

Agenda – Equality and Social Justice Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 3 (Senedd)

Meeting date: 12 May 2025

Meeting time: 13.30

For further information contact:

Mared Llwyd

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

SeneddEquality@senedd.wales

Pre-meeting

(13:00– 13:30)

Public meeting

(13:30–14:45)

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(13:30)

2 Social cohesion: ministerial evidence session

(13:30–14:45)

(Pages 1 – 38)

Jane Hutt, MS, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Andrew Charles, Deputy Director, Cohesive Communities, Welsh Government

John Davies, Head of Cohesion, Welsh Government

3 Papers to note

(14:45)

3.1 Correspondence from the Minister for Children and Social Care to the Chair regarding the expansion of the Flying Start programme

(Pages 39 – 40)

3.2 Correspondence from the Minister for Culture, Skills and Partnership to the Chair of the Environment, Transport and Rural Affairs Committee regarding the Welsh Government’s legislative consent memoranda on the Employment Rights Bill

(Pages 41 – 42)



- 3.3 Correspondence from the Children's Legal Centre Wales to the Chair regarding the strip searching of children in Wales**
(Pages 43 – 63)
- 3.4 Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip to the Chair regarding speech , language and communication needs in the criminal justice system**
(Pages 64 – 65)
- 3.5 Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip to the Post-Custody Accommodation Working Group regarding support for Prisoners**
(Pages 66 – 67)
- 3.6 Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip to the Chair regarding the Welsh Government's response to the Committee's report: "Anything's Achievable with the Right Support – Tackling the Disability Employment Gap"**
(Pages 68 – 78)
- 3.7 Response from the Welsh Government to the Equality and Social Justice Committee's report on the response to the Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Employment Rights Bill**
(Pages 79 – 82)

4 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (vi) and (ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting

(14:45)

Private meeting

(14:45–15:30)

5 Social cohesion: consideration of evidence

(14:45 – 15:15)

6 Disability and Employment: consideration of response and additional work

(15:15– 15:30)

Document is Restricted



Equality and Social Justice Committee

Evidence Paper for the Inquiry into Social Cohesion

28/04/2025

This paper addresses the Inquiry terms of reference, as follows:

- The key issues which impact social cohesion in Wales and consider whether interventions need to target specific groups of people, geographical areas or particular key issues.
- Examples of best practice and other interventions/needed to support social cohesion and overcome tensions. This includes understanding the role the third sector plays in supporting social cohesion and what barriers it faces, including funding.
- What support the Welsh Government provides to community groups and organisations and identify whether there are any opportunities to provide additional support. This includes examining the limitations and barriers which exist given some aspects of support for social cohesion are reserved to the UK Government (for example policing, media and internet regulation), and what action could be taken to overcome these challenges.

The paper also addresses additional questions received from the Committee on 4 April regarding the Community Cohesion Programme.

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1. Social cohesion in Wales.

The wider context for community cohesion.

- 1.** Social (or community) cohesion is affected by a myriad of short-term triggers, world events and long-term societal factors, which can quickly create or exacerbate tensions.
- 2.** Short-term triggers would include the devastating attack in Southport on 29 July 2024. This was followed by hateful and divisive narratives and fuelled by misinformation and disinformation. These events highlighted a deliberate effort to fragment our communities and sow fear and doubt amongst minority communities. Though Wales experienced no riots, we still experienced the corrosive and real-life impact of online hate and misinformation on social cohesion.
- 3.** We will continue to see the impact of world events on cohesion within Wales. The Covid-19 pandemic led to novel tensions arising from misinformation about the virus and lack of compliance with public health restrictions. Conflicts in the Middle East can often create tensions in Wales due to the impact felt by diaspora communities, protests and boycotting of organisations perceived to be involved with either side of conflicts. The online sphere also has an increasing impact on community divisions and can lead to both short-term unrest or compound long-term societal trends such as increasing polarisation and declining trust in public bodies.
- 4.** Long-term societal factors, such as poverty, declining trust in public institutions and criminal justice agencies or negative perceptions of net migration, also impact cohesion. If people do not trust authority, such as the police, they will not reach out for help when a victim of hate crime or may be more likely to spread conspiracy theories or become perpetrators. Malign actors seek to capitalise on this loss of trust with alternative narratives which create division.
- 5.** Although Welsh Government has devolved responsibility for community cohesion and the well-being of anyone present in Wales, we do not have responsibility for justice and policing, counter-extremism, media and internet regulation, and many other areas of law or policy which can limit our ability to resolve tensions effectively.

Measuring Cohesion in Wales

6. The Annual Well-being of Wales report (under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015) includes a dedicated 'A Wales of Cohesive Communities' chapter. This chapter provides context and an assessment of progress towards community cohesion in Wales.

7. Welsh Government collects community cohesion indicators as part of the National Survey for Wales. 2024-2025 results will be available later in 2025. The last collection in 2021-2022 showed that of those surveyed:

- 84% agreed people in the area from different backgrounds get on well together;
- 82% agree people treat each other with respect and consideration; and
- 79% agreed they belong to the local area.
- Nearly two-thirds of adults (64%) agreed with all three of these measures of community cohesion.

There was no statistically significant difference between men and women, or by ethnicity, agreeing with all three statements.

8. Measuring cohesion is inherently difficult as it relates to individual perceptions which can often change. Our Well-being indicators are proxies by which we try to measure cohesion over time. The 2021-22 results show a slight decrease from 2020-21 but an increase since lows in 2016-17.

9. Nevertheless, localised areas have experienced periods of unrest and division in recent years, often sparked by short-term triggers but with underlying long-term societal factors at play. The response to UK Government proposals for asylum accommodation in Penally (2020) and Llanelli (2023), as well as disorder in Mayhill, Swansea (2022) and Ely, Cardiff (2023), are examples of this.

10. The Penally and Llanelli situations demonstrate limitations we experience without responsibility for the asylum system. Both situations related to inappropriate accommodation which would have made implementation of Nation of Sanctuary and Community Cohesion policies very difficult. Multi-agency work is underway in Llanelli to help address ongoing tensions.

