

Building a Fairer Society and Opportunity for all

Policy paper on inequality in Wales

Spring Conference 2015

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Background to Policy Document

This paper has been prepared as part of a project for Kirsty Williams AM, funded with the kind support of the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. The aim of this project is to explore the issues to overcome inequality and build a fairer society in Wales.

This paper has been approved for publication by the Welsh Liberal Democrat's Policy Committee as a Policy Paper for debate at the Welsh Liberal Democrat Spring Conference in Cardiff on 28 February - 1 March 2015.

Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom. The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area. If approved by Conference, this paper will form the policy of the Welsh Liberal Democrats.

Many of the policy papers published by the Welsh Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to implement all these proposals immediately. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next National Assembly for Wales election.

Thanks must go to all those organisations which responded to the consultation.

Foreword

The Liberal Democrats is **the** party of social justice.

At the beginning of the last century, David Lloyd George established Liberal social care credentials when he presented the 1909 People's budget by calling it a budget to raise money to wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness.

We must never forget that it was a Liberal, William Beveridge, who wrote the 1942 ground breaking report on '*Social Justice and Allied Services*'. He called for the government to address the five 'Giant Evils' of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Unemployment.

The truth is that the Welsh Government has let the people of Wales down. After 15 years of Government by Labour Wales has the lowest educational attainment and economic productivity levels in the UK.

We all know that times are tough and budgets are tight. Even Ed Balls has acknowledged that and confirmed he would follow an austerity agenda.

However, something is badly wrong with the way Wales is governed. Even the Western Mail has acknowledged that "*The Welsh Government is doing what it can to increase the skills of those without qualifications, but there remains too many who lack the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Something appears to be wrong with the strategy.*"

We need a fresh approach in Wales - a Liberal Democrat approach - where people are empowered and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. The Welsh Liberal Democrats have already shown their commitment to an equal Wales by securing:

- *increased funding for the Pupil Premium in Wales, ensuring schools have the resources to support pupils from the poorest backgrounds.*
- *funding for 3,000 new apprentices to ensure a skilled workforce for Wales as well as further education opportunities*
- *the Youth Concessionary Fare Scheme for 16-18 year olds.*

Not only do we need a stronger economy to do that, but we have to have a fairer society.



Kirsty Williams AM
Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats



Introduction

Global Context

Inequality is a global issue. Income inequality in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries is at its highest level for the past half century. The average income of the richest 10% of the population is about nine times that of the poorest 10% across the OECD, up from seven times 25 years ago.

Reducing income inequality is key to securing economic growth. In December 2014 an OECD report found that countries where income inequality is decreasing grow faster than those with rising inequality. The report, *"Trends in income inequality and its impact on economic growth"*, concluded that the single biggest impact on growth is the widening gap between the lower middle class and poor households compared to the rest of society. Countries that promote equal opportunity for all from an early age are those that will grow and prosper. Education is the key: a lack of investment in education by the poor is the main factor behind inequality hurting growth.¹

There is a passionate debate about the role of the "super rich" on generating wealth for all. Over recent decades UK Government policy has been to attract and retain extremely wealthy people in the belief that their wealth would "trickle down" to benefit the general population. For example, in 1979 the highest income tax rate was reduced from 83% to 60%. There are now more billionaires per head of population in the UK than anywhere else. The UK is currently perceived as the best tax haven in the world, more so than countries like Switzerland. However, the influential economist, Professor Thomas Piketty, author of *"Capital in the 21st Century"* believes that having a large middle class is very important for the economy to develop. He argues that, if the wealth of billionaires continues to rapidly rise, the middle class will decline. If current trends continue the majority of Britain will be renters by 2032.

Impact on Wales

External observers are already noting the poor state of social justice in Wales. The Guardian columnist, Sir Simon Jenkins, wrote that, "The Welsh economy since devolution has moved to bottom of the UK's 12 regions. Growth moved in step with that of the UK as a whole between 1970 and 1990, but since then it has slumped: real income in the UK has grown by 42%, and in Wales by only 27%. One in five Welsh households is now below the poverty line² and among children the figure is an extraordinary one in three. These are dire statistics".³

Remit of Paper

The remit of this paper is to consider how to address the inequality faced by those on lower income levels. It considers the support available for those in need in Wales as well as education, health, housing and transport. It is shocking that Wales performs so badly when compared with other UK and comparable sized countries. The paper also considers how public services can be improved to address inequality levels.

¹ <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/inequality-hurts-economic-growth.htm>

² According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the most commonly used approach to define poverty is relative income poverty. Each household's income, adjusted for family size, is compared to median income. (The median is the "middle" income: half of people have more than the median and half have less.) Those with less than 60 per cent of median income are classified as poor. This 'poverty line' is the agreed international measure used throughout the European Union. www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-definitions.pdf.

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/sep/30/wales-can-slumbering-dragon-awake>

There is much evidence that the risk of living in relative income poverty is higher for **all** groups of people with protected characteristics than the rest of the population. For example, 30% of working-age families in poverty in Wales contain a disabled adult contrasting with 17% who do not. Similarly, the greatest risk factor for moving into poverty is becoming a lone parent, greater even than becoming workless.⁴

A comprehensive analysis of inequality according to gender, race, disability and age was commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales - the Anatomy of economic inequality in Wales.⁵ The inequality faced by those with protected characteristics is so important that it is recommended a separate report be written to consider the issue.

This paper considers those areas devolved to the National Assembly for Wales, so does not include tax and benefits policy. The crucial role of the economy in generating the wealth necessary to overcome inequality is considered in the 2014 Welsh Liberal Democrat, *Building a Stronger Economy* policy paper.

Summary of Proposals

In Government, the Welsh Liberal Democrats would ensure:

1. more effective support for those in need by:
 - a) focusing on addressing inequality by rationalising the number of organisations and funding pots dealing with deprivation
 - b) preparing strategies to facilitate the sectors dominated by low paid employment to move away from business models based on low cost
 - c) making Wales more attractive to potential investors in higher skilled sectors
 - d) maximising the impact of finite resources on addressing inequality by reforming the public sector culture through establishing a robust leadership programme and having consistent excellence in monitoring, performance and project management
 - e) having more openness and transparency on government expenditure and people's rights
 - f) using public sector funding to generate extra capacity, activity and resources
 - g) promoting the use of Credit Unions and make them more accessible
2. improved education for all by
 - a) providing access to the Flying Start initiative to all children across Wales on the basis of need rather than geographical entitlement
 - b) improving the system of continuous professional development for teachers
 - c) establishing a Welsh Academy of Leadership
 - d) ensuring automatic eligibility for free school meals for children whose parents are in receipt of a passported benefit and ensure good nutritional standards.
 - e) further improving the impact of the pupil premium grant by making the PDG guidance more clear and concise, use of a Sutton Trust Toolkit, provide earlier confirmation of funding amounts to schools, increase sharing of best practice and extend funding.
 - f) facilitating closer engagement with parents through schools to raise pupil achievement
 - g) establishing one funding stream for programmes which get people ready for work and increase the number of apprenticeships
 - h) ensuring apprentices are not exploited and receive excellent training programmes

⁴ New Policy Institute Monitoring Social Exclusion in Wales, 2013. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

⁵ An anatomy of economic inequality in Wales - Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and methods (WISRD)

3. improved health for all by:

- a) providing additional “talking therapies” for those facing mental health challenges
- b) amending the Estyn Framework to ensure that greater focus is given to education on healthy eating and exercise in schools.
- c) properly implementing the All Wales Obesity Pathway
- d) reducing the harmful effects of alcohol by introducing a public health licensing objective and ensuring items in alcoholic drink multi-packs are not sold separately.
- e) focusing more resources on the cessation of youth smoking and tackling illegal tobacco
- f) guaranteeing access to an NHS dentist

4. improved housing for all by:

- a) raising minimum standards for private sector rented housing
- b) ensuring the Welsh Housing Quality Standard is implemented across all Wales
- c) improving enforcement of standards and training of landlords to ensure better housing quality
- d) establishing a system of redress for private sector tenants
- e) stopping landlords evicting tenants who make a complaint about essential repairs
- f) having compulsory accessible housing registers and provide advice on building disability friendly homes
- g) setting targets for the number of affordable homes to be built in Wales during an Assembly term, to be set by Ministers within six months of the Assembly election and reported on annually to the National Assembly
- h) tackling fuel poverty by incentivising private sector landlords to insulate homes
- i) encouraging and facilitating the use of direct debits to ensure people benefit from utility bill savings

5. improved transport for all by

- a) creating Passenger Transport Authorities in Wales to deliver more affordable, accessible transport services
- b) re-regulating bus services through the Transport Authorities to improve the coverage of routes in rural and poorer areas of Wales
- c) lowering ticket prices and introducing an all-Wales "Oystercard" on re-regulated bus services
- d) exploring a fairer "per mile" ticket cost for most rail journeys in Wales through the specification of the next Wales and Borders Rail Franchise
- e) improving the frequency and quality of rail travel by electrifying the North Wales Coast line in addition to the agreed lines in South Wales
- f) giving greater priority to safe routes to schools
- g) encouraging more walking and cycling by providing support for route development and education programmes

State of Inequality in Wales following 15 years of a Labour Welsh Government

A wealth gap that has existed for more than 100 years between Wales and the more prosperous regions of Britain has been widening in the first few years of the 21st Century. On many measures Wales ranks as the poorest, or at best second or third poorest performing region of the UK economically.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has been monitoring poverty and social exclusion since 1997 and reports the position in Wales every 2 years. Following a fall in the early 2000s, the overall level of relative income poverty in Wales has shown little change, with 23% of the population living in low income families in the period 2010/11-2012/13.² There has however been a big change in the composition of those on low incomes - there are now fewer people of pensionable age in poverty offset by a rise in the numbers of working age adults and families.⁶

Wales has some areas of high deprivation. These include large areas of the South Wales Valleys, parts of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea, pockets around Cardigan, Rhyl and Bangor.⁷ The causes of this deprivation include the closure of the coalmines and the decline of the tourist trade in seaside areas. Living in a deprived area is more likely to lead to higher levels of poor health, smoking and teenage pregnancy, violence, lower education levels and other difficulties.

Historical Context

Ironically, the former predominance of coal, which ended after World War I with the switch to oil in many industrial and transport uses, is at the heart of the difficulty. During the era of coal and steel - its other main industrial sector - Wales did not develop a diversified economy. Attempts to correct this fault, through post-war direction of industry, inward investment incentives and encouragement of indigenous entrepreneurs have not yet paid off.

