pleased that the Welsh Government has listened to our findings and taken many of our recommendations on board.

Welcome though it is, it is appalling that thousands of Welsh households are in such hardship that they have to ask for emergency cash. Some of the crisis is caused by features of the UK social security system, such as the five-week wait for a first payment, deductions of up to 25 per cent of benefits to repay 'debts', and inadequate sick pay.

The changes to the Discretionary Assistance Fund will go some way to alleviating the very worst of the hardship that families face. But the long-term solution has to be decent wages and good terms and conditions for those in work, and a social security system that provides enough for essentials.

CALLS FOR HOUSING REFORM REACH WESTMINSTER

Local Housing Allowance rates continue to fall far behind advertised rents on the private rental market in Wales. The Bevan Foundation has joined other UK organisations in calling for the uplifting of LHA rates to provide tenants in the private sector with more security in their housing.

Wales is facing a housing crisis. As we have revealed in Exchange over recent years there is an acute shortage of properties that people can purchase or rent at affordable prices. The social security system is failing to keep pace with the rapid changes in the housing market, especially in the private rental sector. This situation is pushing low-income households into poverty and desperate situations, affecting people's health and increasing demand on homelessness support services.

Recent months have seen the Bevan Foundation step up our efforts to bring about the necessary reforms to protect tenants, leading us to join forces with organisations from Wales and across the UK more broadly.

The Local Housing Allowance

Local Housing Allowance (or LHA) is not a benefit itself. Rather, it is used to calculate the amount of help with housing costs that household is eligible for, whether that is the housing element of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit. LHA rates are set according to the area a property is in, using a different geography to local authority boundaries.

In theory, LHA rates are supposed to cover the cheapest 30th percent of properties within a given market area.

LHA also takes into consideration the number of bedrooms a household is entitled to. LHA rates have been frozen since 2020, so current rates haven't kept up with the dramatic changes in the private rental market since then. Frozen rates make worse the other issues such as under-35-year-olds only being entitled to enough support to rent a room in shared accommodation.

What we did

Ahead of the spring Budget there has been a concerted effort from organisations working on housing and homelessness to persuade the Chancellor to unfreeze LHA. To support these efforts the Bevan Foundation analysed afresh the state of the rental market in Wales. The extent of the challenges faced by low-income renters are significant, as was revealed in our recent report; *Wales' Housing Crisis: Local Housing Allowance and the private rental market in Wales, Winter 2023*.

We found that of 2,368 properties on the market between February 3rd and February 17th in Wales, only 32 were advertised at rents that were fully covered by LHA rates. This means that only one in 100 properties advertised to let in this period had rents that were covered by LHA.

Of the 22 local authorities in Wales, we

only found properties available for rent at or below LHA rates in six (Cardiff, Ceredigion, Conwy, Gwynedd, Powys and Rhondda Cynon Taf). Cardiff had the largest number of below-LHA properties, at 14. This is clearly an issue that is affecting communities across Wales.

The challenges facing low-income tenants are worsened by the conditions that many landlords require them to satisfy before considering offering a tenancy. Requirements include asking for deposits equivalent to more than one month's rent, minimum income checks and 'professional only' requirements. When these additional requirements are considered, the number of properties available to rent at LHA rates drops even further. Of the 32 that are covered by LHA, only nine did not have any additional requirements that would likely present a challenge to a low-income tenant. In other words, properties that are easily accessible to low-income households and are covered by LHA in full made up only 0.34 per cent of properties advertised on the market in Wales in February 2023. This also halved the number of local authorities where any properties were available to just three – in Cardiff, Ceredigion and Rhondda Cynon Taf.



As we have revealed in Exchange over recent years there is an acute shortage of properties that people can purchase or rent at affordable prices.

Making the case for reform

The Bevan Foundation has been building a coalition for reform of the LHA. At a UK level, the Bevan Foundation has been working alongside members of the Cover the Cost coalition, a group of organisations campaigning for reform of LHA. In February, we joined members of the coalition at a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for ending homelessness in Westminster. There were productive conversations held with MPs, their staff and other organisations and we were able to share both our findings and our concerns about the levels at which LHA have been set. At a Welsh level, the Foundation has worked closely with members of the Homes for All Cymru Coalition to share our insights and to co-ordinate a series of joint letters that were sent to appropriate UK Government and Welsh Government Ministers.

Disappointingly, the UK Government did not commit to uplifting LHA rates or reviewing the private rental market in the



Spring Budget. There are reasons to be optimistic that our ongoing work in this area is having an impact. On the same day that the Chancellor decided against uplifting LHA, Arfon MP Hywel Williams, held a Westminster Hall debate on the subject. The debate was attended by MPs from all over the UK and from various parties including Labour, Plaid Cymru, the SNP and the DUP, with DWP Minister Mimis Davies MP representing the UK Government. Our research was cited extensively throughout the debate, and the interest in the discussion suggests that this is a political issue that will not go away any time soon.

There is increasing awareness that LHA is having a profound impact on Wales' housing market and homelessness in the Senedd. Our research has been cited several times by members of all parties to highlight

the necessity of reform to the housing situation in Wales. There also appears to be a greater awareness of the actions that the Welsh Government and Welsh local authorities can take to mitigate against the worst affects of the UK Government decisions on LHA.

Uplifting LHA rates to truly reflect the private rental market would provide low-income households with much needed security but should not be the only policy introduced to address the housing crisis. Additional calls we have made to address the housing crisis include strengthening the data gathered on the private rental sector and rents in Wales, rapidly increasing the stock of social housing across every local authority in Wales, and a Welsh Housing Guarantee to protect tenants across Wales. We will continue to push for these over the coming weeks and months.

THE ILLEGAL MIGRATION BILL: WHEN LAW-MAKING BREAKS THE LAW



The Illegal Migration Bill is just that – illegal. The Bevan Foundation’s Access to Justice Project Lead Isata Kanneh explains why this bill presents a serious challenge to international law and the UK constitution.

