

**END CHILD POVERTY NETWORK CYMRU
RHWYDWAITH DILEU TLODI PLANT CYMRU**

The National Child Poverty Coalition for Wales

Child Poverty: A Programme Towards Eradication Manifesto (revised 2014)

The End Child Poverty Network is
co-ordinated by Children in Wales



Children in Wales
Plant yng Nghymru



End Child Poverty Network Cymru

The End Child Poverty Network (ECPN) Cymru is a coalition of organisations focused on the eradication of child poverty in Wales, co-ordinated and managed on a day-to-day basis by Children in Wales. Its Steering Group includes representation from across the voluntary and statutory sectors, and the network has an increasing supporting membership from a broad cross-section of agencies.

Steering Group members include:

Barnardo's Cymru
Children in Wales
Save the Children Wales
National Energy Action Wales
Action for Children
NSPCC Cymru
Citizens Advice
Public Health Wales
Oxfam Cymru
Shelter Cymru
The Prince's Trust Cymru
The Buttle Trust
Welsh Women's Aid
Wales Migration Partnership

Observers:

The WLGA
The Wales TUC
The Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales

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Introduction

The End Child Poverty Network (ECPN) Cymru coalition remain deeply concerned that levels of child poverty are sharply increasing in Wales, as more children and their families struggle to provide the basic necessities. Today we hear of children going cold, without food or adequate clothing. This is not the kind of society we envisaged when the coalition was formed in 2001. With levels of child poverty predicted to increase further in the short term, all levels of government must redouble their efforts to get back on track and work towards the cross-party target of eradicating child poverty in Wales by 2020.

The ECPN Cymru published a manifesto in November 2010 ahead of the National Assembly of Wales elections in May 2011 and which was updated in May 2012. In it we welcomed the introduction of a Child Poverty Duty under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, and the Welsh Government's response to the UN Concluding Observations through their National Action Plan Getting it Right. The release of the revised Child Poverty Strategy in February 2011 reinforced the Welsh Government's intention that tackling child poverty remained a national priority and incorporated many of the key issues that the ECPN Cymru had been raising concerns about for many years.

However, the external landscape and situation for many children and families in Wales has changed considerably over the past few years, with high levels of worklessness amongst young people, increased personal debt and much uncertainty characterising the lives of a growing number of our population.

We believe that solutions can and must be found.

Whilst we remain profoundly concerned that the impact of the proposed changes to the Welfare Benefit System, being advanced by the UK Government, pose a serious threat to our vision, the Welsh Government must accelerate

the opportunities at their disposal through the reconfiguration of the Communities First programme, alongside the enhancement of Flying Start and Families First. The current Tackling Poverty Action Plan with a strong focus on child poverty and the new early years framework, should also provide a clear roadmap to help lift children and families out of poverty, if implemented effectively.

We believe that the programme of action for tackling child poverty in Wales must be underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and that delivery of the children's rights agenda in Wales is key to success in tackling child poverty.

We look forward to continuing to work constructively with Welsh Government and local partners to support the joint vision that no child in Wales is living in poverty by 2020.

This Programme towards Eradication, developed by the ECPN Cymru coalition, outlines the areas of activity to support this target.

Sean O'Neill
Chair, End Child Poverty Network Cymru

Eight Overarching Priorities

We expect the Welsh Government to commit to:

1.

Deliver on the cross party pledge to eradicate child poverty by 2020 through a joined up policy framework supported by appropriate resources

2.

Address the implementation gap between policy and delivery

3.

Adequately resource, protect and strengthen national programmes and services which have been effectively evaluated and which deliver positive outcomes for our poorest children

4.

Ensure that existing duties placed on public sector bodies are subject to robust scrutiny procedures to ensure the delivery of child poverty obligations

5.

Work with all sectors, including employers, in the national fight against child poverty

6.

Ensure that all national policies, services and programmes are developed and delivered within a child rights framework

7.

Engage effectively and consistently with the UK Government at all levels around child poverty matters that are non-devolved

8.

Provide Wales with an open, transparent and accountable government that ensures equality of opportunity and seeks to free all children from a life of poverty

A programme of action should always be underpinned by the UNCRC and take account of the UN Concluding Observations

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Education

Overarching call: EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to good quality education that gives them opportunities to realise their potential

1. Education must be inclusive and all children and young people should have the opportunity to realize their potential through education

The Welsh Government should ensure that every child in Wales has the opportunity to realise their potential through education. This must include sustained action to break the unacceptably strong link between poverty and low attainment, which blocks too many children in Wales from realising their potential and fulfilling their RIGHT to education. In accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC, the Welsh Government should establish mechanisms to allow pupils to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing actions that affect them.

Breaking the cycle between low educational achievement and poverty in adulthood should continue to be a top Government priority throughout this Assembly term.

2. Improving the school experience

Alongside efforts to reduce the impact of poverty on attainment, Welsh Government should also ensure that the education system recognises the importance of supporting and addressing the social and emotional needs of all children, especially the most vulnerable and at risk of poverty. Whilst attainment levels and qualifications are important for future life chances, children and young people should experience other benefits from participating in school with raising and meeting the aspirations of children a key objective for success.

The development of a wider set of outcome indicators than academic achievement should be developed for schools, which focus on pupil wellbeing. This would help to monitor this area and ensure that children are receiving the right support at the right time during their school experience.

3. Sustainable Funding

We welcome additional investment through the School Effectiveness Grant and the Pupil Deprivation Grant to provide support to schools to make progress on the three national education priorities, and specifically welcome the focused support they provide for reducing the impact of poverty on pupil's attainment. The announcement of an additional £2m Communities First Pupil Deprivation match-fund is also welcome to support community engagement.

Welsh Government should commit to a continuation of Pupil Deprivation Grant funding for the rest of this Assembly term and consider the sustainability of promising interventions that have been funded by the grant, going forward. Welsh Government should also review the criteria for eligibility of the Pupil Deprivation Grant to include those eligible for Free School Meals at any point in the last six years, and extend the allocation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant to Nursery Schools in Wales with funding in accordance with an early intervention approach.

Funding for the Pupil Deprivation Grant should be at a sufficient level to make a real difference. Funding should be set at an amount that would enable schools to introduce the necessary package of additional support for the poorest pupils that will make a real difference to their education. Welsh Government should carry out a costing exercise for recommended interventions and increase the Pupil Deprivation Grant accordingly. However, we would emphasise that how the funding is spent is crucial. Robust monitoring and inspection arrangements should be put in place to ensure that schools are utilising the funds for their intended purpose, and are achieving noticeable results for individual pupils.