During two decades of success in the 1980s and 1990s in attracting inward investment Wales won some of the biggest projects to come to the UK. These have now run their course. Many of the companies that were attracted to Wales by the incentives on offer then have now found it more profitable to scale back or move their operations to other global destinations. The vacuum left by a weak private sector has been mainly filled by the public sector, mostly health, education and local and national government, which now accounts for more than 60% of the Welsh economy, a figure higher than in many parts of former Eastern Europe.⁸

Wales has a very small portfolio of company headquarters, a poor record in business start-ups, a relatively small financial services sector... and below the share of UK research and development expenditure that might be expected. There have been some success stories. For example, when the Admiral Company floated on the London Stock Exchange in September 2004 and became the highest valued public company in Wales. However, such successes have been insufficiently widespread to maintain a high performing economy.

Welsh Government Approach

The Tackling Poverty Action Plan sets out how the Welsh Government plans to build resilient communities and help prevent and reduce poverty in Wales. Various funding streams and schemes have been established to support deprived communities. These include:

⁶ National Assembly for Wales, Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee Inquiry into Poverty – Joint Submission by Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Bevan Foundation

⁷ Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation 2014

⁸ http://www.clickonwales.org/wp-content/uploads/15_Factfile_Economy.pdf

European Structural Funding - Wales has been deemed one of the poorer parts of the European Union so has qualified for "structural funding" for the third time in a row to generate wealth and create jobs.⁹ The money is given to areas where the value of what is produced is three-quarters or less of the EU average. The latest tranche runs from January 2014 until 2020. There will be £1.7bn for west Wales and the valleys and £350m for east Wales.

Communities First - This programme provides funding for Lead Delivery Bodies within local Councils known as Communities First Clusters to narrow the economic, education/ skills and health gaps between the most deprived and more affluent areas. It has 3 strategic objectives to help achieve these outcomes. The programme has 52 Communities First Clusters which work with all the communities eligible for inclusion in the programme. Funding of £75 million has been provided up to March 2015.¹⁰

Families First - Families First is designed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. It emphasises prevention and early intervention for families, particularly those living in poverty.¹¹

Flying Start - Flying Start is the Welsh Government Early Years programme for families with children under 4 years of age in some of the most deprived areas of Wales. An additional £67 million funding is available across financial years 2014-15 and 2015-2016.

Lottery Funds - Funding goes to community groups and projects that improve health, education and the environment in Wales. For example, in May 2013 it was announced that £14 million would be allocated in Wales to 18 projects working with young parents and disabled people through the Big Lottery Funds Bright Futures Programme.

Council Neighbourhood Partnership Schemes - Councils give various sums of money for local schemes to help those in need.

In 2012, the Welsh Government produced its assessment on equality in, "Wales as it stands - what are the inequalities we want to tackle?"¹² It has also introduced free services to tackle inequality like free swimming, access to national museums, coach travel, breakfasts and prescriptions.

Welsh Government Outcomes

It is clear that the Government strategy is not working. Various reviews have highlighted the current extent of inequality remaining in Wales. For example, the 2014 State of the Coalfields Study concluded that, *"It's clear that of all the former mining areas in Britain those in South Wales remain the most socially and economically disadvantaged"*.¹³ It found that:

- 757,000: Number of people living in former mining communities in South Wales
- 9.8%: The proportion in the valleys who say their health is bad or very bad - higher than any other former coalfield
- 17%: The proportion of working age adults on benefits in the valleys - higher than any other former mining community
- 20%: The proportion of working age adults in the valleys who have no qualifications compared to a 15% national average.

⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-23155414>

¹⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/communities/communitiesfirst/?lang=en>

¹¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/national-evaluation-families-first/?lang=en>

¹² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/equality/publications/5503306/?lang=en>

¹³ Sheffield Hallam University Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research: The State of the Coalfields – Economic and Social Conditions in the former mining communities of England, Scotland and Wales

- 10.7%: The proportion of the valleys' population who claim disability allowance - double the national average
- 41: The number of jobs for every 100 people of working age - the lowest of any former mining area.

Wales needs a vibrant economy to generate good employment, wealth and income levels to maximise opportunity. Unfortunately, Wales has some way to go to achieve those goals.

Wales has the highest percentage of people on low incomes in the UK according to the Department of Work and Pensions. The Households below Average Incomes (HBAI) survey shows that in 2012/13 24% of workers in Wales live on low incomes after housing costs. This is a higher proportion than England, Scotland or Northern Ireland. The figures are getting worse as they are up a percentage point on the previous year.¹⁴

The Welsh unemployment rate is reducing at a slower rate than any other UK region. Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures in December 2014 show that compared to the previous year, the Welsh unemployment rate dropped by just 0.3%, compared to 1.3% in Northern Ireland, 1.6% in Scotland and the South West, 2% in the West Midlands, 2.3% in London.¹⁵

One of the indicators of Wales's economic difficulties is the low productivity levels, measured by Gross Value Added (GVA). Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures show that England has the highest GVA per head at £21,037, followed closely by Scotland at £20,013, then Northern Ireland at £16,127 and finally Wales with £15,401.¹⁶

The pay gap between the top 10% of earners in London and the bottom 10% in Wales has risen by 9.8%. This is far higher than the overall UK average over the same period. It should be noted though that the gap between the richest and poorest in Wales is reducing according to the 2000 and 2013 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE).¹⁷

The use of Equality Impact Assessments is widespread. An EIA is a valuable tool that helps public authorities make sure their policies, and the ways they carry out their functions, do what they are intended to do and for everybody. Carrying out an EIA involves systematically assessing the likely (or actual) effects of policies on people in respect of disability, gender, including gender identity, and racial equality and, where you choose, wider equality areas.

Assessment of Welsh Government Poverty Strategy

The National Assembly for Wales, Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee is conducting an Inquiry into Poverty and the Welsh Government. The outcomes are awaited. An Evaluation of the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales was done in July 2014.

Many commentators have criticised a lack of Government vision and the duplication and inefficiency caused by so many different funding pots. The 2013 Institute of Welsh Affairs Eisteddfod Lecture argued that *"Wales' economic performance has been so disastrous as to prove that use of European funding had been an unmitigated failure... Of the 57 regions in receipt of European regional fund support at the highest level in 1999 fourteen remain eligible in 2014. Of those 14 regions only two are not within Greece, southern Italy or Portugal. One of those two is West Wales and the Valleys"*.¹⁸ The lack of transparency on how the funding has been used has also been criticised.

¹⁴ www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/new-figures-show-wales-highest-7355475

¹⁵ Welsh Lib Dem Media Release: Wales lagging behind rest of UK on unemployment, December 2014

¹⁶ www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/compendiums/compendium-of-uk-statistics/economy/index.html

¹⁷ www.tuc.org.uk/economic-issues/britain-needs-pay-rise/pay-inequality-has-soared-across-london-and-south-east-2000

¹⁸ 2013 Institute of Wales Eisteddfod lecture, EU funding: Wales's latest dependency culture? by Guto Bebb MP

Poor performance of public services

The problem of inequality in Wales is exacerbated by the poor performance of many public services. Wales has lower levels of education attainment than the rest of the UK¹⁹, targets for ambulance response times are missed²⁰ and there are longer waiting lists for specialist treatment²¹. The Welsh Government's own targets to improve the quality of social housing in Wales are missed.²² The transport network leaves many isolated²³ and the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) is higher in Wales than anywhere else in the UK²⁴.

It is important that the public sector is high performing and uses finite resources as effectively as possible. Obviously there are examples of good practice across Wales. But the picture is not consistent. Many concerns have been raised about the culture prevalent in the public sector in Wales.

Impact of partnership working

Concerns have been raised about the way partnership working is done in Wales. There has been an expansion in the number and coverage of public-sector collaborations and partnerships in Wales. In each local authority area the structure culminates in a local service board (LSB) which includes all major local service providers and is tasked with developing and delivering a Single Integrated Plan (SIP). The January 2014 Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery (the Williams review) summarised views from across the spectrum.²⁵

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability said that,

"despite evidence of collaboration across public sector in Wales, there is no 'golden thread' linking different bodies' objectives, priorities and performance, and little evidence of improved outcomes as a result of the collaboration".

Local partner, Denbighshire County Council concurred,

"The complexity involved in delivering collaborations can actually have a detrimental impact on service delivery and performance as so much time and energy is focused on overcoming the political and operational barriers".

This sense of limited impact on improvement is also borne out in research commissioned by the Welsh Government,

"This picture of Welsh partnership working provided by our surveys and case studies is predominantly one of networking and information exchange rather than resource sharing and cost saving. More crudely expressed, partnerships still seem largely to be 'talking shops' rather than 'one stop shops.'"

Public Sector leadership, performance management and sharing of good practice

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development stress good leadership and performance management as key to successful organisations. However, the Williams review also raised

¹⁹ www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm

²⁰ www.wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/ambulance-services/?lang=en

²¹ www.wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2014/140109-referral-to-treatment-times-november-2013-en.pdf

²² www.insidehousing.co.uk/wales-fails-to-hit-quality-standard-target/6524227.article

²³ National Assembly for Wales Enterprise and Business Committee. Integrated Public Transport in Wales Report, May 2013

²⁴ www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/welsh-neets-highest-uk-2028170

²⁵ Commission on Public Service, Governance and Delivery, (Williams review) Full Report. Pages 52-54

concerns about the quality of leadership, performance management and sharing of good practice' in Wales. The report found that,

"It is essential that all public service organisations in Wales have management teams who are technically excellent at what they do and continually strive to improve performance, consistently recognising and adopting appropriate processes and best practice. Evidence to the Commission has consistently reinforced the very disappointing message that 'good practice is a bad traveller'. The quality of leadership is inconsistent. We have heard evidence that has highlighted a worrying range of weak organisational behaviours in existence in Welsh public service organisations. These include: Innovation, blame and risk aversion; Silo working; Passivity; Parochialism; and Short-termism/lack of vision.

There are still some worryingly high sickness absence rates in some parts of the public sector which can be an indicator of low morale. For example, the Wales Ambulance Service NHS Trust had a sickness absence rate of 7.8 per cent to the quarter ending June 2014.²⁶ During the last two financial years at least 13,163 Council staff have been sick with stress in Wales.²⁷

Labour Ethos regarding Inequality

The former Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, seemed more relaxed about an inequality gap saying, he didn't go into politics to make sure that very high earners earned less money.²⁸ His approach was similar to Margaret Thatcher who declined to condemn an increased gap between the richest and poorest 10% during her last Prime Ministers questions²⁹. This contrasts with the 2009 book, the *Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*,³⁰ which claimed that physical health, mental health, drug abuse, education, imprisonment, obesity, social mobility, trust and community life, violence, teenage pregnancies, and child well-being outcomes were much worse in more unequal rich countries.

²⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/sickness-absence-nhs/?lang=en>

²⁷ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/stress-epidemic-thats-costing-public-7166961>

²⁸ <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/04/inequality-and-after-thatcher-what-really-happened>

²⁹ House of Commons Hansard, 22 November 1990

³⁰ *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett 2009

Welsh Liberal Democrat Fresh Approach to Tackling Inequality

Since Wales has had such poor economic and social outcomes over the last 15 years, the Welsh Liberal Democrats believe there are inherent and generic problems with the way Wales is governed. We need to have a fresh approach to tackling inequality.

There are examples in Europe of how economic transformation can be achieved. Due to investment in infrastructure and skills the economy of East Germany has changed within 25 years from one of the poorest parts of Europe to the economic powerhouse that it is today.

Liberal Democrat Ethos

The Liberal Democrats believe there should be equality of opportunity for all, rather than just the simplistic goal of people having the same income levels. The Liberal Democrat Constitution states that individuals have the *“right to develop their talents to the full... We believe that the role of the state is to enable all citizens to attain these ideals, to contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives.”*³¹

These principles were followed in the achievements of the Liberal Democrats as part of the UK coalition government to ensure a fairer society. For example:

- Tackling unscrupulous money lenders by capping the interest rates charged
- Raising the income tax threshold to £10,600 to give a tax cut to £24 million people
- Giving working parents up to £2,000 towards the cost of childcare for every child

Empowering communities

Empowering communities is at the heart of the Federal Liberal Democrat policy paper on *Tackling Inequality at its roots*. The document outlined strategies to improve access to services, transparency of information and encouraging community participation.³²

The value of people being empowered and taking control of their lives was highlighted in the 2010 highly respected Marmot report, titled, “Fair Society, Healthy Lives”. The report proposed a new way to reduce health inequalities. It argued that traditionally government policies have focused only on some segments of society. To improve health for all and to reduce unfair and unjust inequalities in health action is needed across the social gradient. Universal action is needed but with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage. Key to Marmot’s approach to address health inequalities was to create conditions for people to take control over their own lives.³³

Another model for empowering communities and securing equal rights is the Citizen’s UK approach which works with diverse civil society organisations for the common good. They train local community leaders in the principles of Community Organising so they have the power to challenge politicians, councils, and businesses. They aim to transform the world, from what it is to what they believe it should be. To do this they listen to their members, ask about their concerns and develop strategies to improve communities. They work to ensure that civil society is at the negotiating table alongside the market and state, so that communities are included in the decisions that affect them. They have run many campaigns on payment of the living wage, serving of halal food and improving housing quality.³⁴

³¹ Constitution of the Liberal Democrats. <http://www.libdems.org.uk/constitution>

³² Liberal Democrats - Tackling Inequality at its Roots, August 2012.

³³ http://www.local.gov.uk/health/-/journal_content/56/10180/3510094/ARTICLE

³⁴ <http://www.citizensuk.org/about/>

Improving Public Services

The Bevan Foundation agrees with the Liberal Democrats in the importance of good public services. While acknowledging many examples of outstanding performance, they raised concerns about high profile instances of service failure, excessive top salaries, poor performance, and lack of responsiveness to service user. They believe that excellent professional and political leadership, service innovation, and the use of evidence and active engagement of service users in the design of services are fundamental to improvement.³⁵

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe the myriad organisations and funding pots should be rationalised to give more effective support to those in difficulty. This would allow a clearer and more concise set of outcomes on which partnerships in general, and local service boards in particular should focus, as recommended in the Williams review.

There needs to be radical public sector reform by having more consistency in performance management, more openness and transparency, higher quality leadership and project management training. Monitoring of implementation needs to be better. Done properly monitoring need not be about control but rather empowering people to determine themselves how to meet goals on a day to day basis while an oversight is maintained. This includes ensuring excellence in the practice of Wales's inspectorate bodies.

The Welsh Government should prioritise its activity on only adding value rather than trying to duplicate good practice that already exists elsewhere. More public money should be used to generate extra capacity, activity and resources to empower communities.

Tackling low incomes

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe strategies should be prepared to facilitate the sectors dominated by low paid employment to move away from business models based on low cost in order to allow them to pay at least the living wage. For example, social care, retail and hospitality. Extra impetus should be given to minimum wage enforcement.

Credit Unions have been a good way of paying lower interest rates for borrowing. Regular savings by members create a pool of money which is used to provide low cost loans to members. Surplus profit is returned to members in the form of a dividend.

Proposals

In Government, the Welsh Liberal Democrats would ensure more effective support for those in need by:

- a) focusing on addressing inequality by rationalising the number of organisations and funding pots dealing with deprivation
- b) preparing strategies to facilitate the sectors dominated by low paid employment to move away from business models based on low cost
- c) making Wales more attractive to potential investors in higher skilled sectors
- d) maximising the impact of finite resources on addressing inequality by reforming the public sector culture through establishing a robust leadership programme and having consistent excellence in monitoring, performance and project management
- e) having more openness and transparency on government expenditure and people's rights
- f) using public sector funding to generate extra capacity, activity and resources
- g) promoting the use of Credit Unions and make them more accessible

³⁵ Bevan Foundation response to Welsh Liberal Democrat consultation on Building a Fairer Society

Educational Equality

Early Years

Research has shown that children who are below the language targets when starting school are likely to remain behind. Children from deprived backgrounds are less likely to be read to at home, sometimes due to low literacy levels of the parents. Action for Children has called for public spending to be shifted towards early intervention to prevent future problems.³⁶

The Welsh Government's targeted early years programme, introduced in 2007, aimed at families with children below 4 years of age in some of the most deprived areas in Wales is called Flying Start. The Welsh Government expanded the scheme from 2012 onwards with the aim of doubling the number of children gaining from Flying Start to from 18,000 to 36,000 by 2016. In 2012/13, 23,579 children have had a contact with a Flying Start health visitor during the year.³⁷

The Flying Start scheme consists of **four core elements**:

- **Free 'quality' part time childcare:** for all eligible 2 to 3 year olds for 2.5 hours a day, 5 days a week for 39 weeks;
- **Enhanced health visiting:** with caseloads of 1 health visitor per 110 children in Flying Start areas, (a significantly reduced caseload compared with the generic service);
- **Parenting support programmes:** provision of parenting programmes, to be decided upon local need, which have been judged to generate positive outcomes for children;
- **Early language development and play skills:** each eligible family should have access to a language and play group. Where needed, more specialist support can be offered.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats have raised concerns about the findings of the Welsh Government Flying Start Synthesis Report which evaluated the success of the scheme in January 2014. The evaluation highlighted a number of difficulties in assessing how effective the scheme had been to date, particularly because no proper baseline was established before the project was rolled out to the whole of Wales. The Liberal Democrats also sought reassurance that sufficient Flying Start health visitors were in place to meet the caseload limits.³⁸

The State of the Nation report into social mobility and child poverty commissioned by the UK Government and chaired by former Labour Minister Alan Milburn was published in October 2014. The Commission, warned that "*nearly half of three-year-olds in Wales in the poorest areas are failing to achieve the expected level of development for their age.*"³⁹ While the ambitions of 'Flying Start' are welcome, the report echoes Welsh Liberal Democrat concerns that poor families who do not live in disadvantaged areas are excluded from the scheme.⁴⁰

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe there should be a more consistent approach with a common criteria across Wales to access the scheme. A parent's ability to access Flying Start should depend on need, not their post code.

Schools

Wales is the lowest performing UK country on the educational international stage according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The 2012 PISA survey,

³⁶ Action for Children submission to Welsh Liberal Democrat Inequalities consultation

³⁷ <http://www.assemblywales.org/Research%20Documents/Flying%20Start%20-%20Research%20note-03032014-254185/rn14-005-English.pdf>

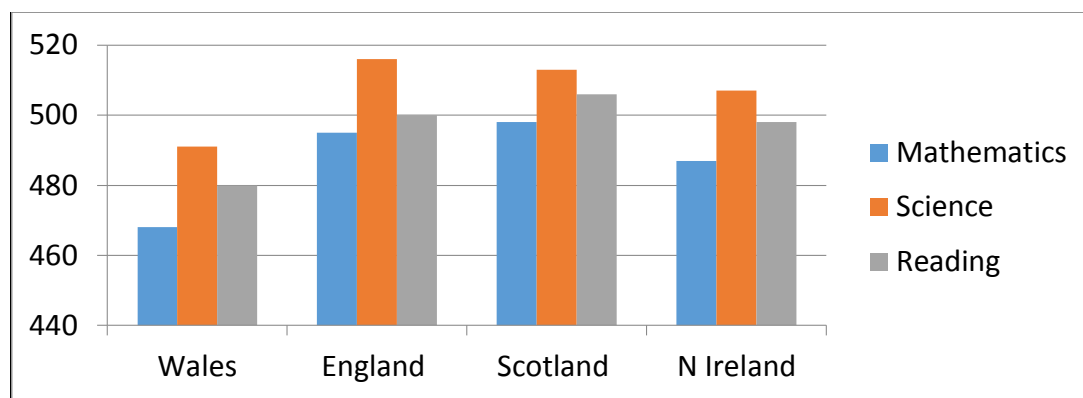
³⁸ Welsh Liberal Democrat Media Release: Flying Start roll-out should have been evidence-based"

³⁹ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/poor-children-wales-being-let-7965691#r1abs=10>.

⁴⁰ Welsh Liberal Democrat Media Release; Our poorest children are still being let down by Labour

found that of 65 countries included in the survey, Wales was 43rd in maths (formerly 40th), 41st in reading, (formerly 38th) and 36th in science (formerly 30th). The tests were taken by 500,000 15-year-olds in 65 OECD countries.⁴¹

The chart below shows how Wales compares to other UK countries in the 2012 PISA survey.



It is also of huge concern that nearly a third of local education authorities in Wales have been subject to special measures. These include Anglesey, Pembrokeshire, Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire and Merthyr.

In a major review of the schools system the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said the Welsh government lacks a long-term vision for education and does not do enough to support teachers.

