

# Child Poverty Strategy Progress Report 2013



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

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

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

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# Foreword

**In the twelve months since I published my Child Poverty Strategy the economic challenges facing families bringing up children and young people in Wales have become even greater.**

The impact of the economy on labour market opportunities and wage levels means that more and more working families are struggling to meet living costs. At the same time the UK Government's welfare reforms are hitting families with dependent children particularly hard. This isn't about families who can't afford to buy their children the latest trainers; it's about families having to make difficult choices about how to provide for their children week to week. Recent figures suggest that one in five people who have a bailiff knocking at their door are working parents.

Child poverty is the result of family poverty. However a child poverty approach to tackling the issue is essentially different from a family poverty approach. A child poverty approach puts the child at the centre of all policy measures and acknowledges the child as a rights bearer with rights that extend beyond the family. Once framed in a child rights context, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the distinctiveness of a child poverty approach becomes clear. As growing numbers of families in Wales face financial hardship, so too are growing numbers of children and young people at risk of falling behind their peers in terms of opportunities to realise their rights and reach their potential.

I have heard back from the children and young people who are acting as my first Community Ambassadors in Wales. I have been impressed both by the commitment they have shown to the scheme and by the quality and depth of the evidence they have gathered for me. The information they have provided about what matters to the children and young people in their communities demonstrates the fact that children and young people are aware of and negotiating the challenges of community cohesion on a daily basis.

When I published my first annual report as Children's Commissioner for Wales in 2008 I was clear that I found it unacceptable that one in four children in Wales were living in poverty. Five years on, despite significant policy commitments, I am dismayed that the latest figures show that the situation is even worse, with one in three children in Wales living in poor households. Now, more than ever, we need to prioritise action to secure the rights of children and young people growing up in poverty.

**Keith Towler,  
Children's Commissioner  
for Wales**

# Child poverty in Wales Update

**The latest figures released show that the rate of child poverty in Wales (33%) is second only to the rate in London (36%). This compares to regions with the lowest poverty rates at just above 20%, including Scotland (22%) and the South East of England (21%).**

The UK Government's welfare reforms will have far-reaching impacts for benefit claimants, particularly non-working families with children and overall, non-working lone parents are one of the groups that will incur the largest income losses. The national benefit cap for out-of-work (working age) households in association with the move towards the Universal Credit regime, are expected to restrict benefits for some 1,500 households in Wales, including 6,000 children.

Evidence published last month reports that as a consequence of rising in-work poverty in Wales, more working age adults and children were now in low-income working families (285,000 on average in the three years to 2010/11) than in low-income non-working ones (275,000). The same publication reports a much higher risk of poverty for part-working families and suggests that this is because of the lower levels of pay associated with part-time working.

Welsh Government published 'Child Poverty Strategy for Wales: Baseline Indicators' in March of this year. This report provides an evaluation of the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy providing baseline data for 2005 and a comparison with the most recent year's data across 23 indicator related to income poverty, education, housing and health. Progress is only evidenced in relation to 6 of the 23 indicators considered in the report.

The Welsh Government established a Ministerial Task and Finish Group on Welfare Reform and the Children's Commissioner has attended a number of the meetings convened by this group. The Ministerial Task and Finish Group also commissioned a three-stage programme of research to assess the impact of the welfare reforms in Wales. The analysis suggests that those households with children will be among those hardest hit by the UK Government's welfare reforms.

Welsh Government published 'Building Resilient Communities: taking forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan' in July 2013. The Children's Commissioner has noted that this action plan has a stronger emphasis on children and young people issues than the 2012 publication 'Tackling Poverty Action Plan'. He has welcomed the attention given to Communities First, early years, childcare and education. However, he remains concerned that the inclusion of child poverty within an all-age poverty action plan does not lend itself to actions firmly placed within a framework of children's rights in line with the UNCRC. Direct reference to the UNCRC is absent from the 2013 Action Plan.