The Illegal Migration Bill is breathtakingly bold in its open challenge to human rights, international law and the UK’s own constitution and rule of law. A stark example of this is the Home Secretary’s own statement about the Human Rights Act on the Bill’s front page:

“I am unable to make a statement that, in my view, the provisions of the Illegal Migration Bill are compatible with the Convention rights, but the Government nevertheless wishes the House to proceed with the Bill.”

For a Bill to open with a statement about its own illegality is, to put it mildly, unusual. It should signal to Parliament that the Bill needs extensive scrutiny, but it is being rushed through Parliament and has already passed its first and second reading in the Commons. Its scope is vast, covering almost every person who requires permission to enter or remain in the UK.

With limited space, we cannot give justice to the full scope of the attack on people, their rights, and established law contained in this Bill. What follows is a whistlestop tour of some key concerns.

If passed into law, the Bill would effectively remove legal protections from anyone arriving via an “illegal” route. This is a Catch-22 for refugees, as legal routes for asylum seekers to enter the UK are extremely limited. They comprise tiny visa schemes for select groups, which do not allow full protection under international human rights law, and a few UNHCR resettlement schemes which are limited and slow. In effect, there are no

safe and legal routes to the UK for most people seeking sanctuary.

The Bill would make certain asylum claims inadmissible, and these would be dismissed without consideration and with no right of appeal. The decision would be permanent, and the claim could never be heard in the UK. These measures clearly contravene the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act, under which every person has the right to seek asylum in another country.

Powers of detention would be widely extended, while the role of the courts would be restricted. These provisions are serious red flags for justice and the rule of law: the Bill would allow for people to be detained indefinitely at the discretion of the Home Secretary and in a place of her choosing. For the first 28 days of detention, bail would be denied and any review of whether the detention is legal would be almost completely banned. The Home Secretary would have a Duty to remove people and their families quickly, mandatory for adults, and discretionary for children.

Existing protections for pregnant women, victims of trafficking and children, would be removed. This includes children with families, unaccompanied children and children born in the UK to parents who are ‘in breach of immigration control’. The Home Secretary would have the power to accommodate children in unregulated accommodation such as hotels, without safeguards for children.

The provisions concerning children almost certainly clash with Welsh law.

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act places a duty on local authorities to determine and meet children’s needs, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is incorporated into Welsh law. The Bill flouts children’s rights, giving the Home Secretary the power to direct local authorities to stop looking after unaccompanied children and transfer them to “accommodation for unaccompanied migrant children”. Initially, this is limited to England, but there is power in the Bill for the Home Secretary to make regulations extending this to devolved nations, and to repeal Welsh law. The law, once enacted, would be retrospective, applying to anyone who entered or arrived in the UK on or after 7th March 2023. Retrospective legislation is an extremely dangerous road to travel, undermining the rule of law by making acts illegal which were legal at the time they were committed.

The Illegal Migration Bill has not emerged from nowhere. The UK government has repeatedly stated its intention to repeal human rights obligations. The Bill of Rights currently going through Parliament would curb the power and independence of the courts and limit their ability to obligate public bodies to protect and facilitate rights. Some provisions in this latest Bill are unworkable in practice, and parts may be modified as it passes through Parliament. However, it is likely that the resulting legislation will severely restrict rights and freedoms. It is a challenge to devolved powers and may even provoke a constitutional crisis and has repercussions for a long time to come.



- Cynhyrchu syniadau ffres
 - Ymgysylltu â rhanddeiliaid
 - Datrys problemau penodol
 - Sylfeini ar gyfer cydgyhyrchu
 - Datblygu menter gymdeithasol
 - Arloesi ac ymgysylltu cymunedol
- Generating fresh ideas
 - Solving specific problems
 - Stakeholder engagement
 - Foundations for co-production
 - Development of social enterprise
 - Community innovation and engagement



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INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION

Although there are many more benefits to education than examinations, good educational attainment is strongly associated with good outcomes in other aspects of life including future employment prospects, personal and household income and good health.

This infographic illustrates some of the biggest inequalities in education – which are those linked to income – drawing on the Bevan Foundation’s March 2023 State of Wales briefing. The briefing also includes inequalities associated with gender, disability and ethnicity.

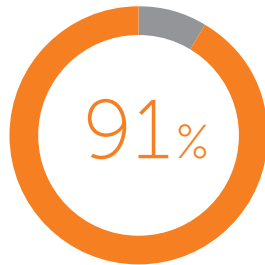
School attendance

In the current academic year more than one in ten sessions in school has been missed.

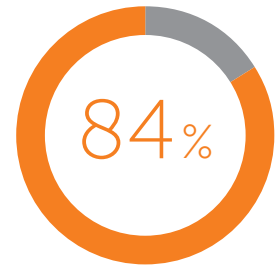


Missed sessions

Attendance by pupils not eligible for free school meals is higher than attendance by pupils who are eligible