It has been argued that Wales is held back by a general level of low confidence. For example, the December 2013 Final Report for Wales by the Oxbridge Ambassador Paul Murphy found that, *“Too many bright Welsh applicants appear to suffer from low self-esteem and to lack academic self-confidence, which precludes them from applying or undermines their ability to do themselves justice in the application process”*.⁴²

Importance of education to equality

Having a good education system is fundamental to improving the overall opportunity and well-being of Wales. As Katja Hall, the chief policy director of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) employers' organisation said, *“No issue matters more to the UK economy over the long term than the quality of our education system”*.⁴³ The Open University endorses this view by saying that education plays a key role “in tackling inequality, raising aspirations and improving the economy”.⁴⁴

A good education system is the key to getting people out of poverty. However, the UK Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission recently called for “urgent” change in Wales to help those from the poorest backgrounds and ensure more people go to university. In their second report, produced in October 2014, the Commission was alarmed that better-off pupils in Wales are more than twice as likely as those on free school meals to achieve five good GCSEs including English or Welsh and mathematics. These children have a lower attainment rate than their counterparts in all but six of the 152 local authority areas in England.

⁴¹ <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm>

⁴² <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/lack-self-confidence-stops-welsh-students-6400729>

⁴³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-25187997>

⁴⁴ Open University submission to Welsh Liberal Democrat consultation on Inequalities

These sentiments are echoed by ESTYN. In her 2012-2013 Annual Report, the Chief Inspector, Ann Keane, said:

"It is the case that too many pupils, at present, continue to be disadvantaged by poverty. Schools with high proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals do not currently perform as well as those with pupils from more advantaged backgrounds"... "Tackling the impact of poverty has to be central to whole-school planning. School leaders do not currently put a high enough priority on this. Schools should have a suite of distinct initiatives to support disadvantaged learners [...] in terms of:

- *Tracking pupil progress*
- *Coaching and mentoring individuals*
- *Improving literacy and crucial thinking skills*
- *Developing social and emotional skills*
- *Support for well-being include attendance and behaviour*
- *Offering a relevant and motivating curriculum*
- *Listening to learners and*
- *Engage with parents".*⁴⁵

A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report has also highlighted the link between poverty and educational attainment, *"There is strong evidence that living in poverty has a major impact on levels of educational achievement for children in Wales."*⁴⁶

Role of school leadership in education performance

The importance of leadership to school improvement, including in the mitigation of poverty, has been highlighted by ESTYN. The Chief Inspector said:

"One of the key factors in any journey of improvement is strong leadership. There has not been enough support at a national level in Wales to develop leaders systematically by offering training, coaching and mentoring programmes for aspiring middle and senior managers".

She also criticised the lack of a central source of expertise for leaders saying, *"Leaders lack a one stop shop of leadership expertise that they can call on for guidance and informal advice, sourcing of training courses, and the matching of partners for coaching and mentoring."*⁴⁷

There has been some debate about the advantages of introducing some of the English schooling structures to Wales. The most notable of these are academies which are publicly funded independent schools. Academies don't have to follow the national curriculum and can set their own term times. They still have to follow the same rules on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as other state schools. Academies get money direct from the government, not the local council. They're run by an academy trust which employs the staff. Some academies have sponsors such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith groups or voluntary groups.⁴⁸ Sponsors are responsible for improving the performance of their schools.

However, commenting on his December 2014 Annual Report, the Chief Inspector of Schools in England, Michael Wilshaw, said a lack of good leadership was often the key issue regarding

⁴⁵ HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training Wales Annual Report, 2012-2013, page 8

⁴⁶ Poverty and Low Educational Achievement in Wales: Student, Family and Community Interventions, Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2013.

⁴⁷ HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training Wales Annual Report, 2012-2013, page 13 and 8

⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/academies>

school improvement, more so than the type of school, such as an academy or local authority. He said increased monitoring needed to accompany more school autonomy.⁴⁹

The Review undertaken by Robert Hill Consulting on The future delivery of education services in Wales in June 2013 found that, *“the quality of leadership in a school is second only to teaching in its impact on student outcomes”*. He felt that the model of strong leadership is not as well-embedded across Wales as it needed to be. He met head teachers who did not feel empowered or equipped to deal with the challenges they faced and middle and senior level leaders who said they had received insufficient leadership support. He said, it was clear that Welsh education was not utilising as well as it might the strengths and resources of the high-quality leaders and leadership teams it does possess.⁵⁰

Although a National Leadership Development Group has been set up as part of the National Model for School Improvement, progress has been slow.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe there should be stronger mechanisms to ensure good school leaders. A Welsh Academy for Education and Leadership should be established. It would be outward facing, transparent and non-insular. The Academy would facilitate the sharing of good practice between experts from Wales, UK and the world. As the UK Deputy Prime Minister, said, “teachers need to “challenge and learn from each other”.⁵¹

Role of quality of teaching in education performance

Following the poor performance of Wales in the international PISA survey, the Welsh Government asked the OECD to provide an analysis of the Welsh education system. The resulting 2014 report, *Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective*, recommended a way of improving the education for children from deprived backgrounds. It concluded:

*“With a high proportion of low performers, about one in five students living in poverty and the same proportion with special education needs, and low proportion of high performers, Welsh schools need to move towards more personalised learning while still setting high expectations for every child”.*⁵²

In October 2014, the Welsh Government set out their vision and aims for education to 2020 in, *“Qualified for Life - An education improvement plan for Wales”*. The document acknowledges that *“Excellent teaching and learning comes from...excellent practitioners, who are highly skilled, who combine expert subject knowledge with a deep understanding of the learning process and who continually seek to improve their skills”...“Evidence shows that learners from deprived backgrounds may be less likely to experience good-quality teaching, but to buck the trend, they need more of it”*.⁵³

The Liberal Think Tank, Centre Forum, published a report called *“To Teach, To Learn”* in November 2013 by James Kempton which stressed the importance of continuous professional development (CPD) by teachers to improve the quality of teaching in schools. The report highlighted that CPD exists in many UK professions including law, accountancy and medicine and that many other developed nations invest far more in teacher CPD. The report called for:

- every teacher to have a bespoke CPD plan to deepen their subject knowledge and teaching skills over the course of their career

⁴⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-30398160>

⁵⁰ The future delivery of education services in Wales Review by Robert Hill Consulting, June 2013 Pg 36

⁵¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/nick-cleggs-speech-on-education-and-outstanding-leaders>

⁵² *Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD perspective*, 2014

⁵³ Welsh Government, *Qualified for Life - An Education Improvement Plan for Wales* October 2014

- new post teacher training qualifications and re-certification
- a government backed pilot scheme that would afford teachers a personal budget to fund their CPD costs
- a new Royal College of Teaching to lead on the professionalisation of teacher CPD.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe far greater emphasis needs to be given to the continuous professional development of teachers.

Pupil Premium Grant

Studies have also noted a link between those children on Free School Meals (FSM) and special education needs and behavioural issues. Where schools and parents are not given the skills and resources to support a child who needs additional support, pupils will fall further behind. Pupils with special educational needs may include gifted students as well.

Over recent years, the Welsh Liberal Democrats have secured funding for the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) which supports children in most need. Funding for continuation of an expanded PDG from 2015/16 has been secured. All schools in Wales will receive £1,050 per child on free school meals in 2015/16 to spend on improving the literacy and numeracy skills of the poorest pupils. This will rise to £1,150 for the following year. For the first time, under 5s will receive the grant (at a rate of £300 per eligible child in 2015/16) to ensure Welsh children get the best possible start in life. Schools have used this money to invest in additional learning support for students as well as updating resources for the classrooms.⁵⁴

A 2013 Welsh Liberal Democrat survey of 1,630 primary and secondary schools in Wales revealed how students from poorer backgrounds are starting to benefit from the pupil deprivation grant. The survey revealed the positive impact the pupil deprivation grant is having. Some schools noted that carefully focused spending and teaching had resulted in “*positive, measureable outcomes*” and was having a “*huge impact on improved pupil performance*”.⁵⁵ To further improve the effectiveness of the grant, the survey concluded that the paperwork involved with the grant should not be overly bureaucratic, individual grant allocations should be confirmed as soon as possible and best practice be widely shared.⁵⁶

An October 2014 Welsh Government commissioned report showed the PDG was having a positive effect. Particularly, there was evidence that a significant amount of new activity has been undertaken to support disadvantaged pupils and there has also been a culture change in schools which has improved the way they tackle disadvantage and monitor impact.

The 2014 national primary school test results in England also show the value of additional funding for disadvantaged children through the English version of pupil deprivation grant, the pupil premium. December 2014 figures showed that disadvantaged pupils continue to close the attainment gap on their peers. The results for more than half a million 11-year-olds at key stage 2 show the percentage achieving the expected level (level 4) in reading, writing and maths has risen by 3 percentage points to 79%. Two-thirds of pupils (67%) on free school meals gained a Level 4 in reading, writing and maths this year - up four percentage points on 2013.⁵⁷ This compares with 83% for non-disadvantaged pupils, reducing the attainment gap to 16 percentage points. However, more needs to be done

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe the Welsh Government needs to address the flaws in the monitoring of the PDG grant, make sure that schools follow Ministerial guidance and

⁵⁴ Media release: Welsh Lib Dems secure major £223m deal, 30 September 30, 2014

⁵⁵ <http://welshlibdems.org.uk/en/article/2013/720466/pupil-deprivation-grant-beginning-to-make-a-difference-to-children-from-poorer-backgrounds-aled-roberts>

⁵⁶ Welsh Liberal Democrats - Learning Lessons from the Pupil Deprivation Grant, September 2013

⁵⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/22000-pupils-improve-their-reading-writing-and-maths-since-2013>

make better use of the Sutton Trust Toolkit evaluation system. The regional consortia should do more to support schools to ensure even more disadvantaged children benefit from this scheme.⁵⁸ *The PDG guidance should be more clear and concise, funding amounts should be confirmed earlier to schools and funding extended.*

Healthy Eating

In England, the Liberal Democrats in Government have introduced free school meals for all pupils aged 4-7 from September 2014. The purpose of the policy is to help improve pupil attainment, end the stigma often attached to free school meals, ensure children can have a healthy and nutritious meal at lunchtime and save parents money. The move will save the average family £400 a year per child and ease household budgets. The Liberal Democrat 2014 Pre-Manifesto committed to expand the policy to all primary school pupils in England.⁵⁹

The policy has been based on in depth research. In January 2013 the Department for Education produced a Research Report which evaluated the Impact of a Free School Meals (FSM) pilot which took place in Newham and Durham local authorities. Two different approaches to extending FSM provision were tested as part of the pilot. In the local authorities piloting a 'universal' offer (Newham and Durham), all primary school children were offered free school meals. In the third area (Wolverhampton), entitlement was extended to cover pupils in primary and secondary schools whose families were on Working Tax Credit whose annual income did not exceed £16,040 in 2009-10 (uprated to £16,190 in 2010-11). The evaluation found that the universal pilot had a significant positive impact on attainment for primary school pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2, with pupils in the pilot areas making between four and eight weeks' more progress than similar pupils in comparison areas.⁶⁰

The Welsh Labour Government has received additional funding over two years as a result of this policy in England. However, they have not used the funding to introduce free school meals in Wales. If the policy was extended to Wales along the lines of the Liberal Democrat 2014 Pre-Manifesto 269,421 primary school pupils would be likely to benefit.⁶¹

The Welsh Liberal Democrats would ensure automatic eligibility for free school meals for children whose parents are in receipt of a passported benefit and ensure good nutritional standards.