11. The response to the Ely disorder learned lessons from the Mayhill situation the previous year. The Cardiff and Vale regional cohesion team was involved in brokering and driving forward the Ely and Caerau Community Plan, which is included in the best practice annex below.

Welsh Government Policy

- 12.** In recent years, our communities have faced unprecedented challenges, with impacts which are still unfolding. There is growing evidence that not all communities have coped in the same way and that those with key resources, including physical assets, strong partnerships and local advocates, tend to be more resilient to the types of shocks which all have experienced in recent years and which are likely to continue. Yet, in the most challenging of circumstances, Welsh communities have repeatedly shown the strength, resilience and unity so synonymous with who we are as a nation.
- 13.** Partners are telling us there is a need for a fresh look at community policy in the light of the pandemic, when local action was so vital. We are taking the first steps in developing a Communities Policy.
- 14.** Communities Policy involves co-productive, ways of working between Welsh Government and communities and the ways in which we can enable communities to be thriving, empowered and connected, recognising the inherent strengths which communities possess. This forms the basis of the relationship and approach seen in our work to build community cohesion between different groups.
- 15.** The Welsh Government's primary vehicle for supporting cohesion is our Community Cohesion Programme. The *'After the Riots' report*, jointly published by British Future, Belong, and the Together Coalition in September 2024, identified our Cohesion Programme as an approach which *'offers useful lessons for England.'*
- 16.** The Programme is delivered across all 22 Local Authorities by Local Authorities in collaboration with a team at Welsh Government who manages the overall Programme. For the purposes of this programme, Wales is divided into eight cohesion regions: Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan, Cwm Taf, Gwent East, Gwent West, Mid & West Wales, North-East Wales, North-West Wales, and Swansea Bay. Structuring the Programme in this way provides a pan-Wales framework to respond dynamically and collaboratively to the needs of communities.
- 17.** The Programme embeds the development of bespoke interventions that suit the characteristics of the region and its communities. This flexibility within the Programme recognises that each area has its own unique strengths and challenges. Workplans are co-produced regionally with local authorities, while aligning to the aims of the Programme established by Welsh Government.

18. Flexibility within the Programme allows the regional teams to respond to emerging and unforeseen key issues impacting communities in Wales. Past examples include:

- Assisting marginalised communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Supporting the local authority response to the sudden migration of sanctuary seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Hong Kong.
- Working with relevant partners and affected communities during periods of heightened tensions.

19. Welsh Government delivers wider initiatives which implement the Public Sector Equality Duty and build cohesion, for example:

- The [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#) is delivering Welsh Government's goal to make Wales an anti-racist nation, which includes the goal to become a Nation of Sanctuary through the implementation of the Nation of Sanctuary vision.
- The [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales](#) sets out the actions to strengthen equality for LGBTQ+ people, to challenge discrimination, and to create a society where LGBTQ+ people are safe to live their lives.
- The Welsh Government engages with a wide range of stakeholders via Ministerial-led fora such as the Wales Race Forum, the Faith Communities Forum, and the Disability Equality Forum.

20. Welsh Government is also tackling socio-economic inequality which can exacerbate social divisions, resulting in disharmony within communities. The Socio-economic Duty came into force in Wales on 31st March 2021 and requires relevant public bodies, including Welsh Ministers, to give due regard to the need to reduce inequalities resulting from socio-economic disadvantage when taking strategic decisions. Alongside the implementation of the Duty, Welsh Government is delivering targeted and universal programmes to alleviate financial pressures and help maximise income, through initiatives such as Universal Primary Free School Meals, the Schools Essentials Grant, Flying Start and the Childcare Offer.

21. Alongside the Community Cohesion Programme (discussed below) the Welsh Government seeks to support victims of hate crime and dissuade those who would be perpetrators. Support is achieved via the Wales Hate Support Centre (run on our behalf by Victim Support Cymru) which offers tailored advice

and advocacy for hate crime victims across Wales. The Hate Hurts Wales campaign (see further details in Annex) promotes awareness of hate crime and available support, as well as showing perpetrators the effect and consequences of hate. The Wales Hate Support Centre has been extended until March 2027 and the Hate Hurts Wales campaign has been increased from £216,000 to £500,000 in 2025-26 to increase its reach and effectiveness.

22. In 2025-26 we will undertake further work around hate crime perpetrators, work to support community recovery where tensions persist, and work to support users of online platforms exposed to hate and misinformation.

Community Cohesion Programme

The Committee asked a range of questions related to our Community Cohesion Programme. Responses have been grouped to avoid duplication:

1. An update on the delivery of the strategy, including details of how the Community Cohesion Co-ordinators are delivering the strategy.
2. Clarity on the Community Cohesion programme and its governing principles.
3. Any actions, if any, that were taken following the review of the community cohesion programme in 2021/22.
4. Detail of the role of the Community Cohesion Co-ordinators including how they work within local authorities, with the third sector, the police and the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership.
5. A breakdown of the funding / or how are the posts funded.
6. Any information you could share about the work of the Community Cohesion Coordinators in the 8 regions, including any examples of best practice.
7. Whether there are any strategies in place for mitigating misinformation or disinformation online

23. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 goal of a Wales of Cohesive Communities and the Equality Act 2010 (Public Sector Equality Duty and Socio-Economic Duty) drive our Community Cohesion work. We co-produce

Community Cohesion Programme workplans with local government to ensure local circumstances are taken into account when designing interventions.

24. Regional workplans are developed and agreed at the start of each year as part of the grant monitoring process and are developed to align with both national and local priorities. Progress against these workplans is monitored on a quarterly basis by Welsh Government.

25. The Programme is aligned to the Public Sector Equality Duty with all actions connected to one or more of the three aims of the duty:

(a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act;

(b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

26. The Programme is also driven by the well-being goal of making 'Wales of cohesive communities', with all regional teams diligently following the five ways of working (collaboration, integration, involvement, long-term, and prevention) which are mainstreamed throughout their work programmes.

27. In 2021, the Welsh Government commissioned Diverse Cymru through open procurement to undertake a rapid review of the Community Cohesion Programme. The aim of the review was to assess the design and delivery of the programme and identify lessons for how the programme could improve.

28. The independent review found that the Community Cohesion Programme 'was valued by most stakeholders, who felt that it focuses on the right issues and makes an important contribution to progressing Community Cohesion in Wales.'