All school funding should be spent on interventions that are cost-effective and have the strongest evidence base to support their efficacy. Schools should be supported to develop a strategic plan that shows how they will use the resources that have been made available to reduce the impact of poverty on student achievement.

4. Removing the additional costs of education

All financial barriers to education should be removed. This is all the more important in the context of unprecedented pressures on family budgets. Welsh Government must ensure that schools and local authorities continue to support children living in poverty, by eliminating the costs associated with education in line with the duty placed upon them in the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

Children and young people consistently report how poverty can limit their ability to fully participate at school, by missing out on expensive school trips and activities arranged both in and out of school. Welsh Government should ensure that all schools fully adhere to equal opportunities principles and that no additional costs are made for activities and essential items required for school, such as costly school uniform policies, equipment and materials for Art, Design and Technology and Home Economics classes. Financial barriers for children's participation lead to children feeling stigmatized and 'different,' and increase the potential for bullying.

Funding allocated under the Welsh Government's School Uniform Grant should continue, and the level allocated should be assessed in line with growing pressures on family budgets.

5. Maintain key entitlements for children and their families

Free School Meals (FSM) and Free Breakfasts are both important entitlements for children and

their families in Wales.

Data shows that the performance of pupils eligible for FSM is lower than those not eligible at every stage of their education experience. The introduction of Universal Credit will mean that the current criteria for identifying entitlement for FSM will no longer apply. Any revised eligibility framework should not result in the reduction of the number of children eligible for support. Rather, the Welsh Government should take the opportunity to extend entitlement to include other children in low income households not currently entitled, commit to increasing uptake and address on-going issues of stigma that surround current arrangements. The replacement system should not undermine existing arrangements for monitoring and tracking the attainment of poorer pupils, and the allocation of funding which are based on FSM eligibility.

Though we welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to continue the provision of Free Breakfasts, we note that the School Standards and Organisation Act 2013 outlines a move from a ring-fenced grant to the RSG. We are concerned that this could jeopardise the commitment to safeguard free breakfasts and possibly threaten universal provision. We recommend that the Welsh Government review this decision and continue to monitor the number of schools engaging, noting that 29% of schools in Wales still do not provide free breakfasts after six years of the scheme, and the uptake amongst families from low-income backgrounds. At the very least, the Welsh Government should ensure that Free Breakfasts are available for children living in Community First Cluster areas.

6. Prioritise narrowing the poverty gap in education and addressing educational outcomes

The Welsh Government's stated objective to improve standards for all learners is welcome and we are also pleased that the Welsh Government has made 'reducing the impact of poverty on educational achievement' one of three national priorities for education. That progress on the other two strategic priorities on Literacy and Numeracy are envisaged to have a cumulative impact to help bridge the poverty gap in education is also welcome. We welcome the recent address by the Minister for Education that tackling the link between poverty and poor academic achievement must become one of the top Welsh Government top priorities

Welsh Government should strengthen their guidance for schools and local authorities. Guidance should draw on evidence of best practice and promote the sharing of knowledge of 'what works' in reducing the impact of poverty on education. Welsh Government should work with Local Authority Education Consortia to ensure that in the challenging work they are remitted to undertake with schools, they have as one of their core priorities reducing the poverty gap in schools. This should also include training on the effects of income poverty on children in school, for head teachers, teachers and school based staff

Schools should be supported to utilise the comprehensive data sets they have available to monitor and evaluate the impact of their plans on individual student outcomes and achievements. Additional support for pupils should be in place to support the transition from primary to secondary education.

7. Schools for the Community

A growing body of research suggests that solutions for reducing the poverty gap in education lie in the development of holistic and mutually reinforcing approaches encompassing schools, parents and communities. While schools can have a significant impact on improving the achievement of disadvantaged students, they cannot do it alone and will

require both direction and support.

Welsh Government can aid the process by providing comprehensive guidance which makes clear ways in which communities, families and schools can work together to tackle the link between disadvantage and achievement. This should build on learning from the progress made through the Community Focused Schools Programme. Approaches must also be responsive to local contexts.

Drawing on recent findings by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Sutton Trust, Welsh Government interventions such as community mentoring and increased out of hours and after school activities (which do not exclude low-income families due to their cost, especially admission fees and transport costs) should be considered as key interventions that could act as conduits for a holistic approach.

Strategies for more holistic working across local programmes and initiatives should be built into local child poverty strategies as part of Single Integrated Plans being delivered at local level. All schools should be strongly involved in this process.

8. Parental engagement and life-long learning

Parents, carers and families play a vital role in a child's educational success with 85% of a child's success at school depending on the type of support and stimulation that their parents provide for learning in the home. Parental involvement is increasingly found to be central to children's academic performance. Supporting parents to ensure that their children do not fall behind is one of the key ways to break the poverty cycle and help children to develop to their full potential.

The Welsh Government should redouble efforts to work with local and third sector partners to support and promote initiatives that focus on boosting parental improvement in children's learning. The Welsh Government should continue to engage with evidence-based

programmes and activities that are supporting children in Wales' most deprived areas.

Building on earlier calls for a holistic, community focused approach to education; Welsh Government should actively support opportunities for parents to become re-engaged in education and promote lifelong learning opportunities, ideally through contact with local schools and FE/HE colleges.



Health & Well-Being

Overarching call: EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to be free of ill health

1. Preventing ill-health and tackling health inequities

The Welsh Government should ensure that the priorities outlined in the Fairer Health Outcomes for All: Reducing Inequities in Health Strategic National Plan are sufficiently resourced and fully implemented. This will be key to mitigate the effects of poverty and to help close the gap. Universal services must be fully protected and recognised as the foundation for improving the health and well being of the whole population and addressing the significant lifestyle challenges presented in the Welsh Health Survey 2012. Effective, evidence based targeted programmes for those most vulnerable and at risk should also be in place within this universal context. Health inequities cannot be tackled in isolation or through a single policy, programme or service and will require a cross departmental approach across Government and the concerted commitment from all partners. As evidence has shown, the combined impact from a number of complimentary programmes and services will achieve greater success than any one single programme or initiative alone.

2. Food Poverty Strategy for Wales

Evidence is showing that food poverty is an increasing problem for low income families in Wales, underlined by the increase in the growth of foodbanks throughout Wales and in the number of families accessing crisis food provision. Whilst foodbanks are serving a much needed emergency function in the current economic climate, the Welsh Government should develop a robust social policy response to the problem of food poverty in Wales. Through working with local and regional partners, the Welsh Government should develop and identify sustainable solutions. A holistic food poverty strategy and a national food poverty indicator should be developed which could include existing provision and programmes through schools but would also need to address access to

food in school holidays and the accessibility of fresh, nutritious food locally. Working with local authorities, co-operatives and third sector partners, 'eating well' principles should be extended to all settings that cater for children and families, such as leisure centres, youth clubs and childcare facilities and maximum compliance should be sought and monitored.