# Community Ambassadors Pilot Scheme Update



**The Children's Commissioner set out in his Child Poverty Strategy his intention to pilot a Community Ambassadors scheme. Building on the Children's Commissioner's successful School Ambassadors scheme the Community Ambassadors scheme is intended to:**

- target children and young people living in areas of social deprivation and/or from disadvantaged groups;**
- offer opportunities to a wider age range than the current School Ambassadors scheme;**
- to offer opportunities to children and young people who may find it difficult to engage through education settings.**

**As with the established School Ambassadors Scheme the children and young people who become Community Ambassadors are expected to:**

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

The scheme has now been piloted in three South Wales communities: Glyncoch(RCT), Adamsdown (Cardiff) and through Swansea Young Single Homeless Project. Film Agency Wales has commissioned work with the three South Wales pilot sites to provide film technique workshops and to provide material for a DVD resource to support the future roll out of the scheme.

A further two pilot groups in North Wales are starting work this autumn.

The Children's Commissioner is currently raising awareness of the Community Ambassador scheme and there has already been interest from new areas that would like to be involved in the roll out of the scheme. A final decision will be made on a phased roll out of the scheme from March 2014 once all the pilot areas have reported.

The Children's Commissioner is grateful to the children and young people who have acted as his first Community Ambassadors and has been impressed by the commitment that they and the projects supporting them have shown to the scheme. The information they have provided about what matters to the children and young people in their communities demonstrates the fact that children and young people are aware of and are negotiating the challenges of community cohesion on a daily basis.

## Community Ambassadors Report

The Adamsdown and Swansea groups came to the Children's Commissioner's office where they met with the Commissioner and shared presentations setting out the issues that they identified as important to the children and young people in their communities and provided feedback on what is needed to support the scheme in moving forward. The North Wales pilot groups and Glyncoch group will report back in March 2014.

Community Ambassadors used a number of different methods to gather the views of children and young people in their communities. They decided on the methods they wanted to use which included.

- **Informal contact/talking to children and young people/peer research.**
- **Observation.**
- **Survey about problems in the community and how people thought they should be overcome.**
- **Volunteering in different services/projects, listening, and doing focused workshops.**

**This is what the Community Ambassadors from Adamsdown and Swansea told the Commissioner is important to children and young people in their communities:**

- **Problems associated with drug use in the community:** Children and young people are very aware of adult behaviour around drug dealing and using drugs and this makes them feel unsafe. They reported easy access to drugs for children, shops selling alcohol and tobacco to underage children and young people and feeling scared because of drug use and associated behaviour. They also feel that their community has a bad reputation because of drug use.
- **Racism:** Racism is having a big impact on the way the community operates, and on how children and young people feel. Racist attitudes and behaviour make them feel unsafe. There was also a feeling that there need to be more opportunities for young people from different ethnic backgrounds to enjoy social time and activities together. Both groups talked about racism but Adamsdown reported this as one of their primary issues.
- **Age-discrimination:** Young people talked about a lack of respect of young people by older people, about discrimination because of perceptions of young people as being frightening and involved in gangs and some young people felt victimised by the police.
- **Disability discrimination:** Young people talked about a lack of job opportunities, training, and support for young people with learning disabilities. Disabled young people were also concerned about a lack of services and problems associated with the built environment (for example pavements) which make it difficult for them to get around the city.

- **Something to do:** Young people said that they need more options in terms of places to go, things to do and better information about what is going on.
- **Direct access to politicians:** Young people want to be able to give government their views face to face- they want more opportunities to do this instead of feeding in through an organisation.
- **Attitudes of Job Centre:** Young people talked about the employment service as a confusing system, they reported a lack of understandable information and feeling stigma from having to rely on the system. Young people said they need a job centre mentor (especially for young people with learning disabilities), they talked about poor treatment/lack of respect for young people by employment service staff and said there is a need for a better range of opportunities such as volunteering and education.
- **Social Services:** Young people who are supported by social services including care leavers said that young people need to know that their social worker is on their side; need to know that the social worker will communicate with them directly; that they don't know what to do if there is a problem with carers or a social worker; that they need better access to support, respect to be heard and access to advocacy. They need out of hours support.
- **Housing:** Young people need more help to understand the housing allocation system and the best ways of getting permanent accommodation.
- **Children's Commissioner for Wales:** many young people don't know about the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