29. The report was in favour of maintaining many aspects of the programme, praising the flexibility to deal with emerging issues and the regional structure of the Programme, although some changes were made:

- Following the review longer-term funding for the Programme was agreed. Three-year funding awards were made from April 2023, with the option of extending an additional two years from 2026 onwards.

- A small grants scheme was introduced as part of the Programme. This is administered by each region and awarded to third sector organisations and partnership projects tailored to local communities.
- We have improved mechanisms for sharing good practice between regions and strengthened collaborative working between regions. The regional Community Cohesion teams deliver a range of activities as part of their roles. Partnership working is key to the delivery of this work.

30. The aims of the Programme are to:

- a. Monitor community tensions and work with partners to mitigate them: The Cohesion teams have a critical role within regional structures for assessing and managing community tensions, working closely alongside police and local authority community safety leads. This work includes liaising with third sector and community organisations during times of heightened tensions.
- b. Support public bodies and other organisations with the provision of training on equality and inclusion related issues: Cohesions teams provide, commission, or coordinate community cohesion related training, for local authority staff, elected officials, or others with a key role to play in building community cohesion.
- c. Act as conduits between communities and public bodies to promote participation in policymaking and equality of opportunity for communities: This work includes developing an understanding of opinion shapers, local community leaders, and trusted voices in the region, and using these relationships to raising awareness of relevant issues and opportunities, such as consultations, decisions and funding opportunities.
- d. Ensure community cohesion issues are considered in the development of local authority plans and policies: The Cohesion teams play a role in ensuring that local authorities are engaging with minority groups and considering their perspectives and circumstances when developing policies or taking decisions which are likely to affect them. This would include Well-being Plans, Strategic Equality Plans, and Equality Impact Assessments, and/or Community Safety planning.

- e. Foster good relations by developing events and projects to bring people from across different communities together: The teams deliver accessible and inclusive outreach and engagement events, activities, and initiatives which foster good relations between groups through reducing segregation and increasing empathy and understanding.
- f. Deliver of a small grants scheme: Each region administers an annual small grant scheme to assist third sector community groups to promote and foster cohesion within their communities via tailored projects.

31. In 2024-25, the programme was funded at a total cost of £1,260,000 per annum, which provided £157,500 of grant funding to each of the eight cohesion regions. This funded a Regional Community Cohesion Coordinator, up to three Cohesion Officers and an activities and small grants fund per region. In 2025-26 this will increase to £1,600,000 and provide £200,000 per region.

32. Welsh Government takes a proactive approach to tackling misinformation around our policies, identifying areas where it is prevalent, and countering it through a clear, positive communications approach, accurately reflecting the reality of our work and values. Officials make use of Government Communication Resources to develop proactive and reactive approaches to addressing misinformation. The RESIST 2.0 toolkit and the Wall of Beliefs toolkit are examples of these.

33. We have developed a fact-check blog, 'For the Record', to provide short, factual information to challenge myths and misinformation on Welsh Government policy, such as the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan.

34. Further work is intended in 2025-26 to equip community leaders with the tools to navigate difficult conversations and misinformation.

35. Through our Hwb educational platform, we provide information and resources for school staff, learners and their families. There are resources for practitioners to support the teaching of media literacy as well as activities to help learners think critically about how to be responsible and ethical users of AI. The Keeping Safe Online area of Hwb also contains information about misinformation and online hate including a section specifically written with and for children and young people. Keeping Safe Online provides further resources for parents.

36. Welsh Government is working with Ofcom to understand how new Online Safety Act 2023 powers can be effectively utilised in Wales. Attempts to work directly with tech platforms to tackle online hate and misinformation have not been successful to date.

37. Best practice examples of work the Cohesion Programme has been recently involved with is set out in the Annex at the foot of this evidence paper.

2. Support for community groups and organisations.

38. Across the Welsh Government funding is allocated to community groups and organisations for a variety of different policy objectives. There are well over 40,000 voluntary organisations operating across Wales today – many of them supporting the most vulnerable people in our society. Whilst not all these groups will have cohesion as their primary purpose, active community groups can be a supportive factor for cohesion across and within communities.

39. The Social Justice portfolio provides support to communities in a number of ways, including but not limited to:

- A small grants scheme is part of the Cohesion Programme. All funded projects must deliver activities that support minority communities to address community tensions or bring communities together.
- Welsh Government continues to invest in Third Sector infrastructure, including Third Sector Support Wales (comprising WCVA and the 19 County Voluntary Councils) which enables any organisation to seek support on governance, volunteering and sustainable funding.
- An additional £2m revenue and £2.9m capital will be provided to support Third Sector activity across Wales in 2025-26, recognising and valuing the role the Third sector organisations and volunteers play in supporting our communities thrive and improve Wales' well-being.
- The Cohesion teams are required to work with community-based organisations to identify and secure additional sources of funding to support community cohesion projects. Welsh Government funding for the Third Sector also supports [Funding Wales](#), a free, online resource which contains information of local, regional and national funding opportunities.
- The [Community Facilities Programme](#) is a capital grant programme which provides grants of up to £300,000 to help community led projects to purchase and/or improve well used and much needed community assets.
- The [Community Asset Loan Fund](#) (CALF) is a £7.5m loan fund which provides long-term (up to 25 years) loan funding of up to £300,000 to incorporated third sector organisations seeking to take on community assets. These loans must be used towards the purchase or improvement of

community assets. The CALF is managed on our behalf by the WCVA. We know that communities with a good community asset base are more resilient than those without. Community facilities provide a focus for community action, improve cohesion and provide local access to services.

- A range of equality and inclusion-related funding routes, such as Grassroots Pride Fund, Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ArWAP) funds and others, also help to ensure the third sector can support community cohesion activity. Regional ArWAP Convenors also help to foster two-way dialogue to help us deliver visible, tangible improvements lived experiences.
- Our Nation of Sanctuary policy recognises that new arrivals need support to integrate effectively, and migration processes must be carefully managed to ensure host communities feel the benefit of that migration. We provide a range of funding and policy interventions and work closely with the UK Government, local government, and Sanctuary Coalition Cymru to implement this work.
- Wider allocations relating to those with protected characteristics also support our community cohesion work. This work is mainstreamed across Welsh Government rather than always requiring bespoke funding streams.