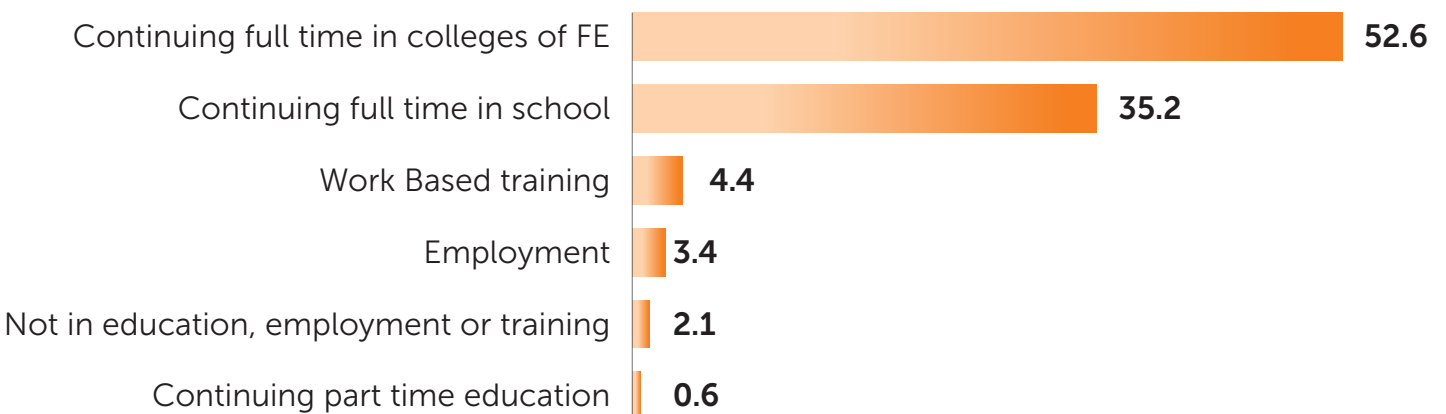


Not eligible for School Meals Attendance



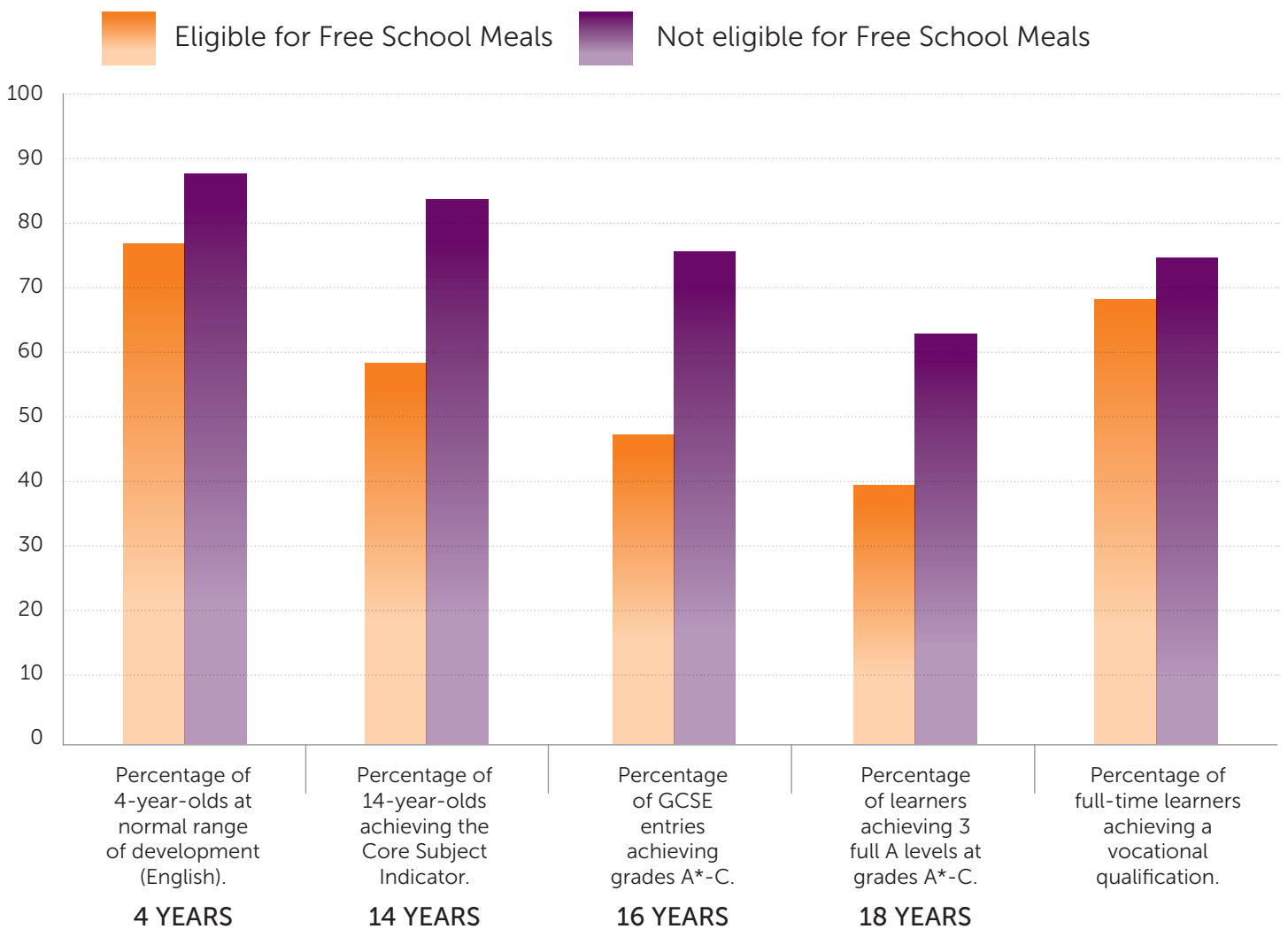
Eligible for School Meals Attendance

Pupil destinations (2022) At the end of year 11, 87.8% of pupils continued in full-time learning:



Free school meals

Low household income, measured by eligibility for free school meals, has a big impact on attainment. The impact widens over a child's education, except in vocational learning.



Note: all data are from Welsh Government. See notes to each data set.

THE IMPACT OF THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS ON PEOPLE'S HEALTH



It has long been known that living in poverty has a negative impact on health. The Bevan Foundation's Head of Policy (Poverty) Steffan Evans explores our latest findings about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

As the grip of poverty has tightened on Wales over the past 18 months, there have been growing concerns about the impact on people's health. The reasons for these concerns are clear. There is a large body of evidence that shows that living in poverty damages people's health, in both the short- and longer-term. New data published by the Bevan Foundation in its Snapshot of poverty in Winter 2023 report lays bare just how significant an impact the crisis is already having and provides new insights on the underlying causes.