**Children's Commissioner commitment to Community Ambassadors: the Commissioner will share the issues they have raised as important to children and young people in their communities with Welsh Government and will include these issues in his Child Poverty Progress report 2013 and the Annual Report for 2012-2013 that will be published in 2014.**

# Equality Matters

**Earlier this year the National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee undertook an inquiry into the future of equality and human rights in Wales. The Children's Commissioner for Wales submitted evidence to the inquiry and set out his position that the National Assembly should be given powers to build on the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. This might include implementing sections of the Act that the UK Government has no immediate intention of implementing and extending the coverage to certain groups.**

A person's socio-economic background remains a key factor in determining their life chances. Article 29 of the UNCRC states that education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities in full, however, education provides a clear example of the impact of a child's socio-economic background on educational outcomes. Research suggests that socio-economic factors are a better predictor of educational attainment than ability with less academically able but better off children overtaking able poorer children by the age of 6. Data published last year by Welsh Government indicates that performance of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than their non eligible counterparts at all key stages and in all performance measures in education.

At the same time there is a clear relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and protected characteristics. Article 27 of the UNCRC provides that: 'States Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for a child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development' without discrimination (Article 2 of the UNCRC). However, disabled children for example are at greater risk than their peers of growing up in poverty and the experience of poverty will impact on their future life chances in terms of education and employment.

The socio-economic duty was proposed with the intention of 'making clear that tackling socio-economic disadvantage and narrowing gaps in outcomes for people from different backgrounds and narrowing gaps in outcomes for people from different backgrounds is a core function of public services'. Local authorities and other prescribed public bodies in Wales are already subject to a duty to prepare and publish a strategy for contributing to the eradication of child poverty in Wales under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. The introduction of a socio-economic duty in Wales would strengthen the implementation of this policy intention and of the over-arching well-being commitment contained in the Programme of Government. More significantly it would contribute to driving forward efforts to reduce the impact of child poverty and to improve equality of outcomes for children and young people in Wales.

# Delivering on the Children's Commissioner for Wales' three Key Commitments on Child Poverty Progress

Although the Children's Commissioner for Wales is not subject to the duty contained within the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, he made the decision to publish his own Child Poverty Strategy to set out the work his office is undertaking to contribute towards tackling child poverty in Wales. When the Child Poverty Strategy was published in October 2012 the Children's Commissioner made three key commitments on child poverty:

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

This report sets out the progress that has been made against these three key commitments in the first year of the Commissioner's Child Poverty Strategy.

**To deliver on the actions set out in the Commissioner's Child Poverty Strategy and to review these on an annual basis.**

**The Commissioner's Child Poverty Strategy considers issues against the Welsh Government's 7 Core Aims for all children and young people.**

### **Aim 1: flying start in life**

The Commissioner has welcomed Welsh Government's investment in a programme of initiatives designed to provide early intervention and support families in a holistic way. The pioneer phases of these initiatives are now complete and local authority delivery across Wales has progressed over the past twelve months. It is significant that each of these programmes is targeted at vulnerable children and their families and that a system of on-going evaluation is in place. Looking forward, the Children's Commissioner wants to ensure that family focussed intervention includes a strong focus on meeting the specific and distinct needs of children and young people within those families. The findings of the evaluation processes in place will be considered as they are published.

The Children's Commissioner has included a call on the need for guidance to support the implementation of parenting support as set out in the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 in his latest Annual Report which was published earlier this month.



**Promoting good practice – making sure that children living in poverty realise their right to support for their development without discrimination.**

Research tells us that children with a prisoner in the family are more likely to live in poverty and are at greater risk of poor emotional, social and educational outcomes. Work is needed to ensure that these children, whose needs often remain invisible to mainstream services, are able to realise their rights without discrimination in line with Article 2 of the UNCRC.