40. In addition to funding, we work closely with partners in a Team Wales approach to co-produce solutions as far as possible. Partnership working is essential to ensure the state of cohesion or tensions are properly understood and a multi-agency approach can be brought to bear for the most effective outcomes. We aim to empower communities to implement local solutions, wherever possible.

41. Third sector organisations and people with lived experience are increasingly being targeted due to their affiliation with cohesion, equality or inclusion-related initiatives. We worked closely with Welsh Refugee Council and EYST during recent examples of this targeting to ensure they understood our approach, that they felt supported, and their positive contributions were recognised, and so that an offer of security measures could be made. Further work is planned to help third sector organisations and associated individuals to keep themselves safe before or during any hateful online targeting and harassment.

42. We have worked with community groups to develop a tool to help guide community leaders to structure conversations with concerned community members. The tool aims to help communities to spot and mitigate the spread of hate or misinformation.

3. Annex – Cases studies

Examples of best practice

Ely and Caerau Community Plan

43. Following the tragic death of Harvey Evans and Kyrees Sullivan and the disorder in Ely, Action for Caerau and Ely (ACE) was appointed to co-ordinate the development of a Caerau and Ely Community Plan, jointly funded by Welsh Government, Cardiff Council and the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner.

44. ACE embarked on a listening exercise with residents of all ages. to identify the strengths of the community as well as the challenges they faced. ACE heard from 1,234 people between August and December 2023, in open events, groups, surveys and conversations, and gathered almost 4,000 comments across 47 engagements. These views were collated into 6 themes:

1. Children & Young People
2. Community Safety & Safeguarding
3. Spaces and the Environment
4. Health & Wellbeing
5. Employment, Living Standards & Cost of Living
6. Communication and Community Building

45. In early 2024, ACE brought together residents, public and third sector partners in a series of community workshops to dig deeper into the issues identified during the community-wide listening exercise. In these sessions, attendees jointly designed positive, tangible action actions for change, which formed the Community Plan.

46. The entire Community Plan development process was overseen and agreed by a Community Steering Group, made up of local volunteers who live or work in the community. The final steering group meeting took place in April 2025.

North East Wales Multi Cultural Hub

47. North East Wales Multi Cultural Hub (NEWMH) was established in 2022, with 3 years funding allocated to Tŷ Pawb and Wrexham County Borough Council via

the Welsh Government's Anti-racist Wales Culture, Heritage and Sport Fund. The NEWMH is a community-driven initiative delivered in partnership with Race Council Cymru and aimed at fostering a more equitable and interconnected society by celebrating and recognizing diversity. The Hub serves as a platform for its members by amplifying voices often unheard, empowering communities to lead on making the change they wish to see. Since its establishment, the Hub has:

- Supported the involvement of volunteers from minority ethnic communities in North East Wales to actively take part within the arts, culture and heritage sector.
- Hosted exhibitions of the work of local minority ethnic artists.
- Commissioned artists local minority ethnic artists to deliver community and school arts projects.
- Provided seed funding, via small grants, to Hub members to deliver projects which celebrate and raise awareness of the rich diversity of cultural heritage across North East Wales.

48. The Hub also provides a direct link to smaller community groups in the area. This was valued during the 2024 summer unrest, as public bodies were able to meet with community leaders in one place facilitated by the Hub.

The Diverse Together Conference

49. The North-east Wales and North-west Wales cohesion teams co-organised the Diverse Together conference in April 2025, which brought together around 170 community organisations and public sector partners from across the region to identify examples of good public sector practice and how this positive work can be applied more widely. There was a focus on engagement and consultation, in particular how public bodies can create effective dialogue with diverse communities which breaks the cycle of one-way transactional consultations.

50. The conference ended with the joint action to develop a framework to enable the continuation of this sharing and learning between communities and partner organisations.

Blue Light Engagement Event

51. In 2024, the Mid and West Wales cohesion team hosted a 'Blue Light Engagement' event designed to build trust and understanding between refugees, asylum seekers, and emergency services. The event provided a welcoming space for dialogue, myth-busting, and practical information sharing about emergency services and community safety. The event helped break down barriers and led to increased confidence in reporting and accessing support among participants. Due to its success, a second cohesion region requested support to replicate the model locally and was delivered successfully.

Engagement with Muslim communities

52. The Gwent East cohesion team alongside Gwent Police has set up a series of regular meetings with Muslim representatives, designed to build and strengthen relationships with community members and provide them with an opportunity to raise concerns or issues. This meant that when the unrest happened during the summer of 2024, there was already a framework in place to engage with communities and mosque. These existing relationships enabled Gwent Police to attend Friday prayers across Newport during this period of unrest with the same message of solidarity and reassurance and provide an update on actions to keep communities safe. Providing all mosques with the same information at the same time reduced the risk of misinformation being spread and avoided having messages misinterpreted.

Flip the Streets Project

53. A primary school in Swansea contacted the Swansea Bay cohesion team about an increase in hateful incidents within the wider community. Sessions were delivered to pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 focusing on topics such as positive relationships, respect, and healthy communication both within the school and the broader community. These sessions were delivered in close collaboration with partner agencies specialising in community safety, cohesion, and online safety.

54. The success of the sessions led to a project with Flip the Streets and Fresh Creative to create a lasting memory that showcased the school and wider community as inclusive and rights-respecting. The pupils were given the opportunity to develop a graffiti art piece to represent what matters most to their community. This artwork was unveiled at a community day, where pupils participated in creating their design with a local artist. The project was a collaboration between the local community, South Wales Police and the Swansea Council.

Cymunedoli Cyf

55. Cymunedoli Cyf inspires communities to believe, to create and to maintain, and is there to support communities to own and manage resources locally. Cymunedoli Cyf is an innovative network, which works with and supports community initiatives. Its purpose is to support each other's efforts, strengthen the case for co-operation, and help the local economy.