The scale of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis is frightening. A staggering 14 per cent of Welsh households either sometimes, often or always didn't have enough for household essentials in January 2023. A further 33 per cent did have enough for essentials but didn't have much money for anything else.

Even set against this context, the effects on people's health are eye-opening. Nearly half (48 per cent) of people in Wales reported that their financial position was having a negative impact on their mental health, whilst 30 per cent reported that the crisis was having a negative impact on their physical health. This a massive burden on people of all ages as well as being an additional pressure on an already-stretched health service. Crucially, these health effects have little to do with lifestyle choices and a great deal to do with financial hardship.

The unequal impact of the crisis

A particularly concerning finding from our work is that the health impacts of the crisis are concentrated among some groups. Unfortunately, it is those on the lowest incomes and those already with health conditions or impairments who are hardest hit.

We found that more than two thirds (68 per cent) of people on Universal Credit reported that their mental health had been negatively affected by their financial position. Other groups where over six in ten people reported that their mental health had been negatively affected by their financial position included carers, disabled people whose condition limits them a lot and private renters. In terms of physical health, we found that disabled people and people who are in receipt of so-called legacy benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance were most likely to say that their physical health had been negatively affected by their financial position.

The cost-of-living crisis is unquestionably deepening already stark health inequalities. While the immediate consequences are yet to be seen, we can expect shortened lives and higher rates of long-term illness soon.

Why is the cost-of-living crisis affecting people's health?

We were keen to find out why people's health was affected by their financial position, so we asked respondents what they thought were contributing factors. Our survey reveals that the three most

important factors affecting people's physical and mental health are being unable to afford hobbies, being unable to afford heating and being unable to afford suitable food.

Perhaps surprisingly, the most common reason given for a negative impact on health was being unable to afford to participate in leisure activities, hobbies and exercise. Nearly half of people who said that their health was negatively affected by their financial position said this, with the impact on physical and mental health being very similar. This is an important finding given the financial pressure on many leisure facilities.

Less surprising but just as shocking, being unable to afford to heat the home adequately was also an important factor. More than four out of ten people whose physical or mental health was worsened by their financial position gave lack of heating as a reason for their deteriorating health. Wales has some of the highest energy costs and lowest energy efficiency in the UK, suggesting that action to cut costs would have clear health benefits.

Being unable to afford food for a healthy diet or to meet dietary requirements was mentioned by a third (34 per cent) of people whose physical health was affected by their financial position and by a fifth (22 per cent) of people who said their mental health had been negatively affected. With one in twenty (5 per cent) in our survey reporting that they had had so little food that they had had to visit a food bank, the



Hobbies and exercise are good for health: a group of women swimming at Burry Port.

toll of food insecurity on health is surely significant.

Other factors affecting people's health included being unable to afford contact with friends and family, which affected around three in ten people whose physical or mental health had deteriorated, and difficulties in relationships with family and friends, which affected 23 per cent of people whose mental health had deteriorated.

What can we conclude?

It is very clear that the cost-of-living crisis is exacting a terrible toll on many households in Wales, especially its

poorest households and disabled people. The number of people going without essentials is large and growing, with significant knock-on implications for their health.

Material deprivations, such as being unable to afford heating and food, are, as might be expected, having a huge impact on people's health and wellbeing. Understandably they have been the focus of much of the emergency response. But the cost-of-living crisis is having an impact on health that goes beyond the material, which suggests the need for a broader perspective.

Our ability to socialise and do things that give us pleasure and enjoyment are not just pleasant – they are crucial for our health and well-being. Going without them because of lack of money has real consequences for the physical and mental health, yet they have been much less acknowledged.

With forecasts that it will be four years before living standards return to pre-Covid levels, there needs to be action not just to provide heating, housing and food but also action to enable people to afford to pursue their hobbies, participate in exercise and have social contact with friends and family.

PRIMARY CARE AND THE PERSISTENT INVERSE CARE LAW



Wales' poorest and sickest areas in Wales have fewer GPs and other health care support staff by design, argue Brian Gibbons, former member of the Welsh Assembly and former GP, and Kathrin Thomas, a public health consultant and former GP.

It is over half a century since Dr Julian Hart, who was based in Glyncoed in the Upper Afan Valley, described the Inverse Care Law. Writing in *The Lancet* in 1971 he stated:

The availability of good medical care tends to vary inversely with the need for it in the population served. This inverse care law operates more completely where medical care is most exposed to market forces, and less so where such exposure is reduced. The market distribution of medical care is a primitive and historically outdated social form, and any return to it would further exaggerate the maldistribution of medical resources.

The message seemed clear. The availability of good medical care was least likely to be available where need was greatest. The more market forces determined health care distribution, the greater this effect would be.

In Wales the 'Internal Market' in health care was abolished in 2009 with a return to health service planning. Seven health boards were created which are responsible for planning and providing all health services for their populations. This change, allied to the repeated commitment of the Welsh Government to tackle health

inequalities, should have provided a strong impetus to tackle the Inverse Care Law here in Wales. But progress has been very slow.

The core of primary health care are general practices, with community pharmacies, dentists, optometrists and other community health services such as health visitors and district nurses. There are about 390 GP Practices in Wales, and almost all provide services according to the same contract agreed nationally with the Welsh Government. Since 2010, these Independent contractors and many other community services have come together in 64 clusters to work together to improve the health of their communities. Clusters receive additional funding, of which some can be used to employ staff, and this is allocated by head of population with no weighting according to need or deprivation.