**Parc Prison, Family Interventions and Invisible Walls Wales**

The Children's Commissioner for Wales visited Parc Prison where he met fathers in custody and found out about the innovative work being done in the prison and community in partnership with Barnardo's Cymru, local authorities and other partners to support men in their parenting role (Article 18, UNCRC) and to reduce the impact of their imprisonment on their children. A wide range of interventions are provided including a Family Interventions Unit for men who are committed to working on their parenting role, a Family Interventions Lounge for family centred visits and courses, a parenting programme, baby course, home work club and holistic targeted family support for referred families in the prison and out in the community. The support includes a 6 week 'Language and Play – Number and Play' course designed to support parents/carers and their babies/children aged 0-3. It focuses on communication, language, literacy and numeracy, supporting children to realise their right to development (Article 6, UNCRC).

**Swansea Prison, Family Support**

The Children's Commissioner for Wales visited Swansea Prison to hear about the range of family support work being delivered there in partnership with PACT. The Commissioner met fathers in custody and their partners who have participated in the 'Baby Group'. The group is for fathers whose babies were born during or shortly before their imprisonment. The group offers both mothers and fathers a chance to learn new skills and practice existing ones through stories, song and rhyme time, creative play and baby massage. Providing parents with the support they need to gain skills for raising their children (Article 18, UNCRC) in a way that supports their development (Article 6, UNCRC).

## Aim 2: access to education, training and learning communities

Estyn published evidence in 2012 in relation to school effectiveness in tackling poverty and disadvantage that provides a strong case for the importance of supporting pupil well-being in order to secure attainment.

The Children's Commissioner has welcomed the focus on education contained in Welsh Government's 'Building Resilient Communities: taking forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan' (July 2013). However, he is disappointed that the actions associated with school age children focus on raising the expectations for learners eligible for free school meals through the testing process without considering the importance of supporting pupil well-being as a means of securing educational outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people.

At the same time the Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant Match Fund is an important offer that should help to support community focussed schools and build on the good work already undertaken by Communities First partnerships. The remodelling of the Communities First programme into a community focussed tackling poverty programme places the work of Communities First Clusters into a delivery and outcomes framework that includes the objective of achieving 'learning communities'. In his Child Poverty Strategy the Children's Commissioner sets out examples of good practice in the work Communities First projects were doing in supporting learning. He hopes that the new arrangements will support further work of this kind.

There are examples of excellent practice in Wales where whole-school approaches and a clear community focus are providing good quality educational opportunities for children and young people from low-income households. As education provision in Wales looks towards a period of on-going reforms it is essential that a focus on proven approaches to supporting pupil well-being are an integral part of reform and are afforded equal status to that given to attainment.

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

The Children's Commissioner made a commitment in his Child Poverty Strategy to use his influence to promote good practice on reducing the gaps in educational outcomes between children and young people from low-income households and their peers. In September this year the Commissioner facilitated an evidence exchange providing an opportunity for education professionals with lead responsibility for pupil well-being and inclusion to meet colleagues from across Wales for the first time to share good practice and to identify any barriers to supporting the well-being of disadvantaged learners.

One strong message from the evidence exchange was that national policy, performance drivers, and inspection processes focus heavily on attainment and do not give due weight to well-being issues. The evidence provided through the exchange suggests that the current narrow focus on key stage attainment and attendance levels does not necessarily provide a meaningful picture of those schools which are achieving in terms of supporting children in reaching their educational potential in line with Article 29 of the UNCRC. The Commissioner has shared this evidence with Welsh Government and with the National Assembly's Children and Young People's Committee.

A wide range of practice examples were also provided including:

- **The use of specific programmes/tools with a focus on social and emotional literacy and well-being.**
- **Restorative practice approaches.**
- **Innovation in the way in which education welfare services operate with partners and in the way they engage with families.**
- **Family engagement work.**
- **Multi-agency working including Team Around the Family approaches.**
- **Working with other programmes such as Flying Start and Communities First.**
- **The development of assessment and monitoring tools to capture pupil well-being and plan for individual learning needs and school level support.**

Local authorities published their Single Integrated Plans (SIP) this year. The SIPs are the outcome of Welsh Government policy designed to streamline the approach to integrated planning and partnerships. Duties in relation to publication of a Child Poverty Strategy and Children and Young People's Plan (and a number of other plans) can be fulfilled through the SIP. Over two thirds of local authorities have included narrowing the gap in educational outcomes between children from low-income households and their peers as a central issue for action in their SIPs.