56. The Community Facilities Programme has funded a number of the approximately 50 local groups across Gwynedd and Conwy which make up Cymunedoli Cyf, this includes: Antur Stiniog, Antur Waunfawr, Dref Werdd, Menter Ty'n Llan, Partneriaeth Ogwen, Plas Carmel, Tafarn y Heliwr, and Yr Orsaf.

Hate and Community Tensions Board Cymru

57. The Hate and Community Tensions Board Cymru is a standing group to advise Welsh Ministers and policy makers on hate crime and community tensions and provide leadership across criminal justice agencies in Wales. The membership consists of representatives from Welsh Government, the Cohesion Programme, the four police forces in Wales, British Transport Police, the Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioners, Crown Prosecution Service, Victim Support Cymru, academia and third sector organisations. We have a standing item on the agenda to discuss regional community tensions on a pan-Wales basis, identifying any trends and opportunities to work together on interventions to address hate and community tensions.

58. A recent example of the work of the Board was the co-production of the 'Tackling Hate Crime - The Power of Victims Voices' conference in November 2024. The conference provided an insight into identity-based hate crime and other hate experiences for hate crime practitioners across Wales, informed by Wales Hate Support Centre research alongside input from its Lived Experience Advocacy Forum, with the aim of identifying tangible steps to improve the response to hate crimes and the support available to all victims.

Hate Hurts Wales

59. Hate Hurts Wales is the Welsh Government's national anti-hate crime campaign. The objectives of the campaign, which began in December 2020, are to encourage victims and bystanders to report hate crime, and to build confidence of victims by highlighting the positive outcomes that can come from reporting a hate crime and the support available from the Welsh Government funded Wales Hate Support Centre. The campaign also calls on the people of Wales to stand up against hate and show potential perpetrators the damaging

impact, not only on the lives of the victims, but also the repercussions on their own lives.

60. The campaign was developed with input from stakeholders across our equality networks, the four police forces in Wales, Victim Support and CPS, and was tested with a wide range of focus groups comprising representation from across the five protected characteristics including two on race focus groups.

61. The campaign has delivered a range of activities including television and radio advertising, digital advertising, Wales Online advertorials, and out of home advertising. We have worked with criminal justice partners to target location where there have been higher incidences of hate crime.

62. Evaluation of the Hate Hurts Wales campaign in 2023-2024 found there was a 32% increase in calls to the Wales Hate Support Centre compared to when the campaign wasn't running, with a 10% increase in case referrals to Victim Support.

Focus on Southport attack and UK disorder 2024

63. The Committee has highlighted last summer's unrest as a particular area of focus for the Inquiry. Following the devastating attack in Southport and subsequent violent disorder, the Welsh Government worked closely with a range of partners as part of the overall response in Wales. This included:

- a. Engagement with Police Forces to ensure identifiable vulnerable locations would receive a priority police response if reports to the Police were made.
- b. The First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, met senior policing leads in Wales and convened a meeting with representatives from community groups and voluntary sector organisations in Wales, including faith leaders. The First Minister then published a Written Statement: 'Supporting the safety of people and communities in Wales following the incident in Southport on 29 July'.
- c. The Community Cohesion regional teams monitored online and offline spaces for community tensions and fed information to police and relevant community safety partners.
- d. The Wales Hate Support Centre monitored for any spikes in hate crime related to the unrest, reached out to race and faith-based organisations in Wales, and delivered targeted communications. Our anti-hate crime campaign, Hate Hurts Wales, ran in August 2024

64. Since August 2024, Welsh Government has undertaken further work to identify ways to provide community reassurance during future incidents, helping community organisations with tools to identify and address online hate and misinformation. This will be strengthened by further work in 2025-26.

65. Welsh Government engaged with community organisations ahead of the trial of Axel Rudakubana in January 2025 to provide reassurance and share guidance on dealing with misinformation.

66. Ministers met with the Children's Commissioner for Wales' Youth Panel to discuss the impact of the disorder on children and young people.

Agenda Item 3.1

Dawn Bowden AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Minister for Children and Social Care



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref DB-PO-0204-25

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee
Senedd Cymru

29 April 2025

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter of 17 April seeking further clarification of the funding provided for the Flying Start expansion programme and the proportion of children that would be waiting for childcare places by the end of March 2026.

You are right that the Welsh Government remains committed to our Programme for Government commitment - to "Deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all 2-year-olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh medium provision".

The Final Budget for 2025-26 included over £25m of additional funding for further expansion of high quality Flying Start childcare across Wales. Local authorities have set out plans about how they will continue to expand Flying Start childcare in their areas. The additional funding announced by the Final Budget will make childcare available to the majority of two-year-olds identified in those plans for 2025-26. There are a number of practical obstacles to full rollout including availability of both staff and premises, and lead in times. However, this will make a significant difference to the lives and outcomes of thousands of children across Wales and offer opportunities for more children to access Welsh Medium provision. We would expect Phase 3 of this programme to reach more than 4,000 children in 2025-26.

The proportion of all 2-year-olds that will be offered a Flying Start childcare place will depend on a range of factors. The progress that LAs make towards reaching all 2 year olds with Flying Start childcare will depend on the expansion plans that LAs have developed, the numbers reached to date and takeup levels in both Phases 2 and 3. We are continuing to have discussions with all LAs to understand how we might be able to continue to support their progress and help them overcome any delivery challenges.

Yours sincerely,

Dawn Bowden AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Minister for Children and Social

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Dawn.Bowden@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Dawn.Bowden@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Dawn Bowden MS
Minister for Children and Social Care

17th April 2025

Dear Dawn,

Childcare funding

Thank you for your letter of 4 March regarding childcare funding in Wales which was considered at our meeting on 24 March.

Members welcome the additional funding agreed in the final 2025-26 budget as a step in the right direction. However, we were concerned by your reference to childcare being available for the *majority* of two-year-olds (our emphasis). The commitment made as part of the Budget agreement was for an extra £30 million for childcare, to “ensure funding for the Flying Start programme to deliver childcare to two-year-olds across Wales.”¹ This is in addition to your existing commitment in the Programme for Government to “deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all 2 year olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh medium provision”. We would appreciate clarification on this matter, and for confirmation on what proportion of two- year-olds you expect will be waiting for childcare places at the end of March 2026.