Training for work

The IPSOS Mori and New Policy Institute 2014 Evaluation of the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy Final Report found that, *"The evaluation team has not seen any evidence of significant coordination between programmes aiming to help people into work and programmes aiming to create jobs. It is possible that this may limit what the second strand of the Tackling Poverty Action Plan (TPAP) can achieve".*⁶²

The revenue costs of learning and work services are met from a variety of sources; including European Funding, charities and a myriad of other areas. Providers report that this funding pattern has caused significant problems including a disproportionate amount of resources being spent on monitoring the requirements of the various sources, as well as the work required to secure continuation funding for the service.

⁵⁸ Media release: Welsh Lib Dem flagship policy having positive effect, 22 October, 2014

⁵⁹ Liberal Democrat Pre-Manifesto 2014

⁶⁰ Evaluation of the Free School Meals Pilot Impact Report, Department for Education, January 2013

⁶¹ Welsh Liberal Democrat Media Release: Welsh infants are missing out on free school meals

⁶² IPSOS Mori and New Policy Institute Evaluation of the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy Final Report (2014) para 9.12 p. 102)

Apprenticeships

The number of apprenticeships for young people in England has risen dramatically since the Liberal Democrats entered the Coalition Government in 2010 from 200,000 in 2007 to 500,000 in 2012 according to the House of Commons Library. Figures from Stats Wales showed a decline in Wales over the same period.⁶³ Chwarae Teg call for the perception that vocational education is less desirable than academic routes “to be challenged to ensure that apprenticeships offer a genuine alternative to University that leads to high level qualifications”.⁶⁴

The current lack of support for businesses wishing to take on apprenticeships is detrimental to the Welsh economy as it slows the speed at which businesses may be able to expand but also to those apprentices looking for placements and unable to complete their training due to a lack of apprenticeships available.

If the current trends continue Wales could face a skills shortage in the next 10 years as skilled workers retire with no one able to take their place. In November 2013, the Liberal Democrats launched a report into the challenges young people face when looking at their post 16 educational options. The Welsh Liberal Democrats have proposed:

- developing a school liaison programme to increase the prominence of apprenticeships in the provision of career advice to young people
- establishing an Apprenticeship Ambassador to promote positive role models
- improving the visibility of competitions to celebrate excellence in skills
- trialling a UCAS-style single application process and clearing house system to improve the parity of approach between career routes
- creating a single information, application and support system to streamline information provision and reduce drop-out and disengagement rates

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe the Welsh Government economic and labour market strategies are insufficient. There should be one funding stream for the various courses and processes to get people ready for work. This would avoid the ad hoc schemes currently run. The number of apprenticeships should be increased.

Proposals

In Government, the Welsh Liberal Democrats would improve education for all by

- a) providing access to the Flying Start initiative to all children across Wales on the basis of need rather than geographical entitlement
- b) improving the system of continuous professional development for teachers
- c) establishing a Welsh Academy of Leadership
- d) ensuring automatic eligibility for free school meals for children whose parents are in receipt of a passported benefit and ensure good nutritional standards.
- e) further improving the impact of the pupil premium grant by making the PDG guidance more clear and concise, use of a Sutton Trust Toolkit, provide earlier confirmation of funding amounts to schools, increase sharing of best practice and extend funding
- f) facilitating closer engagement with parents through schools to raise pupil achievement
- g) establishing one funding stream for programmes which get people ready for work and increase the number of apprenticeships
- h) ensuring apprentices are not exploited and receive excellent training programmes

⁶³ Stats Wales and House of Commons Library - Apprenticeship Statistics

⁶⁴ Chwarae Teg submission to Welsh Liberal Democrat Inequalities consultation

Health Equality

The Chief Medical Officer for Wales said, in her 2013-14 Annual Report, that *“Tackling socio-economic inequalities in health is one of the main challenges that exist across all developed countries”*... *“It is important that we focus on ‘preventing the preventable’; improving the safety of our services; and on clarifying the collective expectations of individuals and the health system.”*⁶⁵

Previously, she had reported *“Significant inequalities in health continue to exist across the country, men in the most deprived areas having almost eight years lower life expectancy and women about six years lower, compared with the least deprived areas”*.⁶⁶ Monmouth, on the English border, has the highest life expectancy in Wales, while Blaenau Gwent, just a few miles away, and within the same health trust/board, has the lowest.⁶⁷

“Tough challenges such as smoking and obesity and newer threats like liver disease disproportionately affect the poorest communities”.⁶⁸ People in the most deprived areas have higher levels of mental illness, hearing and visual impairment, and long-term health problems, particularly chronic respiratory conditions, cardiovascular disease and arthritis.⁶⁹ When compared with the rest of the UK, Wales has high smoking levels⁷⁰ and high alcohol consumption (particularly by younger people).⁷¹

Differences in happiness and health both appear to be strongly related to social circumstances. Happiness levels were related to being in work; only 20 per cent of employed people rating low ‘life satisfaction’ compared with 45 per cent for the unemployed. Perceived good health also correlated positively with happiness.⁷²

Impact of poor health on communities

When a nation’s health is poor the impact is far reaching. The effects are felt not only by the individuals and their families but also by communities and the country as a whole. Poor health leads to reduced output, the number of sick days taken impacts upon businesses and their ability to grow and employ more people. It impacts upon education as children miss out not only from their own sick leave but from that of teachers. The healthcare system struggles to cope with the changing demographics and the increase in chronic conditions, and it reduces enjoyment of life and the ability to interact with family and friends.

The Welsh healthcare system is struggling to cope with rising demand and a limited budget.

This paper will focus on poor health areas which can be addressed through preventative action to include mental health, obesity, smoking, alcohol and dental care.

⁶⁵ Chief Medical Officer for Wales Annual Report 2013-14, Pages 3 and 44

⁶⁶ Chief Medical Officer for Wales Annual Report 2012-13, Page 13

⁶⁷ <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Life-Expectancy/LifeExpectancy-by-LocalAuthority-Gender>

⁶⁸ Chief Medical Officer for Wales Annual Report 2012-13, Page 35

⁶⁹ <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/43764>

⁷⁰ http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_93.pdf

⁷¹ <http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/assets/files/Wales%20factsheets/A%20drinking%20nation%20-%20final.pdf>, page 15

⁷² Chief Medical Officer for Wales Annual Report 2012-13, Page 13

Mental Health

Mental health has a disproportionately negative impact on those from poorer backgrounds. Research has shown that the poorest fifth of adults are much more likely to be at risk of developing a mental illness as those on average incomes at about 24% compared with 14%.⁷³

Public Health Wales reports that 11% of the adult population in Wales has a diagnosed mental health problem. This represents 336,000 people from an adult population of 3 million. The prescription rate of anti-depressant medication has doubled over the last decade in Wales, from just over two million prescriptions in 2002 to over 4 million in 2012. The overall cost of mental health problems in Wales is estimated to be £7.2 billion a year.

The Royal College of Physicians (Wales) recognises that there is greater prevalence of smoking, drinking and obesity in those suffering from poor mental health than in the general population.⁷⁴ Depressed people had a 58% increased risk of becoming obese. In the UK, smoking rates among adults with depression are about twice as high as among adults without depression. Moreover, there is much evidence to demonstrate that alcohol is used as a coping mechanism when facing mental health problems.⁷⁵

State of mental health provision

There needs to be far more focus on mental health in the Welsh NHS. The cross party National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee Inquiry into Welsh Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) found the service *"does not have capacity to meet the demands currently placed on it."*⁷⁶ The number of vulnerable young people in Wales waiting more than 14 weeks to access child and adolescent psychiatric services has almost quadrupled, from 199 in January 2013 to 736 in January 2014.⁷⁷

In England, the Liberal Democrats have ensured that treatment for mental health conditions will be brought into line with other NHS services by the introduction of the first ever waiting time standards. From spring 2015, most patients needing talking therapies, for conditions like depression, will be guaranteed the treatment they need in as little as six weeks, with a maximum wait of 18 weeks.⁷⁸

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe the stigma around mental health should be stamped out by more focus and priority by the NHS, including talking therapies and ensure those needing mental health treatment have clarity on when they can expect help.

Obesity

Obesity, the term used to describe someone who is very overweight with a lot of body fat, is a very serious issue in Wales. The 2013 Child Measurement Programme Report showed the inequality between the more deprived and affluent parts of Wales. In Merthyr Tydfil, 34% of four to five-year-olds were overweight or obese, while in neighbouring Rhondda Cynon Taf, the figure was nearly 32%. In contrast, in the more affluent areas of Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan, the figures were 22% and 25% respectively.⁷⁹

The problem is generally caused by consuming more calories - particularly those in fatty and sugary foods - than is burnt off through physical activity. The excess energy is then stored by

⁷³ Mind Cymru submission to Welsh Government Public Health White Paper,

⁷⁴ Royal College of Physicians submission to Welsh Liberal Democrat Inequalities consultation, Dec 2014.