Education has a key role in supporting the well-being of children and young people so that they can achieve their potential as well as delivering on improved educational attainment in Wales. There is strong evidence that the drive for increased attainment will benefit from a clear focus on learner well-being.

**The Children's Commissioner will do further work to disseminate the evidence he has gathered and support the sharing of good practice on approaches to supporting pupil well-being for disadvantaged learners.**

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

The Children's Commissioner set out the importance he places on the standards contained in the National Service Framework (NSF) for Children, Young People and Maternity Services in his Child Poverty Strategy. However the current status of the NSF is still not clear to him as there is no further information has been provided in relation to the intended Welsh Government review of the NSF.

The Welsh Government reported on their progress against the ambitions of their Programme for Government earlier this year. The progress report sets out work to implement the 'Designed to Smile' programme to promote good oral health for children in deprived areas. A number of public health campaigns have also been launched. Just under two thirds of local authorities have identified reducing inequalities in health as an action in relation to their work to tackle child poverty and deliver on health and well-being as set out in the Single Integrated Plans they have published this year.

Evidence suggests a correlation between increased risk of behavioural and emotional problems for children and young people (especially boys) and child poverty. Welsh Government published the national age inclusive strategy 'Together for Mental Health' in October 2012. Welsh Government has identified the inclusion of children and young people in the strategy and specific actions in the delivery plan as a development that gives greater effect to Article 24 of the UNCRC (the right for children to good quality health care). However, the Children's Commissioner has argued that the loss of a distinct and separate national strategy for children and young people could potentially dilute regard to the intentions of the UNCRC. The Delivery Plan accompanying the Strategy does include a number of actions for the support of the emotional well-being of children and young people in education settings and through existing family programmes (such as Flying Start and Families First).

**The Children's Commissioner will monitor evidence in relation to the implementation of initiatives set out in the Programme of Government and the 'Together for Mental Health' delivery plan. He will seek to also gather evidence on the health issues that are important to children and young people living in disadvantaged areas.**

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

The Children's Commissioner set out the evidenced benefits of access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities in his Child Poverty Strategy. Children and young people from low income households are often restricted in their access to structured play and leisure opportunities because of transport and access costs. Disabled children are at greater risk of growing up in poverty than their peers and face additional barriers related to access to play, leisure and sporting opportunities that are able to meet their needs.

#### **Play Sufficiency Assessments**

The Children's Commissioner made a commitment to review the outcomes of the implementation of Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty (introduced through the Children and Families (Wales) Measure, 2010) with a particular focus on children and young people from disadvantaged communities and households and on disabled children and young people. This duty is underpinned by Regulations that set out what matters are to be taken into account when assessing whether a local authority has sufficient play (and leisure) opportunities for children and young people in its area and the Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSAs) were published earlier this year.

The PSAs highlight a number of issues. Local authorities were able to identify data in relation to the number of children and young people from low income households in their area and the majority identified the same data sources but some identified the need for further work to break this data down by age and/or to bring different data sources together. The PSAs suggest that gathering data in relation to the number of disabled children and young people in a given authority is more problematic. There does not appear to be a consistent approach to this. The Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) was the most frequently identified data source, followed by registration on voluntary registers or indexes of disability and held by Children's Services. However a number of authorities set out the difficulties of securing reliable data on the number of disabled children and young people they should plan for in their authorities. This issue needs to be examined at a national level.

In terms of current provision the most common method for local authorities to provide information about no cost or low cost activities was through their Family Information Service (FIS). Some authorities have a FIS that already does this and some included an action for their FIS to do this in the future. Other areas identified other methods such as summer booklets. A small number of areas reported that no cost/ low cost provision was under threat because of funding changes. The Children's Commissioner would like to see schools and other education settings identified as places where children and young people can get information about the no cost and low cost activities available in their areas and he will raise this issue with Welsh Government and local authorities.

Many local authorities identified the need for improvements in holding and sharing information about free or low cost premises as sites for free play provision although some already have systems in place. Transport costs can act as a barrier to children and young people in accessing play and recreation opportunities. A small number of authorities offer some form of subsidy for transport in order to support access but for most authorities funding for this was identified as problematic.