3. School meals: Extending entitlement and increasing uptake

The Welsh Government should ensure that all schools meet the nutritional standards set for school lunches and ensure that effective information and advice is provided around eating healthily and Free School Meal entitlement. In light of changes announced through Universal Credit, the progress made by the Scottish Government in extending their free school meals service to areas of disadvantaged, and proposals currently being considered in England, it would be timely for the Welsh Government to give full consideration to extending free school meal entitlement to all pupils through a phased implementation process from April 2014. This would not only eliminate the costly and bureaucratic administration process but would also help increase uptake and contribute to improving health outcomes of the poorest through children receiving at least one healthy meal a day. The recognised existing problems around registration and uptake of free school meals under the present system would also be addressed together with the stigma associated with current arrangements.

4. School Breakfasts – Increasing uptake (schools and pupils)

We welcome current proposals under the Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure 2009 to ensure that school breakfasts meet expected minimum nutritional standards and ensure that children have an opportunity to eat healthily throughout the school day. Whilst we welcome

the Welsh Government's continued commitment to free school breakfasts, we remain concerned that 29% of schools still do not provide free breakfast provision and there is no clear roadmap with milestones or targets to ensure that free breakfasts are universally available for all primary school age children as policy is intended. Recent research by Cardiff University underlines the significant health benefits for children accessing free breakfasts and this holds the potential to alleviate pressure on family food budgets. Yet this Welsh Government flagship programme is still not available in all schools. The Welsh Government should develop an outcome focused action plan which reinforces its commitment to the Free Breakfast scheme and which includes achievable milestones towards increasing the universal participation of all primary schools and works to improve the uptake of the free breakfast scheme for children in low income families in schools which currently participate. At the very least, the Welsh Government should ensure that Free Breakfasts are available for children living in Community First Cluster areas. Progress should be reported annually.

5. Child Safety Strategy for Wales

The Welsh Government's commitment to develop a dedicated Child Safety Strategy for Wales is welcomed and should be supported by a robust plan of action with key objectives, milestones and timescales for full implementation to achieve positive change. The Strategy should include priorities across all Government departments and give particular attention to the strong evidence base in respect of the groups most at risk and over represented in accidental injury statistics. The impact of transport on health inequalities is particularly significant in relation to child deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents. Evidence shows that the rate and severity of accidents significantly increases for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The Welsh Government should work with local authorities to extend the number of

20mph zones and traffic calming measures in areas of high risk for children and young people particularly around schools, parks and leisure facilities. This would better safeguard children from accidents and also contribute to improving health outcomes by providing safer play opportunities. The Child Safety Strategy should also pay particular attention to identifying solutions to tackle home accidents and drowning.

6. Paid Parental Leave

The Welsh Government should promote the importance of paid paternal leave which is associated with better maternal and child health, lower rates of maternal depression, lower rates of infant mortality, fewer low birth weight babies, more breastfeeding and more use of preventative healthcare. This highlights the importance of parents having access to paid parental leave during the whole of the first year as well as the availability of good quality childcare and flexible employment thereafter.

7. Health Promotion and Prevention Programmes

A life course approach to health promotion should be adopted. The Welsh Government should ensure that all children and their families have access to Health promotion and prevention programmes with a strong emphasis on the early years and pre birth period, with additional targeted support to those most vulnerable and at risk of poor health outcomes, eg, looked after children, care leavers and children in low income families. A universal healthy child programme for all health visitors should be in place as a priority alongside ensuring there is sufficient capacity to deliver. This should lead to improvements in breast feeding rates, a reduction in childhood accidents in the home, earlier detection of child protection concerns, greater support for maternal mental health and earlier signposting to other sources of help and advice. In addition we would advocate the extension of Antenatal classes, using a format that is non stigmatised, well used and accessible to all.

Family and Parenting Support

Overarching call: EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to support

1. Greater focus on universal assessment and targeted early intervention services

Universal services that are accessible to all children and families are essential to tackling early need, and in making sure children and families are able to access targeted support earlier.

Welsh Government, local government and local health boards must deliver the step-change towards early intervention by continued development and investment, to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and deprivation. Local authorities and local health boards must work together effectively to deliver a spectrum of preventative services through fully integrated, multi-agency working. Local authorities and local health boards must have a shared focus on robust early assessment of the health and emotional well-being of children and young people and needs of parents/guardians to ensure they receive the support they need.

2. Parenting

Parents have a pivotal role in helping children and young people to attain language and cognitive development, health, social and emotional wellbeing. The UNCRC recognises that they deserve support and this is a right enshrined under Article 18. Research has shown that parental stress and consistency are the two variables most associated with child outcomes and that the negative effects of low income are mainly mediated by parenting factors. Support, information, preventative action, and a network of parenting and relationship support can be crucial in helping families cope.

Local authorities and local health boards must work together to ensure all parents have access to information about local universal services, whatever their financial situation. Welsh Government should work with local

partners to develop further Flying Start outreach, to ensure families on low incomes outside Flying Start areas are able to access support.

3. Targeted, evidence-based services

We welcome the development and expansion of targeted programmes such as Flying Start and Families First. Quality of staff and training is essential to the successful delivery of evidence-based programmes. Family support policies must always take into account the needs and rights of children as individuals as there are circumstances when the family setting may not be best for a child's safety, welfare and long term outcomes.

Welsh Government should support local authorities and their partners to take a long-term view of responding to the spectrum of need, and translate this into service responses which are not hampered by short term commissioning and which have time to forge local partnerships and deliver a sustained difference to children and families. Welsh Government should ensure guidance to local authorities and partners is clear that the needs of the child should not be over-looked within a family-focussed model.

4. Childcare

Parents and carers must not be forced into employment if they do not have the support in place or access to quality, affordable childcare. This may compel them to rely on inadequate childcare or to leave children alone at home before they are emotionally or practically able to cope, with serious consequences for safeguarding and well-being. Childcare provision must be clearly focused on the needs of the child. Some parents face additional barriers for specialised childcare, particularly for disabled children and within rural areas and during school holidays. Particular gaps have also been identified for children of upper-

primary and lower secondary school age and provision through the medium of the Welsh language.

The Welsh Government must honour their commitments in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan and ensure there is sufficient provision of affordable, accessible, flexible, quality and appropriate childcare support across Wales. Programmes such as Families First and Communities First cannot succeed without this and credible actions for tackling the severe childcare deficit across the whole of Wales much be prioritized.