⁷⁵ Mind Cymru

⁷⁶ Welsh Lib Dem Media Release:- Damning report on Welsh children's mental health services, Nov 2014

⁷⁷ Welsh Lib Dem Media Release: Time for a focus on mental health - October 2014

⁷⁸ http://www.libdems.org.uk/new_mental_health_waiting_time_standards_set

⁷⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-23168523>

the body as fat.⁸⁰ There are also links between parental obesity and obese children.⁸¹ The main measurement to determine if a person is overweight or obese is the Body Mass Index (BMI). This is the weight in kilograms divided by height in metres squared. A BMI of 25-29.9 is classed as overweight, 30-39.9 is classed as obese. Over 40 is deemed morbidly obese.⁸²

Extent of the problem

Child obesity rates are higher in Wales than England according to the second annual report of the Child Measurement Programme, published in July 2014. The programme, run by Public Health Wales, showed that over a quarter of five year olds in Wales have an unhealthy body mass index compared to just over a fifth of five year olds in England.⁸³

The Chief Medical Officer for Wales concluded, in her 2012-13 report, that childhood obesity is one of the most serious health challenges of the early 21st century, with serious health consequences, significant reductions in quality of life and a greater risk of bullying and social isolation. It has trebled over the past 30 years. Half of obese school-age children are likely to become obese adults with especially high risk of metabolic syndrome. Moreover, since behaviour is often passed down through families, successful intervention is essential to safeguard the health of future generations.⁸⁴

The obesity problem extends to the Welsh adult population. The 2013 Welsh Health Survey found that 58% of adults were classified as overweight or obese, including 22% obese.⁸⁵

Experts across the developed world have raised concerns about the rise in obesity. Worldwide, there has been a startling increase in rates of obesity and overweight in both adults (28% increase) and children (up by 47%) in the past 33 years, with the number of overweight and obese people rising from 857 million in 1980 to 2.1 billion in 2013, according to a major new analysis. However, the rates vary widely throughout the world with more than half of the world's 671 million obese individuals living in just ten countries - the USA, China and India, Russia, Brazil, Mexico, Egypt, Germany, Pakistan, and Indonesia.⁸⁶

Obesity can lead to a number of serious and potentially life-threatening conditions, such as, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, some types of cancer, such as breast cancer and bowel cancer and stroke. It can also affect quality of life and lead to psychological problems, such as low self-esteem or depression.⁸⁷ The rapidly growing scale of diabetes, in particular, is alarming, as are the associated care and treatment costs. NHS Wales spending on diabetes was estimated to be £500m in 2011, or 10 per cent of the NHS Wales budget.⁸⁸

Causes of obesity

Dr Nadim Haboubi, Chair of the National Obesity Forum for Wales, an obesity doctor, believes that childhood obesity is: *"down to a combination of many things. Most important is the sedentary lifestyle. They are far less active - many parents drive them everywhere and are worried about their safety when they let them go out to play. Another factor is the availability of junk food and fizzy drinks - you go into a shop or garage and the availability of chocolates and sweets is shocking. And of course, there is the fact that overweight kids are more likely to have*

⁸⁰ <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/obesity/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

⁸¹ EM Perez-Pastor, Department of Endocrinology and Metabolism, Peninsula Medical School, Plymouth,

⁸² <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/52135>

⁸³ <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/news/33512>

⁸⁴ Chief Medical Officer for Wales Annual Report 2012-13, Page 9

⁸⁵ Welsh Health Survey 2013

⁸⁶ Marie Ng, Emmanuela Gakidou et al. Global, regional, and national prevalence of overweight and obesity in children and adults during 1980–2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013. *The Lancet*, 2014;

⁸⁷ <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Obesity/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

⁸⁸ State of the Nation 2012 - Wales, WALES, Diabetes UK Page 6

*obese parents and they are more likely to carry on being overweight until adulthood. It is a huge challenge and there is not an easy solution.”*⁸⁹

Impact of convenience and food prices on obesity

Obesity expert Tam Fry, of the National Obesity Forum, said: *“Really the answer has got to be we have got to put far more focus on prevention”*. Mr Fry said Wales was the UK’s fattest nation. *“Wales kind of vies with Scotland. England is a smudge better. Where you have deprivation and low income, you are more likely to eat food that’s cheaper and convenient rather than healthy and more difficult to obtain food.”*⁹⁰

The former Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Tony Jewell, believed too much processed food was a key problem. In 2012 he said, *“In Wales, we are eating too much processed food, high in fat, sugar and salt and drinking too many fizzy drinks. I believe the links between regular high consumption of these and obesity are also clear”*.⁹¹ Convenience foods are often marketed with a focus on “super-sized” meals or “extra” free and multi-packs.

Researchers from the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR) at the University of Cambridge found a growing gap between the prices of more and less healthy food between 2002 and 2012. They said that *“the increase in the price difference between more and less healthy foods is a factor that may contribute towards growing food insecurity, increasing health inequalities”*.⁹² This profile may change with the growth in low cost supermarkets.

Many people do not have the necessary cooking skills to make a meal from scratch so less is being cooked at home with fresh and healthier ingredients.

Impact of Physical Inactivity on obesity

People in the most deprived population quintile in Wales are less than half as likely to take exercise as the least deprived. They are half as likely again to be obese.⁹³

The NHS advises that adults aged 19-64, to stay healthy, should be active daily and do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity such as cycling or fast walking every week, and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all the main muscles (legs, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms).⁹⁴ Exercise helps keep the heart and lungs healthy, has been noted to have benefits for mental health, can improve sleep and concentration. However, a third of the population do no or very little physical activity according to Dr Tony Jewell, the Chief Medical Officer for Wales, in his annual report published in 2012.⁹⁵

Sport has a key role to play in tackling obesity. In their evidence to the National Assembly’s Children and Young People Committee Inquiry on Childhood Obesity in March 2014, Sport Wales said: *“We firmly believe that sport has a key role to play in improving the overall health of the nation and for too long has been sat on the side lines of the national debate in relation to health and obesity”*.⁹⁶ Moreover, the Welsh Sports Association stressed, *“Sport/physical recreation...is arguably the most effective way of engaging citizens... in more exercise.”*⁹⁷

⁸⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-23168523>

⁹⁰ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/welsh-communities-more-60-overweight-2493562>

⁹¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/healthandsocialcare/2012/120711obesity/?lang=en>

⁹² <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/price-gap-between-more-and-less-healthy-foods-grows>

⁹³ National Public Health Service for Wales (2004) Deprivation and Health

⁹⁴ <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/physical-activity-guidelines-for-adults.aspx>

⁹⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/healthandsocialcare/2012/120711obesity/?lang=en>

⁹⁶ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/wales-obesity-crisis-exercise-been-6772076>

⁹⁷ Welsh Sports Association submission to Welsh Liberal Democrat inequalities consultation

Impact of sedentary lifestyle

Increased car ownership and changes in employment patterns over the last 30 years are some of the causes of a more sedentary lifestyle. Wales has traditionally been a centre of manufacturing, farming and mining - physical jobs. With the decline of these industries in Wales and increased office based roles working people move less in the workplace. Coupled with increased overeating, the effect on the nation's health has been considerable.

About 75% of workers use a car or van to commute in Wales. Blaenau Gwent has the highest proportion of car use for commuting in the UK with more than eight in every 10 workers in the area to work.⁹⁸ Part of this change in behaviour may be attributed to people having to travel further for work, but it is also due to the increased availability of cars, as many households now have at least one car. Children are now often driven to school, despite many schools being less than one mile from home. People use cars for even short journeys.

When relaxing, people tend to be more sedentary and watch TV, browse the internet or play computer games, and rarely take regular exercise. More entertainment now comes from digital media, so many people now spend their working and home life in front of screens.⁹⁹

Action to address obesity

The Welsh Government All Wales Obesity Pathway sets out the approach for the prevention and treatment of obesity in Wales, from community-based prevention and early intervention, to bariatric surgery. It involves health boards working with various groups such as local authorities to address obesity across 4 levels:

- level 1 aims to ensure the availability and promotion to the public of opportunities to achieve and help maintain a healthy body weight
- level 2 provides of a range of services for children, young people and adults who wish to lose weight and have been identified as being at an increased risk of obesity
- level 3 aims to ensure availability of services for obese children, young people and adults who have one or more identified needs, and
- level 4 is about providing specialist medical services, such as bariatric surgery.¹⁰⁰

The National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee did an Inquiry on Childhood Obesity in March 2014. They concluded that *"In principle, the All Wales Obesity Pathway should be an effective way of addressing this issue. However, we were concerned to hear that the Pathway has not been fully implemented, despite being published in 2010. Much of the evidence suggested that clearer national direction is needed"*.¹⁰¹

Preventative work is being done by different health trusts to improve outcomes in deprived communities. For example, the Cardiff and Vale University Trust provides cooking classes, nutrition programmes, and access to fitness programmes.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe there should be more action rather than strategies to tackle obesity. For example, the All Wales Obesity Pathway should be properly and consistently implemented across Wales. The Estyn Framework should be amended to focus more strongly on the implementation and monitoring of education on healthy eating and exercise. Parents should be encouraged to make healthier choices for their children.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ RAC Foundation, 2013

⁹⁹ <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Obesity/Pages/Causes.aspx>

¹⁰⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/improvement/index/pathway/?lang=en>

¹⁰¹ National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee Inquiry into Childhood Obesity, March 2014

¹⁰² Welsh Liberal Democrat Media Release: More action rather than strategies to tackle obesity, July 2013

Smoking

There is inequality in smoking rates between more affluent and deprived communities. For example, 18% of adults in Monmouthshire smoke compared to 28% in Blaenau Gwent. They are neighbouring local authorities. Since about 30 per cent of the inequality in death rates in Wales is attributable to smoking related diseases, Stop Smoking Wales recognises the value of specialist services in addressing inequalities in health¹⁰³. Those in low income jobs, or those who have never worked are more likely to smoke than those with higher income jobs.¹⁰⁴

Tobacco is a preventable cause of early death in Wales and the world today. Over 5,000 premature deaths are attributable to smoking related diseases each year in Wales (Public Health Wales Observatory, 2010).¹⁰⁵

While smoking rates have declined over the last 50 years, it is estimated that 23 per cent of the adult population in Wales continue to smoke (Welsh Health Survey 2011/12).

Wales has the highest proportion of 15 year old girls who smoke in the UK, although the rates are decreasing. It is a great concern in Wales that 16% of expectant mothers continued to smoke, despite being harmful, throughout the pregnancy.¹⁰⁶ Younger mothers are more likely to smoke through pregnancy than those who are over the age of 25.¹⁰⁷

The table below of Cigarette Smoking rates for Adults aged 18 and over in the UK 2013¹⁰⁸ shows that Welsh smoking rates are higher than England and Northern Ireland.