The provision of play and recreation opportunities for disabled children and young people as reported in the PSAs is diverse. A small number of authorities identified the need for actions to improve the current provision in their area. A lot of authorities offer a range of training for staff, buddy systems, and measures to support inclusive play and some provide separate specialist opportunities in addition. Some authorities reported using Families First funding to support access to play opportunities for disabled children and young people but others identified insecurity of funding as an issue. Some authorities have clear multi-agency referral processes in place to consider the needs of and play provision for disabled children and young people on an individual basis. A few authorities stand out as evidencing a framework of policy and practice firmly directed at delivering on the right of disabled children and young people to opportunities for play, leisure, recreation and sport. (Article 31, UNCRC). The PSAs also suggest that authorities are more likely to be able to provide transport for disabled children and young people in accessing provision although this can be limited to children and young people in receipt of certain services or with particular needs. The Children's Commissioner will share with Welsh Government his view that there would be merit in the development of a mechanism for sharing practice so that authorities that do well in providing opportunities for disabled children and young people to enjoy play can offer guidance to those that need to develop their provision further.

## Culture

There is evidence that learning through arts and culture improves attainment in all subjects. Participation in structured arts activities increases cognitive abilities and we know that students from low-income families who take part in arts activities often do better in higher education. Throughout the year the Commissioner has been active in supporting events focused on increasing the participation of children and young people in cultural and artistic opportunities and in particular in promoting work underway to extend participation to disadvantaged children and young people. This has included on-going support for the developments being taken forward by the National Museum of Wales in relation to their Child Poverty Strategy.

### Promoting good practice - making sure children and young people living at risk of poverty can realise their right to play, leisure and sporting opportunities

Play Our Way: Mencap undertook a project funded by Children in Need to improve access to leisure opportunities for young people with a learning disability. In different areas across Wales, they have helped train young people with a learning disability to be project ambassadors, and supported them to take part in different local leisure activities. Whilst taking part, the ambassadors assessed how accessible the leisure activities are for young people with a learning disability, and how they can be improved. Staff and young people from the Play Our Way project came to meet the Children's Commissioner to tell him about the things that they believe need to change to improve play, leisure and sport opportunities for disabled children and young people. The young people have 8 key messages:

- All pupils should benefit from Welsh Government's 5 x 60 scheme.
- They want to see more opportunities to take part in non-competitive sport.
- Leisure venues and clubs should have an accessibility quality-mark on display.
- They would like to see a central, accessible directory of specialist, inclusive and mainstream clubs.
- Direct payments should be made available to groups of friends, as well as individuals.
- Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) should be supported to access any school clubs.
- Person-centred disability awareness training should be given to leisure providers.
- All pupils should be given the chance to take part in overnight trips.

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

The Children's Commissioner set out the ways in which disadvantaged children and young people may face barriers to participation in his Child Poverty Strategy. **Through the piloting of his Community Ambassadors Scheme it is clear that given flexible opportunities to have their views heard in trusted community settings children and young people can exercise their rights under Article 12 of the UNCRC in a way that can help decision makers to understand the issues that matter to them.** A number of Community First cluster areas have already expressed an interest in being involved in the phased roll out of the scheme after March 2014.

Racism and discrimination were big issues for the children and young people who have already reported back to the Commissioner as Community Ambassadors. **The Children's Commissioner has shared the findings of the pilot scheme to date with Welsh Government and will work to identify ways to promote positive change for children and young people affected by racism and other forms of discrimination.**

## **Aim 6: have a safe home and community**

The Children's Commissioner has raised concerns about increasing numbers of households being accepted as homeless and the forthcoming impact of changes to housing benefit rules under the UK Government welfare reforms in terms of further increases to homelessness figures. Evidence provided to him by Shelter Cymru and others suggest that changes to the benefit system combined with the 'bedroom tax' are already having a significant and detrimental impact on families in Wales. The Children's Commissioner has serious concerns about the outcomes of these welfare changes on the well-being of children and young people in Wales.