Early Years

Overarching call: EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to have the best start in life

1. The best possible start for all children and targeted support for early years health, education and social care

We welcome the additional funding for the Flying Start programme and the expansion of the service to enable more children and parents in low income areas to benefit. The WG should continue to support and invest in the Flying Start programme and continue its commitment to fully fund the four areas of the program for each child. There should be no erosion of entitlement nor should the program be diluted in anyway. The WG should also investigate ways in which entitlement can be further extended for poorer families to access beyond the existing catchment areas.

Both the Flying Start and the Foundation Phase early education programmes are key policies that are giving children a better start to their education in Wales. Inequalities in children's educational outcomes become apparent from the early years. By age three poorer children can already be a year behind their better off peers. Investment in the early years is therefore crucial and sustained investment for the Foundation Phase is essential

Evidence shows the importance of the early home learning environment to children's prospects. Therefore, despite attempts to target additional Flying Start provision to concentrations of families living in Income Benefit households, we believe there is a strong case for further action on early interventions and family support. We recommend that Welsh Government support early years education by enabling all low-income parents to be able to have access to proven programmes that help them support their child's early learning and development. We also see the Pupil Deprivation Fund as a potential avenue for expansion to provide additional investment for nursery and pre-school services.

The Welsh Government should also investigate ways of ensuring the sustainability of Integrated Children's Centres (ICC) in Wales. Whilst much progress has been made in establishing these as centre of excellence, the commitment to funding the integrated nature of the provision remains uncertain. The WG should be clear on what the future development of the ICC model is to be, and issue guidance to enable centres to follow common approaches and thus work more efficiently. It would be informative to conduct research into the current funding arrangements and financial health of the ICC's in Wales and to assess if there has been a loss of services over the past two years.

2. Universal services for parents of 0-3s: Ante-natal and Post-natal support

There is growing evidence in Wales of there being insufficient ante natal sessions available to meet the demand. In order to support all new mothers and fathers in the most effective way possible to minimize the worst effects of poverty related issues, this support should be widely available and accessible to parents wherever they live. Through well timed intervention at this crucially important time, families needs for support with issues like smoking cessation, diet and nutrition, substance and drug use, housing and debt could also be more routinely identified and addressed.

Research should be undertaken to ascertain how accessible ante natal support is to all parents across Wales in every Local Health Board area. Anecdotal evidence suggests that despite recommendations in Government guidance there is a severe shortage of ante natal support in some areas of Wales particularly outside Flying Start areas.

3. Early Years Education and Childcare

The benefits of high quality free part time pre-school education for two year olds is well documented and the WG should plan a phased approach to making this entitlement far more widely available to all two-year-old children in Wales. The current minimum provision of 10 hours of free Early Education for all three year olds in Wales should be extended to at least 15 hours a week. Ideally this provision should be delivered in a flexible manner that allow a parent to combine this offer with their other childcare needs, enabling this to service as part of their package of childcare, for example childminders providing playgroups that offer extra day long care and education, day nurseries and wrap around provision where the offer is given in schools.

Whilst there has been growth and much improvement in the standards and accessibility of childcare and early Education provision in Wales over the past decade, it is essential that this investment is continued and enhanced. The targets set for Flying Start of having at least one leader per setting qualified to a level 5 NVQ/ Diploma should be rolled out as a target for all pre school settings in Wales, with funding made available to support the on going training of Early Years practitioners. Primary schools should be encouraged to support the childcare and Early Years settings that feed them and it is hoped that the Early Years Assessment Framework currently being developed by Welsh Government for children from 0-7 years old will present renewed expectations that this does happen

It is imperative that the funding requirements of the non statutory childcare sector is secure to avoid any degradation in the quality of services, and to ensure small voluntary organisations and small businesses are fully integrated and receive up to date information and advice. This is particularly important considering the reduction in the statutory CSSIW visits from yearly to bi-annually.

Wales has a particular shortage of services that meet the needs of Welsh speaking children and families and families who wish to introduce Welsh as second language to their children. Welsh Government should place a minimum requirement on local authorities as a percentage of their overall childcare places, to suit the percentages of children who currently access Welsh medium education in their area.



Safeguarding and Child Protection

Overarching call: EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to be safe

1. Addressing child protection issues

Research has found that adults who suffer abuse or neglect as children are more likely to go on to have low socio-economic status and experience unemployment and poverty. The stress suffered by an abused child can impair cognitive, behavioural and physical development. Childhood sexual abuse has been linked to childhood and adult mental health issues including anxiety, depression. It can impact on behaviour and relationships, including risky or harmful sexual behaviour, crime and parenting, limiting future opportunities and leading to further adversities later in life. Dealing with the consequences of childhood sexual abuse also has a significant economic cost to the Wales and the UK.

Therefore effective safeguarding and child protection measures are essential tools in helping to prevent abuse and neglect which can make children more vulnerable to poverty in late life.

2. Therapeutic services for vulnerable children

Local authorities and their partners must ensure better provision of therapeutic services for particular groups of vulnerable children, such as looked-after children and care leavers to overcome the abuse and neglect these children have experienced. Investment is necessary in services that support children and young people in the care system who have experienced trauma and emotional distress, particularly in therapeutic and mental health services.

Such services are an essential part of the toolkit in helping those who have been abused to overcome their trauma and would lead to significantly improved outcomes and improved resilience to poverty.

Easily accessible, independent advocacy

services must also be available to vulnerable children to help keep them safe by ensuring they have a say about their care and the services they receive.

3. Accredited Training Framework

Welsh Government must develop outcomes supported by an accredited training framework which ensures all agencies (whether working with children or adults) are sufficiently resourced and that professionals are appropriately trained to identify when a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect and know what action to take.

4. Added support and sensitivity to children and young people who've experienced Domestic Abuse

Children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse should be given extra support especially if they've had to leave their locality to be safe. A high percentage of children and young people who've experienced domestic and/sexual abuse have a lower educational achievement. Schools and colleges should ensure that children and young people are supported in narrowing the attainment gap.

Play and Leisure

Overarching call: EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to play

1. Implementation of the Duty

In view of the importance of access to play and leisure opportunities in terms of cognitive and social development and emotional wellbeing for children and young people it is crucial that the duty under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 is properly implemented and resourced. There must be robust scrutiny of developments in meeting this duty and action is needed to ensure that access to play does not suffer as a result of the current financial pressures on local authorities. Statutory Guidance to support local authorities in assessing for sufficient play opportunities for children is in place and local authorities must make use of the toolkit to aid compliance.