	<i>England</i>	<i>Wales</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Northern Ireland</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>
<i>Males</i>					21.1
<i>Females</i>					16.5
<i>Total</i>	18.4	19.8	21.1	18.7	18.7

The most noticeable drop in smoking occurred in the years following the smoking ban. Newer legislation also requires that cigarettes must be out of sight behind screens or under the counter. The impact of the restrictions of tobacco advertising have had mixed reviews.¹⁰⁹

Cost to the Economy

Smoking costs the Welsh economy nearly £800m a year, according to Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Wales. The 2013 analysis concluded that it costs £790.66m a year, putting increasing pressure on businesses and the NHS. This includes £302m spent on healthcare, £288m lost to productivity through premature deaths, £49.5m lost through excess sickness absence, £4m lost to businesses through smoking breaks, £25.8m spent clearing up smoking-related litter and £45.4m lost through premature death due to second hand smoke exposure. The report also said that the cost of smoking to the economy as a whole is £145m higher than the amount generated by tobacco in tax every year.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Stop Smoking Wales Annual Report 2012-2013

¹⁰⁴ www.stopsmokingwales.com/sitesplus/documents/1006/Eng%20Smoking%20Report%20LowRes.pdf f. Pg 17

¹⁰⁵ Stop Smoking Wales Annual Report 2012-2013

¹⁰⁶ Chief Medical Officer for Wales Annual Report 2012-13, page 36

¹⁰⁷ www.stopsmokingwales.com/sitesplus/documents/1006/Eng%20Smoking%20Report%20LowRes.pdf f pg 17

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-info/cancerstats/causes/tobacco-statistics/>

¹⁰⁹ Ash Factsheet - UK Tobacco Advertising and Promotion, May 2012

¹¹⁰ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/smoking-costs-welsh-economy-800m-6091007>

15% of the tobacco market in Wales is illegal - the worst in the UK. Illegal tobacco undermines tobacco control efforts and puts children and young people at risk. A four year campaign in the North East of England reduced the illegal tobacco market from 15% to 9%.

Impact on health

About 50% of smokers will die as a result of health complications caused by their habit.¹¹¹ It is widely accepted that smoking also has a negative effect upon those around the smoker too, particularly young children and those with respiratory conditions such as asthma.¹¹²

E-Cigarettes are becoming increasingly common. There have been mixed feelings about their impact. In April 2014, the Welsh Health Minister, Mark Drakeford, AM said, *"I have concerns about the impact of e-cigarettes on the enforcement of Wales' smoking ban. That's why we are proposing restricting their use in enclosed public places. I am also concerned that their use in enclosed public places could normalise smoking behaviour"*.¹¹³ The Welsh Liberal Democrats have raised strong concerns over the lack of evidence supporting prohibition of e-cigarettes. There is no clear consensus on e-cigarettes, and unless evidence clearly shows that e-cigarettes pose a public health risk, they will continue to lead the opposition in Wales on any restrictions on their use.¹¹⁴

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that action should focus on youth specific cessation and prevention services. There also needs to be a public awareness and partnership enforcement campaign to stamp out illegal tobacco.

Alcohol

Professor Mark Bellis, Director of Policy, Research and Development at Public Health Wales, feels alcohol is *"deeply ingrained in the culture of Wales"* and hurts the poorest most. He says the public must change its relationship with alcohol to curb the high numbers of drink-related deaths.¹¹⁵ The Chief Medical Officer highlighted similar findings in her 2012-13 Report.¹¹⁶

While there has been an average decline of 9% in alcohol consumption between 1980 and 2009 in the OECD, over the same period the UK had a 9% rise in alcohol consumption.

Alcohol is now 45% more affordable than in 1980 meaning that many people are drinking more. 45% of people admit to drinking heavily in health surveys.¹¹⁷ However, sales data suggests that figure is closer to 75% as almost half of the alcohol purchases in the UK is unaccounted for in health surveys.¹¹⁸ Young people aged between 11 and 16 in Wales drink more alcohol each week than in any other part of the UK. According to the Public Health Wales Observatory, 17% of boys and 14% of girls aged 11-16 drink alcohol at least once a week - 2% higher than in England and Scotland and twice the amount of youngsters in the Republic of Ireland.

Impact of alcohol misuse

Alcohol-related admissions, despite falling slightly, remain a problem for hospitals in Wales. On average, there is an alcohol-related admission every 35 minutes. The number of admissions to Welsh hospitals where alcohol was a primary or secondary diagnosis reached 14,907 in 2012-

¹¹¹ <http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree/why-quit/smoking-health-problems>

¹¹² Ash Fact Sheet, Smoking and respiratory disease, October 2011

¹¹³ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/health-minister-mark-drakeford-defends-6911140>

¹¹⁴ www.welshlibdems.org.uk/en/article/2014/842099/welsh-liberal-democrats-oppose-labour-s-e-cigarette-ban

¹¹⁵ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/young-people-wales-drink-more-7942257>

¹¹⁶ Chief Medical Officer for Wales Annual Report 2012-13, page 36

¹¹⁷ <http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/campaign/statistics-on-alcohol>

¹¹⁸ <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/71713>

2013. This compares to 15,166 admissions in 2011-2012.¹¹⁹ Alcohol related hospital admissions are responsible for a large number of emergency admissions (particularly on the weekends), not only for the immediate effects of alcohol on the body but also for injuries sustained as a result of alcohol whether through aggressive behaviour, impaired functions, drinking and driving.

In the longer term, alcohol misuse has been linked to more than 60 medical conditions, including certain cancers, cirrhosis of the liver, high blood pressure and depression.¹²⁰ Treatment for cirrhosis of the liver is becoming more common in younger people, particularly as younger people are more likely to drink above recommended guidelines.

Potential solutions

There is ongoing discussion about the best ways in which to reduce the amount that is consumed. Drinkaware Organisation argues that consumption of some alcoholic drinks, in small amounts, has been found to be beneficial for health.¹²¹

The UK Government implemented legislation in May 2014 to ban the sale of alcohol below the cost of duty plus VAT. According to the UK Government, *"the ban prevents businesses from selling alcohol at heavily discounted prices and aims to reduce excessive alcohol consumption and its associated impact on alcohol related crime and health harms"*.¹²²

One of the most frequently discussed options is Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) which sets a minimum price per unit of alcohol. A 2012 Alcohol Concern survey found that 77% of publicans in Wales were in favour of an MUP of 50p per unit.¹²³ In response to concerns that an MUP would hit the poorest hardest, Alcohol Concern argues the financial impact of MUP on those drinking within the recommended guidelines would be minimal, whatever their income. While estimates vary, a figure of around 20p to 25p a week of extra expenditure for moderate drinkers has been widely quoted.¹²⁴ The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Wales strongly support an MUP for alcohol.¹²⁵ The Welsh Government has advocated that a minimum price be set of at least 50p per unit in response to the UK Government consultation. It said that consideration of public health issues should be a condition under the Licensing Act 2003.¹²⁶

Another way to reduce the amount of alcohol consumed is to reduce the alcohol content of the drinks. Heineken did that as part of the Public Responsibility Deal being run by the Department of Health, pledging to remove 100 million units from UK shelves by 2013.¹²⁷

The Welsh Liberal Democrats would reduce the harmful effects of alcohol by introducing a public health licensing objective and ensuring items in alcoholic drink multi-packs are not sold separately.

Dental care

A recent report by the Welsh Oral Health Information Unit, based at Cardiff University and Public Health Wales showed there is still a strong relationship between dental decay and deprivation. However, this survey showed signs of a faster improving position for children in the most deprived communities and that the state of children's teeth in Wales is beginning to improve.

¹¹⁹ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/terrifying-drinking-levels-see-welsh-7170643>

¹²⁰ <http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/campaign/statistics-on-alcohol>

¹²¹ <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/check-the-facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/effects-on-the-body/is-alcohol-good-for-the-heart>

¹²² Guidance on banning the sale of alcohol below the cost of duty plus VAT, May 2014

¹²³ Alcohol Concern Press Release, Welsh Pubs back plans for minimum alcohol price, 2012.

¹²⁴ Alcohol Health Alliance UK consultation response to : Minimum Pricing Bill (Scotland), 2011

¹²⁵ Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health submission to Welsh Liberal Democrats consultation paper

¹²⁶ Chief Medical Officer for Wales Annual Report 2012-13, page 37

¹²⁷ <https://responsibilitydeal.dh.gov.uk/partners/partner/?pa=220>

Nonetheless, Wales has been deemed the worst country in the UK when it comes to children's dental care. Dr David Tuthill, a consultant paediatrician at the Noah's Ark Children's Hospital for Wales, said that children as young as five in Wales are having to undergo surgery to remove rotten teeth because of poor diets and a lack of knowledge of tooth brushing. He said the problem was caused by a number of factors including diets consisting of sugary sweets and drinks. Wales isn't improving in the same way as other countries.¹²⁸

Nearly half of Welsh people did not receive any form of treatment from NHS dentists over a two-year period according to August 2014 Welsh Government Statistics. The statistics showed that 54.7% of the population - or 1.7 million patients - received dental treatment from the health service in the 24 months to March 31, 2014.¹²⁹

The Welsh Liberal Democrats have campaigned for increased access to NHS dentists. They undertook a survey in 2012 which found that only 37% of dentists in Wales were accepting new NHS patients. They also criticised waiting lists for new patients wanting a dentist, which was six years at one practice.¹³⁰ They highlighted that the Welsh Labour Government 2006 target for 100% of people in Wales to have access to an NHS dentist has been quietly dropped. This has led to many Welsh people being unable to access an NHS dentist. According to NHS Direct only one out of 61 dental practices in Cardiff, and one out of 42 dental practices in Swansea, accepting new NHS patients. There are similar stories across Wales.¹³¹

Causes of poor dental care

The last Adult Dental Survey, which is carried out every 10 years, found that one in five people delayed having dental work because of the cost of treatment. The survey, published in 2011, also found that 22% of people in Wales said the type of treatment they had was influenced by cost. The survey suggested even modest charges can prevent people seeking treatment and can widen dental health inequalities.¹³²

The findings also confirmed research by the British Dental Association (BDA) carried out in 2011 in England, which found concerns about the economic climate were leading patients to cancel dental appointments and defer treatments they need. The BDA said an increasing number of patients needed emergency treatment as a result.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe greater impetus should be given to local health boards to commission dental services in order to guarantee access to an NHS dentist.

