

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig
Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
Ymchwiliad i Dlodi Tanwydd | Inquiry into Fuel Poverty
FP 26

Ymateb gan : Comisiynydd Plant Cymru
Evidence from : Children's Commissioner for Wales

Since my time as Commissioner I have consistently highlighted that child poverty is one of the biggest challenges facing children in Wales.

In April 2019 I published my new three year plan for the final three years of my term as Commissioner. Within this one of my ambitions is to see Wales by 2022 as “a country whose government has taken new steps to reduce child poverty and its impact”.¹

Over the last two years I have also called for concrete steps from Welsh Government to make a positive difference to children living in poverty here in Wales including using levers and taking actions that are available to them as a devolved Government.

I am writing to the committee to; draw their attention that such opportunities exist within this agenda; emphasise that decision going forward will have an impact on children's rights and share relevant information from my report published earlier this year A Charter for Change: Protecting Welsh Children from the impact of poverty

Living in fuel poverty is likely to compromise a number of children's rights including; the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27), the Right to life, survival and development (Article 6) and the Right to Health and health services (Article 24) and even the right to an education (Article 28). The full text of these and all articles contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child can be found [here](#).

Between 2018 and 2019 I undertook a significant piece of work around child poverty in Wales. This involved over 550 children and young people age 5 – 21, over 300, as well as over 40 professionals working with children and young

people in poverty, including teachers, play workers and representatives of third sector organisations.

The report I published as a result of this work, [A Charter for Change: Protecting Welsh Children from the impact of poverty](#), urged Welsh Government to produce a Child Poverty Delivery Plan focusing on concrete and measurable steps to address child poverty in the short and medium term, particularly in respect of the associated costs of school.

However, I'm sure it will not come as a surprise to the committee that a host of other issues were raised during discussions, many of which are interlinked.

The cost of energy bills was raised by children, parents/carers and professionals. Children and young people are very much aware of the high costs associated with fuel and energy bills. A large majority of the children who were spoken to in year 6 at a school in South Wales, for example, identified fuel and energy bills as 'very expensive' when asked what Ceri's family (fictional child/young person whose family lives in poverty), would have to pay for.

Parents raised the cost of gas and electricity along with rent and debt, one parent described this as "a never ending cycle of getting by."² A school parents club in South Wales also spoke about these costs having an impact on their ability to improve their children's quality of life, their own feelings of guilt about not being able to take their children on trips out where cost is involved, and the impact of this upon their own mental health, well-being and self-esteem.

Professionals raised how food banks offered fuel and energy vouchers or credit alongside their food provision service, for those families in need of it. "Most of the poverty we see is in working families...families have s**t jobs with s**t pay and get up at 5am for that – it means that parents are absent and knackered and barely making ends meet. Its soul destroying." (Youth Worker, North Wales).

¹ Children's Commissioner for Wales, [Annual Report and Accounts 2018–19](#), 2019.

² Children's Commissioner for Wales, [A Charter for Change: Protecting Welsh Children from the impact of poverty](#), 2019.

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I am aware that Welsh Government is currently considering future plans in respect of fuel poverty and have shared some initial views at the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs round table event including; ensuring that any household with children (up to 18), including households that consist of an older child (young person) living independently, have the opportunity to access targeted scheme/s or programmes which can help lift them out of fuel poverty. This relates not only to the rights listed above but also Article 1 which provides that all the rights included in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child apply to anyone under the age of 18. I would however expect a fuel poverty strategy for Wales to address the needs of other vulnerable groups for whom fuel poverty also has a number of significant impacts including in extreme cases loss of life.

Secondly, Children and young people are provided with adequate opportunities to sensitively share their experiences of housing conditions and fuel poverty, and contribute to developing policy and practice in this area. This should be part of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for the action plan. This would afford children their right under Article 12; to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously

I am also conscious that work is being taken forward in respect of the First Minister’s commitment to re-engineer existing funding programmes to ensure

that they have the maximum impact on the lives of children living in poverty. I will continue to engage with Ministers and officials and emphasise the value and indeed in certain cases duty to consider the impact of children's rights when making decisions in these areas. Doing this effectively involves an awareness not only of what is being delivered but ensuring there is clear understanding of the outcomes to be achieved, current and future reach in terms of working towards equality for all children and young people. Like last year I am continuing to call upon Government to analyse the budget in the context of its impact on children and young people.

Lastly, children and young people in Wales and across the world are speaking out about climate change. Indeed earlier this year I facilitated a discussion between the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs and pupils from Atlantic College and Radnor Primary school about this issue. How fuel poverty is addressed going forward sits within this wider context, which children and young people feel so passionately about. Two young people eloquently raised with the Minister that new plans should ensure a balance between climate change and social justice is achieved. I hope that Welsh Government will work with such insight and also afford children and young people their right to exercise their voice and consider their views about issues that affect them in the here and now but also their future.