Deprivation is one of the major drivers of workload in primary care. Men living in the most deprived communities spend an average of 13 more years living in poor health than men living in the least deprived communities, as well as dying an average of 7.6 years earlier. A very similar situation exists for women. This massive burden of poor health

The availability of good medical care was least likely to be available where need was greatest.

has a huge impact on GP workload in more disadvantaged areas.

Primary care is where over 90 per cent of health care is delivered. It is made up of general practice and the full range of community-based health care services, although the largest and core element is General Practice. It is the crucial point of first contact for most patients as well as being the main location of preventive health care and the management of long-term ill-health.

We would expect that the sickest and poorest patients in Wales would have the greatest provision of General Practice. Sadly, this seems not to be the case. General Practices get paid a fixed amount paid per patient per year, regardless of how often they see their GP. Although this is weighted for age and other factors, it is clear that it is not weighted sufficiently to match this actual need and workload.



This is clear from a recent study from the Welsh Government's own statistics unit. The purpose of the study was to analyse the distribution of the workforce between the 390 general practices and 64 clusters in Wales, according to the deprivation of the communities they serve. They started by dividing Welsh residents into five groups according to their score in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. Group 1 are those in the most deprived 20 per cent of areas and Group 5 are living in the least deprived areas. Each group is called a quintile (a fifth) of the whole population. They analysed the practices by the proportion of their registered patients who live in each quintile, and also by the number of their patients in each quintile. They then

compared the workforce in all the GP Practices serving each quintile.

There were 15 per cent fewer GPs and 30 per cent fewer nurses in practices serving the most deprived quintile as measured by patient numbers. When similar calculations were done based on the proportion of practice population from deprived areas the figure was 10 per cent more GPs in the most affluent practices and 28 per cent more nurses. Similar patterns, with some variation, were seen at a cluster level and when other front-line community health staff numbers were analysed.

This important study was published with virtually no publicity and even less media attention. It shows that many of

the fundamentals of the way that General Practice is being delivered remain in line with "The Inverse Care Law". The populations living in the poorest and sickest areas in Wales are more likely to have fewer GPs and other health care support staff available to them.

The Wales Audit Office has pointed out that the levels of investment in wider primary care had suffered a real time decline between 2011 and 2017. Primary care still receives about 18 per cent of NHS spend in Wales with General Practices receiving around 7 per cent. This pattern of spending and its distribution is not going to achieve the transformative change that the Welsh Government is committed to achieving. And if capacity and resources are not better aligned to need, then it is inevitable that health inequalities will persist.

We would expect that the sickest and poorest patients in Wales would have the greatest provision of General Practice.

This is an edited version of an article published on the Bevan Foundation's website in February 2023.

TACKLING EYE CARE WAITING TIMES



Betti Hunter, Communications Officer at RNIB Cymru, explores how clearer communication and improved awareness of sight loss could save NHS costs and people's sight.

Imagine waiting to attend an essential appointment at your local hospital, knowing that each day that passes increases your risk of irreversible sight loss. Unfortunately, this is the case for almost half of the most at-risk patients with chronic eye conditions who are waiting for treatment.

In 2018, a new way of managing waiting lists was introduced. It categorises patients based on their level of clinical need to prioritise those most at risk of irreversible sight loss. But data from December 2022 show that fewer than half of the 137,301 patients categorised as highest risk were being seen within their target date. This means that over 66,000 people with serious conditions like glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration waited longer than is considered medically safe and are at real risk of losing their sight.

We know that waiting times are an NHS-wide issue and that staff are working around the clock to ensure that patients receive the best possible care. This is a particular struggle for hospital eye care services. At RNIB Cymru we believe it is important to consider potential creative solutions that NHS Wales could implement.

One way to reduce pressure on waiting lists could be to look at the areas where time and resources are currently being wasted – such as when patients do not attend their scheduled appointments. In 2018/19, 6.5 per cent of ophthalmology appointments were recorded as 'Did Not Attend' (DNA). Our conversations with health boards suggest that DNA rates are



now much higher. Data on DNA could help NHS Wales to understand why people are missing appointments: reducing DNA rates could free up key resources to tackle appointment backlogs.

RNIB Cymru has been working with people with sight loss to find out about their experiences of receiving information from health services. We discovered that inaccessible information is a key contributing factor behind DNAs. All too often, patients receive information in

formats they cannot read. This inequality is a patient safety issue and puts visually impaired people at serious risk of harm. It can be the difference between attending or missing an appointment.

This is why it's important to empower patients by sending information about their treatment in a format that suits them best. Some people prefer receiving their appointment letters in an email or text, allowing them to use screen reader software to read the information to them. Others might need their letters in a larger font or in braille. Such small improvements to patient communication could go a long way to reducing wasted appointments and maximising the capacity of the health service, delivering the dual benefit of saving NHS costs and people's sight.

In addition, patients should be provided with clear information about their condition and their level of clinical need. Increased public awareness of conditions that lead to permanent sight loss could also help to improve attendance rates, provided it is communicated in an appropriate and accessible way.

RNIB Cymru will continue to focus on raising awareness of sight loss, along with the importance of prevention and early detection, in our upcoming campaigns and work with key stakeholders, including Welsh Government and NHS Wales. We would like to see a return to collecting and publishing DNA data as a matter of urgency. This could be a significant step towards unlocking the unused capacity not just in eye care, but across all clinical areas.

A NATIONAL CARE SERVICE WOULD HELP TACKLE THE NHS CRISIS



Mark Turner, UNISON Cymru Wales lead officer for social care, makes the case for reform of the care sector

Ask healthcare workers for a way out of the NHS crisis and they'll tell you: give demoralised staff a major boost in wages to deal with serious recruitment and retention problems and relieve pressure on the NHS by transforming how we deliver social care.

Without proper investment NHS staff will continue to leave for better paid, less stressful jobs and services to patients won't improve. While UNISON Cymru Wales, as the largest healthcare union, continues to campaign for the higher pay rises healthcare workers need, society must recognise that we will never ease the acute pressure on the NHS without significantly improving care services.