I would be grateful for a response by the 6 May.

Yours sincerely,



Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

¹ Welsh Government, [Budget agreement secures extra £100m for public services](#), 20 February 2025



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

Andrew RT Davies MS
Chair, Economy, Trade & Rural Affairs Committee

30 April 2025

Dear Andrew RT Davies MS,

I am writing to thank you and your colleagues on the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee for considering the Welsh Government's legislative consent memoranda on the Employment Rights Bill.

In your report and letter to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee dated 13 February, you expressed concerns about the Senedd Commission being within scope of clause 26 (now clause 31 in the version of the Bill brought from the Commons to the Lords) of the Employment Rights Bill.

The Welsh Government believes it is appropriate and consistent with other legislation for the Senedd Commission to be within scope. The UK Government can already make regulations on equalities matters that apply to the Senedd Commission under section 153(1) of the Equality Act 2010.

The Senedd Commission, as with the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, is listed under Part 1 of Schedule 19 to the Equality Act 2010. It is not listed with other relevant Welsh authorities in Part 2 of Schedule 19. It would be inconsistent for the Senedd Commission to be treated in a different manner to other equivalent parliamentary bodies.

Additionally, the Welsh Ministers cannot place equalities-related duties on the Senedd Commission via section 153(2) of the Equalities Act 2010. This is because the Senedd Commission is not listed in Part 2 of Schedule 19 to that Act. Excluding the Senedd Commission from the scope of clause 26 would place the Senedd Commission in an anomalous position.

I will be writing to the Llywydd and Chair of the Senedd Commission about this matter and the points raised in her letter dated 13 February to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Jack.Sargeant@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Jack.Sargeant@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I am copying this letter to the Llywydd, to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, and to the Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JACK SARGEANT". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'. A horizontal line is drawn underneath the signature, starting from the left and extending to the right, ending with a small dot.

Jack Sargeant AS/MS

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership

Y Gweinidog Diwylliant, Sgiliau a Phartneriaeth Gymdeithasol



Executive Summary: Strip search of children in the Welsh context

Dr Rhian Croke (Children's Legal Centre Wales) &

Saqib Deshmukh (Insaafi CiC & Associates)

April 2025

The publication of the "Strip search of children in England and Wales" reports by the Children's Commissioner of England and Freedom of Information requests, have reported on the high frequency of strip searches across England and Wales. There have also been concerns regarding the serious inadequacies in monitoring of strip searches of children by the Police. Research has revealed that, while strip searches are conducted with the intent to uncover dangerous or illegal objects, strip searches rarely uncover these very objects. Children have also been clear about the profound distress and trauma caused by police strip search practices and concerning the data also demonstrates the disproportionate strip searching of Black children.

Children's Legal Centre Wales and Insaafi CIC, have conducted research and advocated against this practice in Wales since December 2022.

Legislation and Policy Landscape

Strip searches fall under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984, with specific codes outlining procedures.

The Children's Commissioner for England has called for mandatory monitoring and change in laws regarding strip searches. The Home Office has agreed to collect data and review related legislation.

Current laws and guidelines are unclear and insufficient to protect children's rights.

Devolution

Crime, justice and policing are not devolved to the Welsh government, but there is a desire to pursue the devolution of justice. Currently, the devolved administration (including duty bearers such as the Children's Commissioner of Wales and members of the Welsh Senedd) have limited powers to scrutinise police forces in Wales.

Racial Disparities

Evidence shows that Black children are disproportionately subjected to strip searches, raising concerns about racial inequality and potential violations of the UK Equality Act 2010.

A Freedom of Information (FOI) request from South Wales Police acknowledges a disparity in the number of strip searches among minority ethnic groups compared to White British children.

Data Transparency Issues

Efforts to obtain accurate and comprehensive data on strip searches have faced obstacles.

Numerous challenges in accessing clear data from police forces regarding child strip searches highlight a failure in transparency and accountability.

FOI requests undertaken over the course of 18 months has revealed discrepancies in the reported number of strip searches across different police forces in Wales. Additionally, some of the data on child strip search in Wales contradicts data that has been previously disclosed by Welsh police forces.

The failure for police forces to be transparent with data relating to ethnic and racial disparity creates challenges within the devolved and non-devolved landscape. The Anti-Racism Wales Action Plan, the Criminal Justice Anti-Racism Plan and the Police Anti-Racism Action Plan all called for lowered racial inequality within policing.

Calls for Change

Advocates recommend comprehensive and robust data collection to assess the impact of strip searches on children, which at the very minimum should demonstrate compliance with the existing duties in the PACE legislation and guidance and the Equality Act 2010.

Children's Legal Centre Wales and Insaafi CiC have been advocating for an end to strip searches of children in Wales.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland have called to end the practice.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have explicitly recommended prohibiting strip searches of children.

Alternatives to Strip Searches

Strip searches have severe psychological and emotional consequences for children. The use of alternative technologies, like body scanners, is advocated to reduce the traumatic impact of strip searches while ensuring child safety.

Recommendations

Immediate action is needed from Welsh authorities to protect children's rights and explore non-invasive alternatives to strip searches. These include:

1. Amending laws to explicitly prohibit strip searches of children.
2. Investing in alternative technologies to reduce the need for invasive strip searches.
3. Improving data collection and reporting to ensure accountability.
4. Implementing a child-centred and children's rights approach to policing and youth justice.
5. Provide training to police officers and other relevant personnel on the harmful effects of strip searches and best practices for child-friendly procedures.
6. Further research into the practice of child strip search in Wales, exploring the areas of anti-racism, and children's rights within a devolved framework.

Conclusion

The practice of strip-searching children is degrading and contrary to legislative commitments for children's rights in Wales, and an anti-racist Wales.

There is a strong call to end such practices and invest in children's rights and child-centred approaches that stress dignity and respect. Despite challenges, advocates in Wales continue to push for meaningful reforms to protect children's rights and well-being.

Please access the full briefing [Strip Searching of Children in the Welsh Context](#) here.