Proposals

In Government, the Welsh Liberal Democrats would improve health for all by:

- a) providing additional "talking therapies" for those facing mental health challenges
- b) amending the Estyn Framework to ensure that greater focus is given to education on healthy eating and exercise in schools.
- c) properly implementing the All Wales Obesity Pathway
- d) reducing the harmful effects of alcohol by introducing a public health licensing objective and ensuring items in alcoholic drink multi-packs are not sold separately.
- e) focusing more resources on the cessation of youth smoking and tackling illegal tobacco
- f) guaranteeing access to an NHS dentist

¹²⁸ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/rotten-teeth-shock-wales-children-4050846>

¹²⁹ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/nearly-half-welsh-population-not-7651744>

¹³⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-17518352>

¹³¹ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/nearly-half-welsh-population-not-7651744>

¹³² <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/patients-putting-dental-treatment-because-1830529>

Housing Equality

Housing Quality

Housing and inequality are intrinsically linked and improving access to affordable accommodation that meets individual needs is essential to creating a fairer society.¹³³

Good quality housing is important to a country's well-being. Poor quality housing can impact on people's opportunity to achieve educationally by contributing to physical illness, and negatively affecting student performance.¹³⁴ Poor housing can make all generations suffer.

Wales has a significantly higher proportion of poor housing than England. A 2011 study jointly funded by Shelter Cymru and the Building Research Establishment (BRE) Trust found that 29% of homes in Wales have at least one Category 1 hazard, compared to 22% of homes in England. Category 1 hazards include the most dangerous in the home, including unsafe stairs/steps, poor electrics, damp and mould growth, excessive cold and overcrowding.¹³⁵

Council and social housing is required to meet certain standards through the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). Since the private rental market is less regulated the Welsh Government introduced the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 in September 2014. The Act aims to improve the supply, quality and standards of housing in Wales by improving the private rented sector, have better social housing standards, help meet people's housing needs, prevent homelessness and the difficulties often encountered by vulnerable people.¹³⁶

There is worrying evidence that housing tenants are afraid to ask for essential repairs to their homes due to fear of eviction. Shelter figures show that 213,000 people in the UK have been the victims of revenge eviction over the last year alone.¹³⁷ Although the Liberal Democrat MP, Sarah Teather introduced a parliamentary bill to address the problem, it was not passed due to filibustering by conservative MPs.

If Wales had a system of redress for private sector tenants stronger action could be taken against inappropriate private sector housing providers.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that action should be taken to stop landlords evicting tenants who ask for essential repairs or raise poor conditions in their homes.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe the Welsh Government should rigorously enforce the WHQS in those authorities who did not meet the standard by 2012 and asked for an extension.

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe there should be a minimum requirement that rented homes should have smoke alarms, safe electrics, hot and cold running water, heating, a secure front door and good insulation. There should not be carbon monoxide and damp. Accompanying the minimum standards there should be effective enforcement arrangements to ensure implementation.

¹³³ Tai Pawb - Promoting Equality in Housing submission to Welsh Liberal Democrat consultation on Inequality

¹³⁴ World Economic Forum: Housing for all project

¹³⁵ Shelter Cymru Policy Briefing: The cost of poor housing in Wales

¹³⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-regeneration/legislation/housingbill/?lang=en>

¹³⁷ http://www.libdems.org.uk/sarah_teather_s_bill_to_tackle_revenge_eviction_published

Housing Supply

Research by Leonard Cheshire shows that UK local authorities seem to have no awareness of how much of their local private rented sector stock was accessible to disabled people.¹³⁸ An accessible housing register would enable suitable matching between individuals and the properties available within their area. The National Landlord Association has expressed its support for private sector landlords being included in such registers.¹³⁹ As far as possible, houses should be built as disability friendly to ensure cost effectiveness.

Statistics show there are 90,000 people on social housing waiting lists in Wales.¹⁴⁰ At least 2,096 people in Wales have been on a housing waiting list for over ten years and 8,596 people for over five years. There needs to be an increased supply of affordable housing.

Fuel Poverty

According to the Wales Fuel Poverty Projection Tool released in 2013, 31% of social housing tenants in Wales still lived in fuel poverty in 2012, equating to 70,000 households, which is a rise of 6% from 2008 indicators. In 2012, 30% of households and 33% of vulnerable households in Wales were estimated to be in fuel poverty.¹⁴¹ Statistics from the Welsh Government demonstrate that a great proportion of households in the private rented sector are in fuel poverty than in other tenures. 36% of households that rent privately are fuel poor compared with 25% of owner-occupiers and 24% in housing association properties.¹⁴²

The latest Department for Energy and Climate Change figures reveal that 29% of households in Wales are in fuel poverty compared to 25% in Scotland and 15% in England.

Age Cymru argue that private sector landlords should not be allowed to re-let properties which do not achieve a SAP rating of at least band D for energy efficiency. This would make a significant contribution to reducing fuel poverty with no significant cost implication for government and be consistent with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

For many the cost of energy is debilitating. Even making the home as energy efficient as possible, for some, it is still only possible to heat one or two rooms, and lighting is kept to a minimum. Part of the reason for this is that many people are not aware of the assistance available. With help available from so many different sources, it can be overwhelming and confusing. Some charities work with elderly people and families to help them overcome the mountains of paperwork to find the energy schemes for which they are eligible.

There are many schemes to help make homes more energy efficient. This includes assistance with new boilers, insulation and double glazing, as well as converting to solar power or using wind turbines to generate energy for the home. Many energy companies now offer a "feed-in" tariff, allowing householders to sell any excess energy back to the National Grid.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Leonard Cheshire, No place like home: 5 million reasons to make housing disabled friendly, November 2014

¹³⁹ National Landlord Association, Response to the House of Commons Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee, February 2013

¹⁴⁰ Community Housing Cymru Group submission to Welsh Liberal Democrat consultation on Inequality

¹⁴¹ Community Housing Cymru Group submission to Welsh Liberal Democrat consultation on Inequality

¹⁴² Age Cymru submission to Welsh Liberal Democrat consultation on Inequality

¹⁴³ <https://www.gov.uk/green-deal-energy-saving-measures/overview>

Proposals

In Government, the Welsh Liberal Democrats would improve housing for all by:

- a) raising minimum standards for private sector rented housing
- b) ensuring the Welsh Housing Quality Standard is implemented across all Wales
- c) improving enforcement of standards and training of landlords to ensure better housing quality
- d) establishing a system of redress for private sector tenants
- e) stopping landlords evicting tenants who make a complaint about essential repairs
- f) having compulsory accessible housing registers and provide advice on building disability friendly homes
- g) setting targets for the number of affordable homes to be built in Wales during an Assembly term, to be set by Ministers within six months of the Assembly election and reported on annually to the National Assembly
- h) tackling fuel poverty by incentivising private sector landlords to insulate homes
- i) encouraging and facilitating the use of direct debits to ensure people benefit from utility bill savings

Transport Equality

According to the Guardian columnist, Sir Simon Jenkins, *“Given the dire state of Welsh road and rail links, transport is the most urgent. Cardiff must be one of the few European “capitals” not reached by an electrified mainline railway. The one motorway, the M4, is a perpetual bottleneck, and Wales’s north-south “transnational highway”, the A470, is still mostly a winding single-carriageway, slowed to a crawl by tractors and hay wagons”.*¹⁴⁴

The sustainable transport organisation, Sustrans, believes that “transport poverty” exists for more than a million people across Wales. They argue that the rising cost of transport and inadequacy of the public transport system means people feel excluded and isolated, unable to access opportunities, from education, jobs to healthcare, that others take for granted. This can be a particular problem in rural areas, where jobs and services are more widely dispersed, but is also an issue in more built up areas too. The post-industrial make-up of the economy in parts of Wales can mean that many have to travel outside their communities to find work. People also risk becoming socially isolated.

Car ownership can seem to be a lifestyle essential to overcome barriers to accessing essential goods and services. However, as fuel prices rise and become more volatile, many are being priced out of car ownership or forced into debt. About a quarter of households in Wales (over 300,000) already have no car, including half of all lone parents and two thirds of single pensioners, and many more people find public transport unaffordable, inaccessible and inappropriate to their needs. There are no Welsh Government targets to eradicate the challenges of transport poverty.¹⁴⁵

The overs 60s bus pass allows those over the age of 60 to access free bus travel across Wales. However, costs are increasing for everyone else. Whether travelling by bus or train, many journeys are faster and cheaper by car.

Chwarae Teg highlight that part-time workers can be disadvantaged because they often cannot access discounts through season ticket purchases in the same way as full-time workers.¹⁴⁶

Areas with particular difficulties

Wales is a largely rural country with most of its population based in the urban areas along the southern coast and the valleys. This is also where a majority of the transport is concentrated. Many rural communities have no or very limited transport services. For example a rural community may only have one train every two hours, bus services which may only operate a few days a week and high prices when these services are available.

Large scale road developments can damage social cohesion with a divide emerging between communities split in half by a road.

In his report on the state of the former coalfields, Prof Fothergill maintained that weak transport links were part of the reason for the lack of regeneration. He said, *“South Wales has been hard to regenerate. The South Wales Valleys are a bit off the beaten track geographically, there are not the good transport links or flat ground for business and distribution centres that have gone to places like Yorkshire, for instance”.*

In poorer and rural communities there can be a disproportionate number of car accidents. Over a quarter of child pedestrian casualties happen in the most deprived 10% of wards. In Wales,

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/sep/30/wales-can-slumbering-dragon-awake>

¹⁴⁵ http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/files/Access%20Denied_eng.pdf

¹⁴⁶ Chwarae Teg submission to Welsh Liberal Democrat Inequalities consultation.

children and people aged over 65 are twice as likely to be injured by motor vehicles in deprived areas as in more advantaged areas.¹⁴⁷

The Welsh Liberal Democrats believe that to ensure Wales can compete within the UK, Europe and the world economies there has to be a transport system which allows people to work and enjoy their leisure at a reasonable cost.

Proposals

In Government, the Welsh Liberal Democrats would improve transport for all by:

- a) creating Passenger Transport Authorities in Wales to deliver more affordable, accessible transport services
- b) re-regulating bus services through the Transport Authorities to improve the coverage of routes in rural and poorer areas of Wales
- c) lowering ticket prices and introducing an all-Wales "Oystercard" on re-regulated bus services
- d) exploring a fairer "per mile" ticket cost for most rail journeys in Wales through the specification of the next Wales and Borders Rail Franchise
- e) improving the frequency and quality of rail travel by electrifying the North Wales Coast line in addition to the agreed lines in South Wales
- f) giving greater priority to safe routes to schools
- g) encouraging more walking and cycling by providing support for route development and education programmes

¹⁴⁷ Environmental inequality in the United Kingdom, Wikipaedia