Across Wales, hundreds of hospital beds are occupied by patients medically fit for discharge but there is insufficient capacity to ensure a care package for them, so they remain in hospital. Meanwhile, paramedics are stacked outside emergency departments looking after patients who should be in those hospitals. As a result, ambulance response times are the worst for many years. Paramedics tell me, in the past they could attend to five or six calls a shift but now they may do one or two, sometimes spending an entire twelve-hour shift with one patient waiting for them to be seen by emergency staff. This log jam is causing problems throughout the NHS.

Welsh Government estimates Wales will need another 20,000 care workers by 2030. It's in everyone's interests for social care to play its part in helping the NHS,



but care is itself in crisis.

Last year, a UNISON/Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), report, *A National Care Service for Wales*, concluded that people receiving care, as well as care workers, are being let down by the current system of commissioning, outsourcing, and years of underfunding.

APSE described how the requirement to create a profit or, for the third sector, to compete with for-profit providers, means corners are cut. For instance, home care workers are allocated too many service users and are not paid travel time and this impacts on service user care. In-work poverty is commonplace, staff turnover is high and vacancies are huge.

It found that the £1.2 billion care market in Wales is dominated by private companies. No-one knows how much

money is disappearing from the sector in profit or is wasted in the commissioning process. Whilst there are many small private care providers, a handful of multinationals occupy a powerful position. Ultimately owned by private equity firms, they target around 12 per cent return for investors, extracting money from the sector leaving care providers struggling to make ends meet. Costs are minimised by squeezing wages and undermining the quality of care.

Injecting more public money into care without removing the commissioning model and profit motive wouldn't significantly improve the employment conditions of care workers or quality of care for users. As the economics of social care are entangled with the economics of real estate, it would only drive up the value of care firms, making them more attractive as acquisition targets.

The delivery of care by the private and 'voluntary' sector has failed. Every pound of public money spent on social care must go towards the provision of that care. A National Care Service, with most care provided directly by local authorities, would put dignity and respect for clients and staff at its heart and alleviate pressure on the NHS.

A version of this article was first published on the Bevan Foundation website. The Unison / APSE report is at: <https://cymru-wales.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/sites/9/2022/11/APSE-report-A-National-Care-Service-for-Wales-PRINT-19.10.22.pdf>

JOINING THE DOTS ON WELSH BENEFITS



Steffan Evans, Head of Policy (Poverty), takes a look at the next steps needed to join Welsh grants and allowances into a coherent Welsh Benefits System.

An idea we've revisited several times in the pages of Exchange over the past few years has been our calls on the Welsh Government to establish a Welsh Benefits System. Establishing a Welsh Benefits System would provide an opportunity to reform and streamline devolved, means-tested grants and allowances, creating a coherent package of help for low-income households. This would mean households would need to make just one or two applications to unlock all the help they are eligible for. We've argued that joined-up system of devolved grants and allowances would boost take-up, putting money into the pockets of families that need it the most, whilst also easing some of the administrative pressures on local authorities.

The Bevan Foundation's idea has won widespread support, across political parties and in wider civil society. But although work is underway to encourage good practice, there is some way to go to implement the concept in full. In the last edition of Exchange we revealed that the Bevan Foundation and partner organisations had commissioned independent software and analytics company, Policy in Practice, to assess how to implement a common approach to Welsh benefits focusing on data requirements. Their findings make for essential reading.

The modern social security system is built on data. Before someone can receive any kind of benefit, grant or allowance they need to share details on

matters ranging from their name and address to their income and bank details. Households applying for Welsh benefits may also be required to share specific information, such as the name of the school that their child attends if they wish for their child to receive Free School Meals. At present most of this data is collected through separate application forms, creating extra hurdles for people to jump, sometimes preventing people from getting all the support they are entitled to.

Policy in Practice have looked at how the data could be shared more effectively both across and within organisations, reducing the need for multiple applications and potentially unlocking hundreds of pounds in help. Their analysis identified several data-related factors that will need to be overcome – as well as the huge potential of doing so.

Most Welsh benefits currently require claimants to share unique information as part of the application process. This information is not required to be submitted to access any other Welsh benefits nor UK Government benefits. This means that the opportunity to automatically provide people with multiple benefits if they qualify for one benefit – sometimes known as 'passporting' – is limited in the current system.

Even where there is commonality in the data required, some barriers remain. For example, there may not be agreements in place to allow for the sharing of data that

Creating a Welsh Benefits System could boost take up of devolved grants and allowances by £75m.

could streamline the application process and boost take up. Similarly, historic working practices and risk averse cultures may mean that public bodies are reluctant to use data shared with them by other public bodies.

Things don't have to be this way

There are a number of short-term changes that could significantly improve the way that the current system operates. Many of these changes relate to introducing greater uniformity within the system. For example, a standard approach to identifying eligibility and targeting of take-up campaigns using available data could result in more people getting the support they are entitled to receive. This is especially true around the Council Tax Reduction Scheme where far greater automation could be introduced into the system. Other short-term improvements include establishing a common branding on various application forms so that people are aware that a benefit they are applying for is part of a broader system.



Introducing a common approach to risk in the verification of evidence would also bring gains: at present organisations administering Welsh benefits have different approaches so that whilst some local authorities use data provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, others are reluctant to take the same approach. Guidance from the Welsh Government on the verification of evidence and approach to risk could give confidence to organisations that they are permitted to take a more progressive approach to administering Welsh benefits. In the medium-to long-term, Policy in Practice have identified much more significant changes that could be introduced. Perhaps the most eye catching of these would be the creation of a central database and application portal for Welsh benefits. Doing so would create a platform where people could complete one online form to receive all the Welsh benefits they are entitled to. This would reduce the need

Joining the dots would help to reduce poverty, target resources, and save time and money. What's not to like?

for people to fill in their name, address and other personal information several times over. It could also make it easier for local authorities to verify that people are receiving the correct grants and allowances, making the system much more efficient.