**The Children's Commissioner has therefore welcomed the commitment contained in the Welsh Government Consultation 'Homes for Wales: A White Paper for Better Lives and Communities' to end family homelessness by 2019 and has called for a similar commitment to be made by Welsh Government to ending youth homelessness by 2019.**

In his Child Poverty Strategy the Children's Commissioner committed to engaging with new Police and Crime Commissioners in Wales to draw their attention to the positive impact that community development approaches that directly involved children and young people can have on improving community safety. The Children's Commissioner met with each of the Police and Crime Commissioners earlier this year and was able to share evidence in relation to community development approaches in a useful way. **The Children's Commissioner will continue to engage with the Police and Crime Commissioners on these issues. The Children's Commissioner will also share with them the issues around community safety and in particular the impact of drugs and racism that were reported to him by his Community Ambassadors.**



## **Aim 7: not disadvantaged by poverty**

The introduction by Welsh Government of the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) process led by Local Service Boards in each authority means that duties to produce a Child Poverty Strategy can now be met through the production of the SIP. The Children's Commissioner has assessed the SIPs published by local authorities earlier this year in terms of how far they demonstrate a commitment to tackle child poverty. The Children's Commissioner welcomes the fact that the majority of SIPs include a clear focus on child poverty and actions on reducing the number of children in poverty including actions to reduce the impact of child poverty on educational and health outcomes. A small number of SIPs have a focus on poverty but do not specifically prioritise child poverty. The Children's Commissioner for Wales, is however disappointed that only around a third of SIPs include reference to the UNCRC and/or Welsh Government's 7 Core Aims. The Children's Commissioner has set out his position in relation to the need for a distinct child poverty approach that puts the child at the centre of all policy measures and acknowledges the child as a rights bearer with rights that extend beyond the family in line with the UNCRC. **The Children's Commissioner will monitor the implementation of the SIPs and their impact on child poverty over the remainder of his term.**

The Commissioner used his Child Poverty Strategy to set out his concerns about food poverty and its impact on children and young people in Wales. The Free School Lunches and Milk (Universal Credit) (Wales) Order 2013 was issued by Welsh Government last month and provides that free school meal entitlement is dependent on a person or their parent being in receipt of universal credit on or after 6 September 2013. **The Children's Commissioner has raised the issue of tackling food poverty in the school holidays with Welsh Government and he has been led to understand that Welsh Government is considering measures that can be put in place to tackle this issue.**

The UK Government retains power over the tax and benefits systems and these are key levers in relation to tackling child poverty. The Children's Commissioner for Wales has regular meetings with the other Children's Commissioners in the UK. **The Children's Commissioners of the four nations have identified child poverty as a key issue for action and will continue to work together to raise awareness of the impact of poverty on children and young people with the UK Government in Westminster.**

## **To continue to speak out about and promote the need for a rights based approach to tackling child poverty in Wales.**

Through his annual report and through his Child Poverty Strategy and progress reports the Children's Commissioner for Wales will continue to speak out and promote the need for a rights based approach to tackling child poverty in Wales. The Children's Commissioner also has regular meetings with Welsh Government about child poverty and uses these meetings to provide scrutiny from a rights based perspective. Earlier this year the European Anti Poverty Network and Eurochild published an 'explainer on child poverty in the EU'. The publication sets out the 7 advantages of a rights approach to tackling child poverty and promoting well-being.

### **7 Advantages of a rights approach to tackling child poverty & promoting well-being**

- 1. It is key to the prevention of child poverty. If all children's rights are respected and enabled then children are unlikely to live in poverty.**
- 2. It puts the needs of the child at the centre of policy-making. Addressing children's needs becomes a core political obligation and not just a possible policy choice.**
- 3. It puts the focus on addressing the specific needs of the child here and now, as well as improving the position of their families and the communities in which they live.**
- 4. It provides a useful framework for developing a comprehensive strategy to prevent and reduce child poverty. This is very evident in countries like Sweden which has a very strong emphasis on children's rights and consequently has been very successful in preventing child poverty and social exclusion.**
- 5. It links the well-being of children with the well-being of parents and families and puts support for families at the heart of policies to tackle child poverty. For instance the UNCRC recognises that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.**
- 6. It puts a focus on the importance of adopting and enforcing strong anti-discrimination legislation as an essential element in preventing and reducing poverty and social exclusion.**
- 7. It emphasises the right of the children to be heard and to participate in the decisions that affect them.**