Briefing: Strip search of children in the Welsh context

Dr Rhian Croke (Children's Legal Centre Wales) & Saqib Deshmukh (Insaafi CiC and Associates), April 2025

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Background to child strip search in England and Wales

1. There has been totally inadequate monitoring of the incidence of strip search of children across the UK. This practice has been happening, and has been traumatising children, for decades, yet potentially due to children's minority status, lack of power in communicating their concerns to authorities, it until recently remained relatively hidden and unchallenged.

The publication of the "Strip search of children in England and Wales" reports by the Children's Commissioner of England and Freedom of Information requests, have reported on the high frequency of strip searches across England and Wales. The data has also revealed that, while strip searches are conducted with the intent to uncover dangerous or illegal objects, strip searches rarely uncover these very objects¹. Children have also been clear about the profound distress and trauma caused by police strip search practices² and concerning the data clearly demonstrates the disproportionate strip searching of Black children³.

2. Children's Legal Centre Wales and Insaafi CiC have been researching and advocating to end the practice of strip search of children in Wales since December 2022. Below, we make reference to the legislation, policy and data landscape and the timeline of activities regarding the failures by key duty bearers to adequately monitor and report on strip search of children in Wales and to respond to recommendations to end the degrading practice.

Legislation and policy landscape concerning strip search of children UK Level

3. Criminal justice and policing are still a reserved matter for the UK Government. Powers to strip search children fall under UK PACE legislation and codes of practice.

The law in relation to the strip search of children is laid out in:

¹ *Children's Commissioner for England Reports* In addition to the Children's Commissioner for England Reports, *A BBC File on 4 Freedom of Information Request* in 2022, reported that over 13,000 children had been strip searched across the UK, in the last 5 years and in 80% of cases, nothing illegal was found; 432 children under the age of criminal responsibility, were stop and searched by the police in England and Wales in 2023, a quarter were from minority backgrounds and 79% led to no further action. Guardian article, May 25 2024, '*Hundreds of children under 10 subject to stop and search in England and Wales.*'

² Children's Legal Centre Wales, Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), part of Just for Kids Law, and Youth Legal Justice Centre. (2024). *Proposed amendments to PACE Codes of Practice A and C: strip searches.* Children Legal Centre Wales. Last Updated: June 2024. (Accessed: 27.09.24)

³Bath, C. (November 2022) *Police Searches of People: A Review of PACE Powers – National Appropriate Adult Network.* Kent: The Appropriate Adult Network (Accessed: 27 September 2024) Mahalingam, U. (2022). *Around 50 children strip searched by the police every week – and most are black.* (Online). The Justice Gap. Last Updated: 25 May 2022. (Accessed: 28.09.24).;

Children's Commissioner of England. (2022) *Strip Search of Children by the Metropolitan Police Service- new analysis by the Children's Commissioner for England.* London. (Accessed: 28.09.24); Dodd, V. (2023). *Black children 11 times more likely to be strip-searched in England and Wales than white peers.* The Guardian. Last Updated: 26 March 2023. (Accessed: 28.09.24)

Children's Commissioner of England. (2024). *Strip searching of children in England and Wales: First complete dataset for 2018–2023, including new data July 2022–J.* Children's Commissioner of England. Last Updated: 19 Aug 2024. (Accessed: 28.09.24)

- the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)⁴
- the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) codes, in particular codes A and C⁵

There are further powers to strip search under Section 43 of the Terrorism Act 2000 and Section 23 Misuse of Drugs Act 1973.

Types of Searches under PACE Code A and C			
<p>Stop and search – search of clothing in public view</p> <p>PACE Code A 3.5</p>	<p>Stop and Search - strip search not in public view</p> <p>PACE Code A 3.5 3.6 & Code C</p>	<p>Exposure of intimate parts of the body</p> <p>PACE Code A 3.7</p>	<p>Intimate Search</p> <p>PACE Code C Annex A.1</p>
<p>A search in public of clothing which has not been removed, must be restricted to superficial examination of outer garments.</p> <p>This does not, however, prevent an officer from placing his or her hand inside pockets of the outer clothing, or feeling round the inside of collars, socks and shoes if this is reasonably necessary in the circumstances to look for the object of the search or to remove and examine any item reasonably suspected to be the object of the search. For the same reasons, (subject to the restrictions on the removal of headgear) hair may also be searched in public.</p>	<p>The police have no power to require a person to remove any of their clothing in public other than an outer coat, jacket or gloves (apart from when an item is worn to hide identity (Code A para. 3.5)).</p> <p>Strip searches are defined as ‘a search involving the removal of more than outer clothing’ (Code C Annex A Part B para. 9).</p> <p>Where on reasonable grounds it is considered necessary to conduct a more thorough search (e.g., by requiring a person to take off their T-shirt), this must be done out of public view, for example, in a police van applies, or police station if there is one nearby (Code A para. 3.6).</p>	<p>Searches involving exposure of intimate parts of the body must not be conducted as a routine extension of a less thorough search, simply because nothing is found in the course of the initial search.</p> <p>Searches involving exposure of intimate parts of the body may be carried out only at a nearby police station or other nearby location which is out of public view (but not a police vehicle) (Code A para. 3.7). These searches must be conducted in accordance with Code C Annex A para. 11 F and may not be authorised or carried out under any stop and search powers.</p>	<p>An intimate search consists of the physical examination of a person's body orifices other than the mouth (Code C Annex A. 1). This can for example include exposure of the vagina and anus.</p> <p>When an inspector considers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an object has been hidden that might be used to cause physical injury to the person or others at the station; an intimate search must only take place at hospital, surgery, other medical premises or police station (PACE Code C Annex A 4.) <p>if it is a Class A drug that has been hidden with the intention to supply to another person, the intimate search must only take place at a hospital, surgery or other medical premises and must be carried out by a registered medical practitioner or a registered nurse. (PACE Code C Annex A 4.)</p>

⁴ Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, (Accessed: 27.09.24)

⁵ Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, c. A and c. C. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

4. At the UK level, the [Children's Commissioner for England](#) has called for mandatory monitoring and reporting on strip search of children and a review of the law and police powers in relation to strip search of children. In response to these recommendations, the UK Home Office has committed to making data collection and reporting on strip searches mandatory for all police forces and reviewing existing legislation around searches⁶.
5. This has been further reinforced by the Child Q Case ([see article for more information on Child Q case](#)) where the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC) determined that three MPS Officers should face a gross misconduct hearing, for potential breaches of police standards of professional behaviour relating to duties and responsibilities, conduct, equality, and diversity.