2. Accessible play opportunities for young people and for children and young people with protected characteristics

It is essential that sufficient play opportunities are in place and accessible for older children, disabled children and young people with protected characteristics. Access to inclusive mainstream play opportunities should be regularly monitored and level of uptake is captured. The needs of some disabled children and young people for specialist play provision should be prioritized.

3. Removal of barriers to structured play and leisure opportunities

There is considerable divergence in term of structured play and leisure opportunities in Wales with increasing concerns surrounding the sustainability of free or affordable summer holiday play schemes. Many previous schemes funded through Cymorth are no longer in place and a lack of provision in many rural areas. It is essential that existing structured play opportunities which provide stimulating and enjoyable environments for children and young people are prioritized and safeguarded by local authorities when making budgetary decisions. Community First clusters must also ensure that play and leisure opportunities are prioritized in

their action plans given the contribution play can make to ensuing communities are healthy and learning environments in which to live.

4. Affordable access to swimming - through the Free Swimming Scheme for children and young people under the age of 16

Swimming offers children and young people an opportunity to participate in an activity, which has a great positive impact on mental and physical health. It can promote a lifelong trend in healthy living. However, children and young people from low income and benefit households often face barriers to participation due to admission and transport costs. The ECPN Cymru's Working Paper on Swimming Opportunities offers recommendations to remove these barriers including for Welsh Government to:

- Undertake a full evaluation of the Free Swimming Scheme to date which includes an analysis of the issues raised in this working paper
- To work with local authorities to address the different application of the scheme in terms of its availability (Times/days etc)
- To work with local authorities and explore the cost of swimming sessions outside the Free Swimming Scheme
- To work with schools to address any additional costs for children participating in swimming sessions within the curriculum
- To monitor the impact of any leisure centre closures or public/private sector partnerships on the Free Swimming Scheme

5. Access to the arts and cultural events and opportunities

The Welsh Government's continued commitment to support free entry to museums in Wales and subsidizing the entry cost for heritage sites is welcome. However, many children, young people and families are unable

attend cultural events such as the National Eisteddfod and arts and culture opportunities due to high entrance fees. We would welcome representation being made by the Welsh Government to those organisations which receive some level of funding by Government in respect of the need to re-examine entry costs and consider concessionary rates for low income families.



Disabled Children

Overarching call: EVERY disabled child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to live a full life

1. Improve the provision of short breaks
Section 25 of the Children and Young People's Act 2008 in Wales places a duty on Local Authorities to provide short breaks for families with disabled children and work with statutory and voluntary agencies to ensure increased access to services across Wales. This duty must be fully implemented and subject to robust monitoring arrangements. There should be a range of short break opportunities offered to ensure that families access short breaks that best fit their own needs. There is now a real opportunity through the Social Services and Well-being Bill to begin to address the need for enhanced provision of short breaks for families with disabled children. to look to consider

2. Support in education: additional learning needs

We broadly welcome the forthcoming changes to the SEN process but feel that children, young people and their families should be involved in the new definitions and processes that are being planned. We are concerned that the right to appeal against decisions regarding level of additional learning needs has not been given to parents. According to the report 'An anatomy of Economic inequality in Wales' 2011 (EHRC) pupils eligible for free school meals are 2.5 times less likely to achieve grades A* to c in core subjects, whilst people defined as either DDA disabled or having a work limiting condition are 3 times as likely to have no formal qualifications than their non disabled peers. This suggests that any initiatives to increase educational attainment must address the attainment gaps experienced by disabled young people and those living in poverty. This report cites that 74% of disabled adults are not employed.

To improve life chances, the Welsh Government must place a higher emphasis on the need for disabled young people to study for qualifications wherever possible and enable

proper work experience placements. The national statistics for Wales (February 2013) cites that pupils with SEN account for more than half of all permanent and fixed term exclusions and that those pupils who access school action and have an SEN have the highest rates of exclusion. Work must be undertaken to support teachers in teaching pupils with SEN and initiatives need to be crossing cutting so that they address issues of disability and poverty. We welcome the work the Welsh government has undertaken to find out more about illegal school exclusions, but feel that recommendations from the research they have funded needs to be put into practice with immediate effect. We have concerns regarding the number of disabled children and young people who report identity related bullying and would call upon the Welsh Government to implement a statutory consistent approach for recording bullying within schools so that data is available regarding the level and types of bullying within schools. This would be consistent with the ethos of Single Equalities Act 2010 and its subsequent action plan.

3. Extend access to post-16 further education

We welcome the recommendations of the Ministerial Task Group on additional learning needs in post 16 education to improve access to further education and increase the choice of courses for disabled students is part of the legislative framework for special educational needs. This needs to be monitored and evaluated, particularly access to on job training and apprenticeships. Many disabled young people are NEET and therefore should access the same support for training as their non disabled peers. The Welsh Government should work with local authorities to create new provision for students with complex needs in Wales to reduce expensive residential placements in specialist colleges.

4. Transition key workers

The Welsh Government should highlight the benefits having a transition key worker has to a disabled young person and encourage local authorities to fund this important role. Many local authorities have implemented various types of key working, particularly through the Early Support initiative and the European funded Real Opportunities project. Knowledge from these initiatives should be accumulated to support existing good practice in key working and enable key workers to be in place at all stages of transition, in all areas of Wales.

5. Access to early years and play provision

Disabled children in Wales do not access the same number of preschool play sessions as their non-disabled peers. Referral schemes run by MM Wales and Wales PPA enable children with additional needs to access their local pre-school setting. Improved funding will help address the longstanding inequality of access to pre-school childcare and play for disabled children across Wales. Mainstream settings, such as integrated children's centres should monitor the number of disabled children that use their service to ensure that they are serving this population and to enable them to be aware of gaps in their service provision

6. Access to Play and Leisure opportunities

The 'Fair play for disabled children' (2011) report highlights the difficulties faced by many disabled children and young people in accessing play and leisure opportunities. From issues of bullying to lack of personal support, disabled children and young people often have no activities outside of school and few friends, impacting upon extra curricula learning, social skills and peer relationships. We call for mainstream youth and play provision to be more accessible for disabled children and young people and for innovative schemes including peer mentoring or community connecting to widen the leisure opportunities currently

available for disabled children and young people. Mainstream play and youth clubs should monitor the protected characteristics of participants so that they have accurate data about gaps in access to their provision, which can then be addressed.

