

Tackling poverty and inequality in Wales: redressing the balance?

Recent research by the Wales Audit Office demonstrated that welfare reforms imposed by Westminster are hitting Wales the hardest with increased poverty, debt and growing use of food banks. Here is a report by Jodi Cox from Cymorth Cymru.

Looking ahead to the UK Government elections in May, it looks increasingly likely that, whoever comes into power we can expect further cuts to public services and welfare benefits, potentially pushing already marginalised people at risk of housing crisis into ever more difficult circumstances.

We know that tackling poverty and inequality is a priority for Welsh Government, and the third sector has a key role to play in helping to protect people in Wales from the impacts of spending cuts and begin to redress the balance here.

For Cymorth Cymru, the key to achieving this lies in building better links across policy areas and working collaboratively. The issues cannot, and should not, be looked at in isolation – we need to get better at making connections and demonstrating how policy change in one area can have unintended, and potentially devastating, consequences in another.

Tackling poverty and inequality cannot be confined to just one narrow department or portfolio – it is a whole Government problem. In fact, it is a whole society problem.

We know that housing is fundamental to helping people to improve their circumstances.

Various measures can be put in place to try and lift people out of poverty, but if the people they are trying to help don't have somewhere safe and secure to live, and the necessary support to live independently in that home so that they can manage their own lives, then all those other efforts are unlikely to be successful long-term.

If we are to be successful in combating inequality in Wales, it is vital that we work harder at working collaboratively, find our common ground and look at what is in the wider interest.

There are already some excellent examples of this within the Cymorth membership. Many entries for the Promoting Independence Awards in December clearly demonstrated how effective partnership working can achieve meaningful results and have a positive impact on people's lives. However, more needs to be done if we are going to make solid progress.

Cymorth has a key role to play in helping to broker new relationships and learning across policy areas, and this is a key focus of our new strategy for 2015



and beyond. This focus has also helped inform the theme of this year's annual conference – 'Redressing the balance'.

The conference will look at how – together – we can 'redress the balance' to improve the lives of people in Wales who are marginalised and at risk of housing crisis. Held in partnership with Public Health Wales, it will draw on expertise from tackling poverty, housing, health and social care, promoting greater synergy from all of us who are working to build a more equal Wales.

The Cymorth Cymru Annual Conference will take place on 24 and 25 March at the Radisson Blu in Cardiff. For tickets please visit www.cymorthcymru.org.uk or email richardbarningham@cymorthcymru.org.uk

Ministerial Meeting debates redistribution of

A discussion around food waste and food poverty was among key agenda items at the recent sector Ministerial Meeting with Carl Sargeant AM, Minister for Natural Resources.

The meeting, held in Cardiff in January 2015, also included Rebecca Evans AM, Deputy Minister for Farming and Food. The agenda had been restricted by Welsh Government to take account of the fact that the Minister for Natural Resources was only able to allocate 45 minutes to the discussion on this occasion

A key matter raised concerned feeding Britain – a strategy for zero

hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, a report of the All-Party Parliamentary enquiry that was released in December 2014. Much of the discussion revolved around the redistribution of surplus food and community grown food, such as on allotments. The Minister said he would be content to ask the new Food and Drink Industries Board to look at food waste and food poverty and he reassured the third sector that this Board would welcome engagement and dialogue with the sector. He added that the 'Community Growing Action Plan' will also be revised

Also discussed were two papers submitted by Wales Environment Link, supported by the third sector's Natural Resources, Farming and Food Forum. The first concerned funding for nature recovery and the Minister said that he would think about this in the context of the 'plastic bag levy', which is paid by shoppers in Wales. He also pledged to update the sector on discussions he will hold, with other Ministers, about how they can integrate nature conservation with their portfolios.

The second paper concerned the restoration of blanket bogs in Wales, not least as a natural means of flood control. The Deputy Minister affirmed