The size of the prize

The benefits of establishing a Welsh Benefits System are considerable. Policy in Practice estimate that creating a Welsh Benefits System could boost take up of devolved grants and allowances by £75m.

That's money going into the pockets of people who are entitled to it but who are currently missing out. Such an extra injection of cash would both ease the pressures faced by Welsh families and boost the Welsh economy through local spending.

It is clear that now is the time for action. We believe that the Welsh Government should immediately put in place the short-term solutions identified by Policy in Practice and establish an implementation group to take forward the medium-term recommendations for change. Joining the dots would help to reduce poverty, target resources, and save time and money. What's not to like?

The Bevan Foundation gratefully acknowledges the contributions of WLGA, Wales TUC, Save the Children, Oxfam Cymru, Home Start Cymru, Barnados Cymru and Citizens Advice Cymru towards the costs of this project.

IN THE SENEDD

The Bevan Foundation aims to inform debate in the Senedd by providing good quality evidence and sharing its policy ideas. It engages with politicians from all parties on an equal basis. This articles sets out some examples of the ways in which its work has contributed to the Senedd’s business in the last few months.

WELSH BUDGET

The Welsh Government’s budget doesn’t attract the same amount of attention as that of the UK Government, but it is no less important for that. We’re proud to have contributed evidence to inform the budget through the Senedd’s Finance Committee, with our views being reflected in the Committee’s report and in the debate in Plenary on 18th January. The most important impact on the budget was on Education Maintenance Allowance and for the Discretionary Assistance Fund.

After being neglected for many years, the Bevan Foundation is pleased that three Senedd Committees – the Finance Committee, Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee and the Children and Young People’s Committee – have all urged the Welsh Government to increase the value of EMA and uplift eligibility thresholds in their budget reports. The focus on EMA continued on 15th February when Senedd members passed a resolution that called for an inflation linked uplift to the allowance and a review of the thresholds. In moving the motion, Luke Fletcher MS referred to ‘fantastic work done by the Bevan Foundation’ while Mike Hedges MS drew on the latest Bevan Foundation

findings in his speech. The Minister for Education will return to the Senedd with proposals for changes to EMA shortly. The Bevan Foundation welcomed plans to increase the Discretionary Assistance Fund budget in oral evidence to the Finance Committee and to the Equality and Social Justice Committee. During scrutiny by the latter, Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice, quoted the Bevan Foundation’s findings that the fund is an ‘absolute lifeline’. While in Plenary on 22nd March Vikki Howells MS mentioned the Bevan Foundation’s welcome for increasing the cash value of DAF payments in line with inflation.