7. Benefit uptake and Welfare Reform

Changes to the UK benefit system are having major implications for families with disabled children. The Welsh Government must ensure that all income maximization programmes and benefit advice schemes meet the needs of families with disabled children in Wales to take up their benefit entitlements. The Welsh Government should continue a benefit uptake campaign to mitigate to effects that welfare reform is having on families with disabled children. We are disappointed that the draft Social Services and Well Being Bill does not include any mention of citizen direct support. Direct payments are often a mechanism that can enable disabled children and young people to access lifestyles that their non disabled peers take for granted and can enable widened play and leisure opportunities whilst enabling parents to have a short break from their caring role.



Income, Employment & Post-16 Education

Overarching call: EVERY young person in Wales has the RIGHT to a meaningful employment and post-16 educational provision

1. Investing in young people for the future

Targeting young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) must remain one of the Welsh Government's top priorities. Supporting young people at the right time and with the right early interventions can transform an individual's prospects for the whole of their working career and for the economy of Wales. Support must acknowledge the complex additional difficulties and financial barriers that many young people have to overcome in order to engage with education, employment or training. Much of the progress made by Welsh Government on supporting young people into employment has been targeted at those who are 'job ready' through flagship programmes such as Jobs Growth Wales, Pathways to Apprentices and Young Recruits. The Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework should bring together all support and provision for young people with a 'Pathway to Work' covering programmes from apprenticeships to Jobs Growth Wales.

2. Addressing barriers to employment

The outlook for the labour market is extremely bleak and it remains the case that it is harder for young people to find work now than was the case in 2007. Unemployment in Wales has remained above the UK level and underemployment represents a significant lag in the economy and acts as a barrier to employment for many. In Wales 19% of part time workers need more hours. As public sector budgets are cut and private sector demand remains low, this lag is creating a substantial barrier to employment for those seeking work.

The biggest causes of child poverty are jobless households and income poverty. Measures to create jobs and generate employment must go hand in hand with measures that reduce the

most challenging barriers to employment. A lack of affordable childcare, disability or life-limiting illness, and lone parenthood remain persistent challenges to employment, particularly in some of the most deprived parts of Wales. Holistic long-term work is often needed to assist parents and vulnerable young people to a point where they have the confidence to engage in education and training, and to aim for employment that is not low paid.

Welsh Government should increase the pressure on employers benefitting from Welsh Government support to encourage better pay (at least a living wage) and new jobs through major spending commitments. Specifically, employers that benefit from Government investment with major capital budgets should be encouraged to employ arrangements similar to community benefits to deliver jobs and training.

3. Addressing In-work Poverty, Living Wage and tackling the gender pay gap

Employment should always be seen as a route out of poverty, yet with more than half of all children in poverty living in households with at least one working adult, many families rely on in-work state benefits to top up their low pay. The Welsh Government should therefore pursue all avenues in the quest to address in-work poverty and develop an agreed national minimum income standard or equivalent for Wales. As an immediate practical measure, the Welsh Government should urgently pursue its Living Wage manifesto commitment. In isolation, this commitment will not alleviate poverty for families but it will be a positive step towards mitigating, shrinking and/or withdrawn welfare payments and closing the gender pay gap for the lowest paid women in Wales. As a matter of urgency, the living wage should be implemented across the public sector as well as being promoted with a major publicity campaign to encourage private sector buy in.

An ethical procurement policy should also include a Living Wage clause on public sector contracts.

4. Ensure that post-16 qualification framework and Further Education opportunities are relevant and progressive to the needs of young people

The continuation of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in Wales is welcome as it enables young people (16-18) from low income families to remain in full time education beyond post 16 compulsory level. Initiatives such as the retention of the Assembly Learning Grant for Further Education (19+) also enable young adults to continue, or further with education post 19. The Development of the 14-19 Pathways is also a positive step for those at Key Stage 4 and Post 16. Traineeships (16-18) and Steps to Employment (18+) are in existence under the Work Based Learning Model. The 14-19 Learning Pathway should include clear and accessible advice and support for students wishing to pursue vocational opportunities. It is vital that this approach is given parity of esteem with conventional academic routes to FE and employment thereafter.

As laid down in the Review of Qualifications 14-19 year olds report (Nov 2012), Welsh Government should work to develop a coherent high quality, robust and national qualification curriculum framework. There is also a need to ensure that any Welsh based qualifications framework is transferable and comparable with the rest of the UK so that they offer portability. Access to Higher Education should be based on the ability to learn rather than the ability to pay and we welcome the funding support in relation to tuition fees.

5. Welsh Government work in partnership with local authorities, leading employment agencies and the Third Sector to increase job opportunities post 16

Jobs Growth Wales is a very positive start for 16-18 year olds and will provide a route into employment for 4,000 young people. It is also positive to see that these jobs are at or above the national Minimum Wage.

Poverty rates in worklessness families remain high (58%) considerable above national 22% average and a joined up approach should be developed to ensure that young people from these families are aware of opportunities to gain skills and gain employment. There should be greater emphasis on job opportunities for young people being at the core of the larger employers in Wales (such as Councils, Health Boards etc) and that they should be mandated to provide a number of apprenticeships per year.

6. Support for young people who have Dyslexia and other Special Educational Needs to access training and employment

Young people who have Dyslexia and other SEN are more likely to need extra support when applying for employment and will often need more time to read and complete an application form. It is very particularly challenging for them to be able to concentrate for any length of time and this is exacerbated with the greater emphasis towards on-line application forms. Failure to fill an application form will often result in being penalized and their benefits stopped which can lead to greater poverty.

The Welsh Government should ensure that all agencies, which are contracted to deliver careers and employment support, the Work Programme should have dedicated training in how to support people who have Dyslexia in an understanding, sensitive and suitable way. Correspondence from official bodies should always take into account the specific needs of the recipients of the information.

7. Flexible Working Arrangements

The Welsh Government should continue to work with employers to ensure that flexible working is available to new and existing employees, and the right to request such arrangements under statutory legislation is upheld.



Financial Inclusion

Overarching call: EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to a decent standard of living

1. Supporting, co-ordinating and targeting Income Maximisation programmes

Income maximisation is a critical element of the child poverty agenda and helps to reduce the shortfall in take-up of the full range of benefits, tax credits and rebates many families are entitled to. The value of benefits not being claimed is considerable and boosting income in this way can have a significant impact on household finances.

The Welsh Government fund a number of income maximisation programmes and we would urge the continuation of work to improve the way this is targeted and co-ordinated. Linking this work with financial education, including the Money Advice Service, would also help to provide a more holistic service. The Discretionary Assistance Fund has been established to help families access financial grants in an emergency or where there is an immediate threat to health or well being. The Welsh Government must monitor the performance of the fund and ensure that families are aware of their entitlement and are able to readily access assistance.