**To target work through functions such as the Ambassadors programmes, See Me/Dyma Fi campaign, and through the annual workplan on addressing socio economic equalities issues for children and young people.**

### **Advice and Support**

During 2013 the Children's Commissioner for Wales Advice and Support team implemented the actions set out within the Child Poverty Strategy, by raising awareness of the service through targeted communications and visits with Communities First Cluster Managers. Whilst the target was set for the team to visit 25% of cluster areas in October 2012, communication was delayed until January 2013 when the new cluster areas were announced and managers were appointed. In total the Children's Commissioner's officers were able to meet with 5 of the cluster areas, namely Ebbw Vale, Vale of Glamorgan, Swansea, Conwy and Gwynedd, meeting the target of reaching 25% of cluster areas. All of the meetings were consensually viewed as positive, with cluster teams grateful to learn more of the Children's Commissioner Advice and Support Service, which is able to offer an independent source of information to support children and young people, parents, carers, and professionals supporting them. All areas were particularly interested to engage with the Community Ambassadors scheme, and registered their interest for future involvement. In order to maximise future engagements, there are plans to hold regional meetings with managers, as well as attending the annual Communities First Conference to deliver a workshop.

### **Super Ambassadors**

The Children's Commissioner's school ambassadors have played an integral part in the participation work of his office over the past 7 years. Ambassadors are year 6 pupils who are elected by their peers and are tasked with raising awareness about the Children's Commissioner and children's rights, as outlined in the UNCRC in their schools. The local authority pupil well-being and inclusion leads who contributed to the evidence exchange on pupil well-being and disadvantaged learners have agreed to support the Commissioner in encouraging schools to get involved in the Super Ambassadors scheme. This is part of wider work being undertaken by the Children's Commissioner's Participation Officers to ensure that as many schools as possible take up the opportunity to become a Super Ambassador primary school.

### **Annual Work Plan**

Delivering against the commitments made in the Children's Commissioner's Child Poverty Strategy and reporting on progress against these commitments on an annual basis is a core objective of the Children's Commissioner's annual work plan. The annual work plan drives the work of his office against a set of key objectives.

**Over the next 12 months the Children's Commissioner for Wales will continue to undertake work to progress the 3 key commitments made in his Child Poverty Strategy and set out in this progress report. The Children's Commissioner will publish his next progress report on this work in October 2014.**

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Households Below Average Income, (2013) Department for Work and Pensions

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government, (2013) 'Analysing the impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms in Wales – Summary of the key findings', Cardiff:WG3

<sup>3</sup> S. Fitzpatrick et al (2013), 'The homelessness monitor: Wales 2012', Institute for Housing urban and Real Estate Research, Heriot-Watt University and Centre for Housing Policy, University of York.

<sup>4</sup> JRF, (2013) 'Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Wales 2013', York:JRF

<sup>5</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/130314-child-poverty-strategy-wales-baseline-indicators-en.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Government Equalities Office, 'The Equality Bill: Duty to reduce socio-economic inequalities', London: HMSO

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/381221/counting\\_the\\_costs\\_2012\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/381221/counting_the_costs_2012_full_report.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/files/Health\\_consequences\\_of\\_Poverty\\_for\\_children.pdf](http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/files/Health_consequences_of_Poverty_for_children.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.eapn.eu/en/news-and-publications/publications/eapn-books/towards-children-s-well-being-in-europe-eapn-and-eurochild-s-explainer-on-child-poverty-in-the-eu-is-out>



**0808 801 1000 / 80800\***  
**post@complantcymru.org.uk**

\* Text us for free (start your message with COM)



**@childcomwales**  
**www.childcomwales.org.uk**

Write to us:  
**Children's Commissioner for Wales**  
**Freepost RRGL XLYC BHGC**  
**Swansea SA7 9FS**