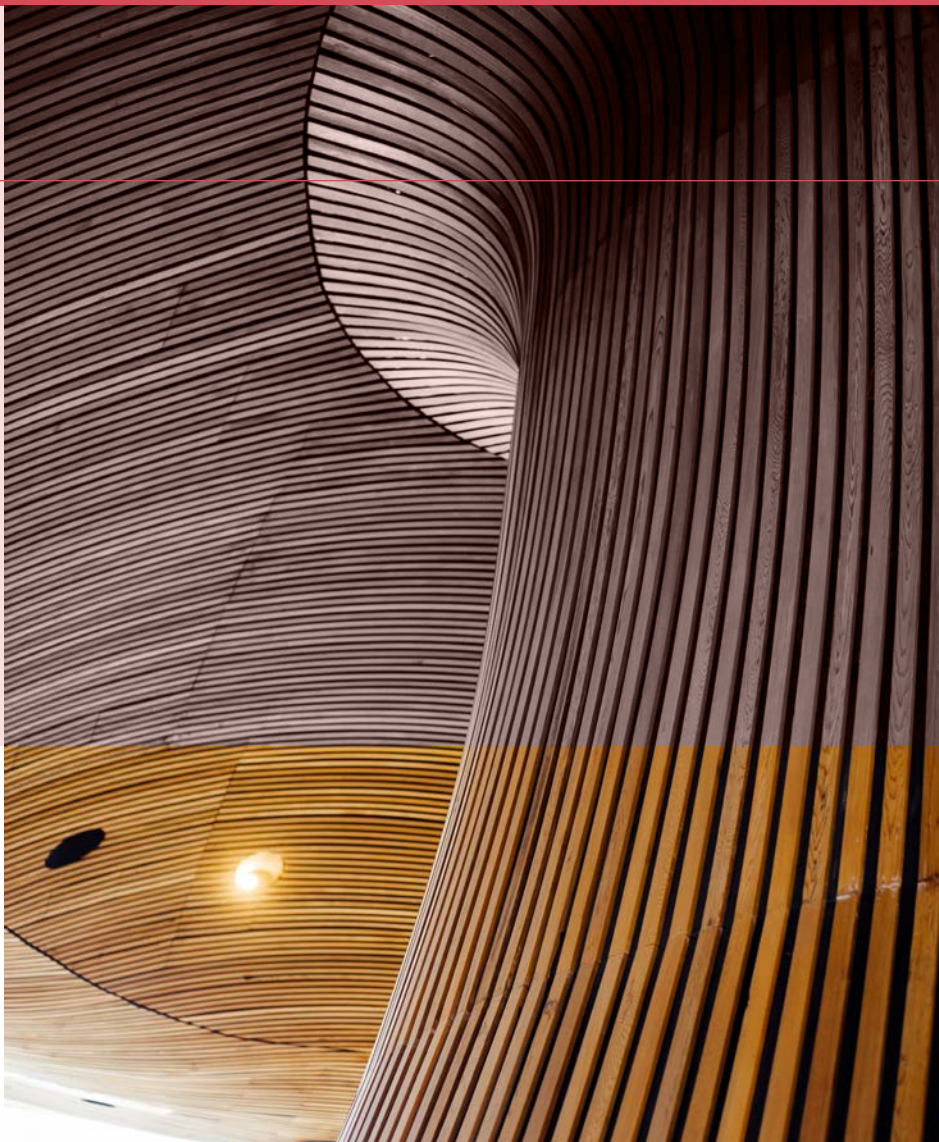


POVERTY & THE COST OF LIVING

Child poverty was the subject of the Plaid Cymru debate on 14th December. The motion asked the Senedd to note the rates of child poverty and the impact of the cost of living crisis and called on the Welsh Government to develop a new child poverty strategy as a matter of urgency. In moving the motion, Sioned Williams MS quoted the Bevan Foundation’s views saying: ‘This is crucial advice. This is what our motion is about’. Later in the debate, we were also quoted by Luke Fletcher MS and Cefin Cambell MS.

Our analysis of poverty continues to be widely quoted in Senedd business. Early in the new year, the Bevan Foundation’s State of Wales briefing on deep poverty featured in Plenary questions from Sioned Williams MS. The Bevan Foundation’s Snapshot of Poverty report was mentioned in the Senedd multiple times, including by Mark Isherwood MS and Peredur Owen Griffiths MS in Plenary on 1st March.

We were also pleased to give oral evidence to the Equality and Social Justice Committee’s inquiry into debt and the cost-of-living crisis.



WELSH BENEFITS SYSTEM

The Bevan Foundation's campaign to streamline and strengthen the plethora of devolved grants and allowances into a single Welsh Benefits system continues to win cross-party support.

In January, Sarah Murphy MS asked what consideration had been given by the Welsh Government to the Foundation's call for mean-tested grants to be increased in line with inflation. In response, the Minister for Social Justice said work is underway on a Welsh Benefits Charter to ensure that local authorities are improving benefit take-up and making the system easier to navigate. Later in the month the Finance Minister, Rebecca Evans MS referred to our work on solutions to low take-up when scrutinised by the Finance Committee.

The Senedd Finance Committee's report on the draft Welsh budget reiterated the call for a more effective system, with the recommendation being debated in Plenary on 7th February. Later in the month, the First Minister Mark Drakeford MS mentioned our work during the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister on 24th March.

HOUSING

The Bevan Foundation's work on housing continued to feature prominently in Senedd debate. We're pleased that the Senedd's Local Government and Housing Committee budget report has echoed our calls for Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to be uplifted, while the Minister for Social Justice, Minister for Climate Change Julie James MS and Minister for Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths MS, have all sought to assure Senedd members that they are making representations to the UK Government on the matter. We're also pleased that the Local Government and Housing Committee's report on homelessness quoted our evidence on moving on from temporary accommodation, rents, Discretionary Housing Payments, the impact of holiday lets and the Welsh Government's Leasing Scheme.

COUNCIL TAX REFORM

Last but not least, the Bevan Foundation gave written and oral evidence to the Local Government and Housing Committee's inquiry into Council Tax. The evidence has since been quoted in debate in plenary, for example by Delyth Jewell MS, who shared our view that Council Tax is regressive and unaffordable for low-income households.



MEET THE TEAM

TAMSIN STIRLING

Bevan Foundation Trustee



1 How did you first get involved with the Bevan Foundation?

Having worked in the policy and research world in Wales for a long time, I was aware of the Bevan Foundation's work and often cited it in research reports that I was writing. I admired the team so when the opportunity to apply to be a trustee came, I jumped at it, and joined the board in 2018.

2 Since you became a trustee, what's surprised you most?

Before becoming a trustee, I knew that the organisation was highly effective, but have been surprised by exactly how much influence it has on policy in Wales. This influence translates into improvements in people's lives – changes that put money in people's pockets. The range of influence is extending as some of our current projects are looking at issues that are not devolved to the Senedd.

3 Being a trustee isn't full time or paid – what's your day job?

I worked in housing for over 30 years – as a housing officer for a housing association, a research assistant at Cardiff University, a policy officer at the Chartered Institute of Housing, a Ministerial advisor and an independent consultant. Recently I have made a big change and am now a student again, currently in the first year of a foundation degree in photography which I am really enjoying. One of the things I am photographing at the moment is demolition in Cardiff, including the Channel View council estate in Grangetown.

4 What's your biggest achievement – personal or professional?

When I look at housing now, so many people cannot access good quality, affordable housing, it can be difficult to be positive about things. However, as policy adviser to Welsh Government Ministers with responsibility for housing between 2012 and 2014,

I played a small role in developing the homelessness prevention legislation that commenced in 2015 and increased the rights of individuals and households at risk of, and actually experiencing, homelessness. It's far from perfect but it was a quantum shift in thinking about homelessness which is now being built upon.

5 Who's your political hero?

I don't have a single political hero. My many heroes are women all over the world who are campaigning for freedoms, safety and equality, to protect the environment and promote peace. An example would be women leaders of indigenous communities in North America literally putting themselves on the line to protect land, water and other resources from further development by the fossil fuel industry.

6 What's the biggest challenge that Wales faces in the next five years?

An intersection of inequality, poverty, destitution, economic shifts and making commitments on combatting climate change reality. We have a lot to do!

7 What might someone be surprised to know about you?

Between 1986 and 1988, I worked as an unqualified residential social worker and lived in a squat in Stockwell. Houses like the one we lived in then now sell for well over £1 million – where do the unqualified residential social workers live in London now ...?

8 Answer the question you wish we'd asked!

That would be 'what shaped your view of the world?' And my answer would be: brought up in a council house, went to a comprehensive, got a full grant to go to university and have been lucky enough only ever to be unemployed for a couple of weeks. It has given me a burning sense of injustice about how today's world works for some but not for others.

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