With the biggest changes ever to the Welfare system being implemented, it is essential that families understand these changes and their entitlement to benefits. As incomes for the most vulnerable families will be reduced, it is essential that provision is made to equip people with the skills to manage on a reduced income. As the cost of living increases, there is a much bigger call on the services of food banks to help support families as they struggle to choose between eating and heating. Closer collaborations between welfare benefit advisors and energy efficiency advisors in respect of fuel poverty and energy efficiency matters must also be developed. The Welsh Government must support projects to help mitigate the impact of child poverty.

2. Access to support through financial/ debt advice services (prevention)

The Welsh Government should continue to see the value and importance of free, unbiased and independent specialist advice services that help ensure that people get support with applications and that they are helped to challenge the system where appropriate.

Debt advisers recognize that one problem often causes or results from another, so rather than addressing a single issue at a time, they look at a clients situation holistically. This way other potential problems can be identified early or pre-empted to prevent them escalating into anything more serious. Debt advice is a central part of the broader income maximisation programme and an important prevention measure that can support people to reduce household outgoings by negotiating realistic repayment plans with creditors etc.

People also need to be able to access prevention focused money advice services that helps them address changing situations in their lives such as bereavement, loss of employment and separation. Money Advisers can provide this advice which can help avoid a more serious debt situation from escalating and which can help ensure people are taking up the benefits to which they are entitled. ECPN Cymru member Citizens Advice currently provides a pan-Wales face to face money advice service currently funded by the Money Advice Service until March 2014. It is recommended that the Welsh Government encourages the Money Advice Service to continue the funding both in terms of duration and in terms of the quantity in any one year as demand continues to outstrip provision.

3. Improving financial literacy

Providing children and young people with clear, comprehensive information on money matters helps to give them a critical life-long skill, and the right knowledge and confidence to manage

their financial affairs into adulthood. The establishment of the Welsh Financial Education Unit within the Welsh Government has helped to provide and co-ordinate support for teaching financial education in schools and empowering young people to manage their finances and make financial decisions. However, the future role and funding of the Unit is uncertain. We would urge that the strategic role of this Unit is sustained and built upon over the coming years to help improve the delivery of financial education both in schools and within the wider community by providing financial capability projects via third party organizations

4. Access to affordable credit

Due to the current financial climate, more and more families are having to turn to high-cost lenders on the high street and door step in order to make ends meet and cope with the increase in the cost of living. Changing the way people think about borrowing is a big challenge which we must all play a part in addressing. The Tacking Homelessness through Financial Inclusion project funded by the Wales Government needs to be continued post 2013.

Building sustainability into more affordable lending approaches, such as credit unions, and raising awareness of these services is critical so that they can continue to provide affordable small-scale loans, savings facilities and other financial products that are more appropriate to the needs and circumstances of people living on a low income. The Welsh Government have committed to finance credit unions until 2013 and the support for this type of service must continue.

5. Monitoring the impact of welfare benefit changes

Welfare Reform is already having a detrimental impact on households with children in Wales and the pressure on low income families is predicted to escalate further. The Welsh Government should monitor and report on the impact of announced changes to the benefits system on households with children in Wales.

It is crucial that the outcome from these announcements is measured to ensure that the Welsh Government are sufficiently informed of the impact and are able to effectively lobby and engage with UK Ministers. An impact assessment should also be undertaken.



Housing and Homelessness

Overarching call: EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to a secure and decent home

1. A new approach to homelessness

The Welsh Government should ensure that homelessness services meet the needs of homeless families in an effective way. As well as access to high-quality prevention services, families may need appropriate support services to help them maintain tenancies. We welcome the new homelessness prevention duty and urge the Welsh Government to focus on positive outcomes for homeless families, including minimizing the number and length of stays in temporary accommodation.

Many households involved in Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) include children and their needs must be a priority in developing policy solutions to address any risk of homelessness. Action to address the root causes of ASB will lead to better outcomes for children than a punitive approach that destabilises families without assisting them effectively to tackle the source of their difficulties.

The Welsh Government should incorporate Leaving Home Education into the National Curriculum to help children protect themselves from the negative consequences of leaving home in an unplanned way.

2. Investing in decent homes

While the target to increase the supply of affordable homes is ambitious and welcome, this commitment still falls short of the 4,000 new affordable homes a year that the Holmans Report identified. The Welsh Government should still aim to provide as many affordable homes as possible, over and above that already promised, to meet need to the greatest extent possible. Consideration should be given to prioritising some of the £227 million capital expenditure consequential to build one- and two-bedroom affordable homes in the social rented sector.

We welcome the Houses into Home scheme,

however we believe the Welsh Government should demonstrate the impact it has made on provision of affordable homes, as opposed to housing generally. More and more families with children have no option but to be housed in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) and the Welsh Government's policy response should focus on the needs of these households. Families require stability and it is highly questionable whether short-term accommodation in the private rented sector can deliver this. The Welsh Government should consider carefully whether the discharge of the main duty in PRS accommodation is suitable for families with children.

3. Local Housing Allowance, Housing Benefit and Welfare Reform

The Welsh Government should aim to minimise homelessness as a result of welfare reform changes announced. In particular the Welsh Government should seek agreement with social landlords not to evict households for Bedroom Tax arrears accrued through no fault of their own. Landlords should pursue Bedroom Tax debt by alternative means to possession action.

The Welsh Government should consider how it can give a degree of financial protection to social landlords that agree not to evict for Bedroom Tax arrears. Local authorities should ensure that any family evicted for Bedroom Tax arrears will not be deemed intentionally homeless. Local authorities should fully top up Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budgets to alleviate hardship from welfare reform. If every local authority fully topped up the DHP pot there would be £15.3 million available to assist those hit the hardest. Families who are within two years of being eligible for the property they currently occupy should be prioritized for DHP which would help avoid the need for multiple moves and the disruption this would cause for children in terms of their education as well as social and support networks.

Fuel Poverty

Overarching call: EVERY child in Wales should enjoy the RIGHT to a warm home, adequately heated for health and comfort

1. Integrate policy to ensure no child lives in fuel poverty

The Welsh Government should ensure it further integrates work on child poverty and fuel poverty. All divisions need to share mutual responsibility and accountability for delivering the shared outcome of ensuring that no child lives in fuel poverty given the implications for the Health, Housing and Education policy agendas of children living in cold and damp environments. Households that need to spend a large part of the family income on keeping warm often have less to spend on other parts of the family budget, including food, clothing and leisure activities. Children whose homes are warm have 30% less illness at 3 years old and 20% fewer days off school in childhood.

2. Fully implement the Fuel Poverty Affordable Warmth actions and the Fuel Poverty Strategy 2010

The Welsh Government must implement the calls of the Fuel Poverty Coalition as a matter of urgency and deliver on the commitments outlined in the Fuel Poverty Strategy. The number of households experiencing fuel poverty has not only doubled in recent years but is also deepening with more children likely to have fallen into severe fuel poverty. Recent official figures from Welsh Government show that 30% of households (386,000 homes) in Wales were living in fuel poverty in 2012 and increase of 4% since 2008.

3. Effective targeting of the NEST energy efficiency programme

There is a need to ensure that the Welsh Government's flagship energy efficiency NEST programme is effectively targeted and reaching low income households with children. This should be robustly monitored and reported. A communication and marketing

strategy must set out how the programme will reach low income families that meet the qualifying criteria and the mechanisms for publicizing the entitlements for energy efficiency improvements. Engagement between NEST providers and third sector organizations must be improved and more robust joined up work between NEST and Communities First, Flying Start and Families First must also take place.

4. Workforce Development

The Welsh Government should work with partners to support a training and education programme which helps frontline workers effectively engage with vulnerable families and signpost to appropriate advice, support and energy saving programmes. Health professionals such as health visitors in particular can have a key role in supporting families in fuel poverty and awareness raising training sessions should be in place which aids their involvement.

5. Address the needs of fuel poor households living in rural areas

Fuel poverty is a problem that affects all parts of Wales, but one of the factors that distinguish fuel poverty from other types of poverty is its concentration in rural areas. Many homes in rural areas are not connected to the mains gas and are considered hard-to-treat because their built-form precludes installation of measures such as cavity wall and loft insulation. As a matter of social justice, we believe the Welsh Government should ensure schemes such as Arbed prioritize households of those vulnerable children living in rural fuel poor households. The promotion of local schemes which enable customers to collectively bulk buy oil should be encouraged.

Transport

Overarching call: EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT to access and movement

1. Improved access and flexibility

The Welsh Government should continue to work with local partners to ensure there is sufficient investment in public transport provision with high frequency and quality network in urban areas and to ensure there is integration of services. An improved and more frequent main bus service with demand responsive provision for more remote and rural areas is also required. Lack of suitable transport remains a major barrier to employment and training opportunities for many parents and young people. This is particularly acute for parents who have to accommodate childcare drop off and collection around their working day. Public transport should be fully accessible for all disabled children.

2. Addressing the cost and affordability for young people

Through the 'refresh' of the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, there was the opportunity for the Welsh Government to commit to introducing a Wales-wide national public transport discount card for young people 16-21 year olds which would have eased cost and affordability issues for young people in their quest to access employment, training and education. This opportunity has been missed. We would urge the Welsh Government to give urgent consideration and bring forward a commitment to a scheme to help young people on a national basis.

3. Non-car transport choices

The Welsh Government should work with local partners to improve the environment for pedestrians and cyclists, including more use of well-enforced speed limits of 20mph or less and quality cycle routes. The passing of the Active Travel Bill which will enhance walking and cycling networks across Wales is to be welcomed and the Welsh Government should now ensure that there is sufficient funding in place to help local partners realise the plans.

4. Safe Routes to School

The Welsh Government should continue to support the Safe Routes to School networks in Wales and to ensure that the scheme is properly marketed and there is sufficient advice and information available.

5. Improved Safety

The Welsh Government should continue to work with local partners to increase safety measure to ensure that children and young people feel safe and secure when travelling at all times. This in response to data that highlights that children and young people are the most likely victims of crime.



Rurality

Overarching call: EVERY child and young person in Wales has a RIGHT not to be disadvantaged by geography

1. Ensure that all policy documents are Rural Poverty proofed and Child Poverty proofed, and to ensure that there is interface between the two separate activities

The ECPN welcomes the independent review of rural proofing, which will be completed in December 2013 and that its recommendations will be included in the Delivering Results process. However, there should be an interface between child poverty and rural proofing to help ensure that children and young people from low-income households in rural areas are not especially disadvantaged.

2. Addressing the Communication Gap

The Welsh Government should continue to work with local partners and private sector providers to improve access to broadband and mobile phone communication in rural areas. This would help alleviate social exclusion among children and young people and break the digital divide, assist with children's learning and education as well as improve the success of rural businesses.

We welcome the Welsh Government's Broadband Support Scheme, which aims to provide minimum 2Mbps broadband services in rural Wales. We are also encouraged that the Welsh Government in its Next Generation Broadband for Wales, has committed to invest in areas where the private sector will not reach. However, the Welsh Government must ensure that broadband providers do not charge more for this service than they do for services provided in urban areas.

3. Reconfiguration of Communities First

As the Welsh Government move towards delivering the integrated Tackling Poverty Action Plan and the reconfiguration of the Communities First Programme moves forward, it is essential that specific rural child poverty

Programme have lost their status under the new programme and we remain concerned that a gulf in support for rural areas will emerge. We would urge the Welsh Government to give full consideration to how the challenges facing low income families in rural Wales will now be met.

4. Children, young people and their families living in rural Wales should be able to live their lives through the medium of Welsh

There is a lack of access to services and leisure activities through the medium of Welsh in many rural communities. Children, young people and families should be able to access services through the medium of Welsh and should be able to participate in Welsh medium social activities in rural Wales.

5. Ensure that young people and parents in rural Wales are able to be employed and access training in their locality

The levels of unemployment among young people and families in rural areas are higher than the national average. It is essential that young people are able to access employment and training opportunities in their localities. Support should be given to help them to find work, fill application forms and undertake work experience. The next phase of the Rural Development Grant and European Social Fund should be better utilised to meet the growing needs of young people and families struggling to access employment, training and skills opportunities in rural areas.

6. Ensure that children, young people and their families are able to live in affordable homes in their locality

It is imperative that housing stocks meets the needs of local people in rural Wales. There is a lack of one and two bedroomed homes in these areas. The introduction of the 'bedroom tax'

compounds the situation. Many houses are second homes or self-catering accommodation in rural areas. This increases the prices of challenges are addressed. Areas of Special Interests under the former Communities First homes. This and low employment opportunities and income means that many families are forced to leave their locality because of the lack of affordable housing. There is also a lack of social housing in rural Wales. Building new affordable housing, both private and social, would also ensure that villages in the Welsh language heartland would retain families who are Welsh speakers.

7. Ensure that there is a good public transport network, which is affordable and meets the needs of children, young people and families

A robust and affordable public transport infrastructure is essential for the sustainability of rural areas. Many families rely on public transport to take them to schools, colleges, place of work including childcare, health care and social activities. Children, young people and families often cite poor and expensive transport services as a barrier to social inclusion. Social exclusion and isolation will often lead to poor mental and physical health.