The IOPC has also called for a substantial review of policing powers and laws relating to the strip searches of children to improve safeguarding and prioritise the welfare of minors. This includes a series of learning recommendations to the Home Office, National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and the College of Policing (COP) to review and make changes to national guidance, policing and training relating to searches involving exposure of intimate body parts. These recommendations were responded to by the different agencies.

A report published by [Chris Bath](#) for the National Appropriate Adult Network has referred to a lack of clarity and ambiguity of the current PACE legislation and guidance issued to police forces across the UK on powers to strip search vulnerable children. In the foreword to the report, Interim CEO of Alliance for Youth Justice (2022-23) Saqib Deshmukh, noted his concerns regarding racism and policing, stating:

'The issue of discretion is central, and this is where racism and power come into play. Discretionary powers are so dangerous in the hands of an officer who treats black children and young people as suspects and not vulnerable and do not see them as children⁷'.

6. The [Children's Commissioner for England](#) research has indicated that Black children are more likely to be strip searched. This disproportionate impact on this protected characteristic indicates a lack of compliance with the UK Equality Act 2010.⁸ This has been further supported by [data](#) published by the Home Office in relation to children strip searched in police custody in the year ending March 2023, with a far higher proportion of those strip searched self-defined as being Black, Asian, or mixed race compared with adults.
7. Prior to being at the Alliance for Youth Justice, Saqib Deshmukh worked in Hackney and was on the Child Q Serious Case Review Core Group between 2021-2022. In response to Hackney's safeguarding review in the Child Q case, the UK Department for Education updated its [guidance](#) for schools in England, which covers strip search.⁹ While many of the changes to

⁶ Children's Commissioner for England (March 2022) [Strip Search of Children in England and Wales](#). (Accessed: 27.09.24)

Children's Commissioner for England (August 2024) [Strip searching of children in England and Wales: First complete dataset for 2018–2023, including new data July 2022–June 2023](#). (Accessed: 27.09.24)

⁷ Chris Bath (November 2022) [Police Searches of People: A Review of PACE Powers – National Appropriate Adult Network](#). (Accessed: 27.09.24).

⁸ [The Equality Act 2010](#), (Accessed: 28.09.24)

⁹ UK Department for Education and Skills (2022) [Searching, Screening and Confiscation – Advice for Schools](#).

the guidance, particularly the strong emphasis on safeguarding, recording what happens, and informing parents is to be welcomed, it still authorises the use of strip search¹⁰.

Legislation and policy landscape concerning strip search of children in Wales

8. Devolution has accelerated noteworthy progress on policy and legislation relating to children's rights and scope for innovation and divergence from the UK Government policy and legislation. Since 2004, [youth justice policy](#) has been underpinned by children's rights and a child first approach¹¹. Furthermore, within the limits of the devolved settlement, the [United Nations on the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)¹² has been incorporated into domestic legislation. Welsh Government Ministers under the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 must have [due regard to the UNCRC](#) in the exercise of all their functions, this includes the development of all policy and legislation¹³.
9. The Welsh Government [Youth Justice Blueprint policy 2019 -2023](#) and 2024 strategy are underpinned by children's rights and a trauma informed approach¹⁴. Welsh Government supports a [National Trauma Informed Practice Framework](#) to be adopted by all services, and their policy focuses on the prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences. Strip search of children is undoubtedly an adverse childhood experience and [evidence](#) indicates that the trauma of strip searches interferes with positive brain development¹⁵.
10. Welsh Government has made [several announcements](#)¹⁶ that preparations are happening to devolve youth justice to Wales, and Police and Crime Commissioners have agreed they would welcome the devolution of policing, which it is hoped will further promote embedding a Children's Rights Approach to policing and youth justice.
11. A key component of the [Anti-racism Wales Action Plan](#)¹⁷ and the [Criminal Justice Anti-Racism Plan](#)¹⁸ is reducing racial inequality, along with harm reduction approaches. It is therefore extremely concerning that the Children's Commissioner for England and Home Office data (see Pt 6 above) indicates that Black children are disproportionately strip searched and there is little

¹⁰ Saqib Deshmukh is now working with the [Youth Justice Legal Centre \(YJLC\)](#) and other organisations as the Director of Insaafi CiC on developing better understanding of radical safeguarding which references both strip searches and the role of the police including, asking for a review of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act which embedded the police in these processes. He recently spoke at the YJLC Radical Safeguarding session

¹¹ Drakeford, M. (2010). [Devolution and youth justice in Wales](#), British Society of Criminology, 10(2)

¹² United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) [Treaty no. 27531](#). United Nations Treaty Series, 1577, pp. 3-178. (Accessed: 27.09.24)

¹³ [Rights of Children and Young Persons \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#). (Accessed: 27.09.25).

¹⁴ Ministry of Justice and Welsh Government (2019), [Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales \(2019 -2023\)](#). (Accessed: 27.09.24).

¹⁵ Saha Shah, R. and Feierman, J. (2021). [Strip-Searching Children Is State-Imposed Trauma](#). American Bar. Last Updated: October 12. (Accessed 27.09.24).

¹⁶ Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament. (2022). [Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister](#). Welsh Parliament. Last Updated: 9 December. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

¹⁷ Welsh Government. (2022). [Anti-Racism Wales Action Plan](#). Welsh Government. Last Updated: 24 June 2024. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

¹⁸ UK Government. (2022). [Criminal Justice Anti-Racism Action Plan for Wales](#). UK Government. Last Updated: 21 December 2022. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

clarity or transparency regarding the Welsh specific data (see pt 35 below). The Anti-Racism Wales Action Plan and the Criminal Justice Anti Racism Plan comprise a national Wales-wide focus on the reduction of racial inequality across life in Wales.

The death of George Floyd in 2020, the death of Mohamud Mohammad Hassan in 2021 and the death of Mouayed Bashir in 2021 has affected the policy landscape within Wales on policing and the criminal justice system, especially around racial inequality. [The Cardiff Race Equality Taskforce](#) was founded in 2021, chaired by the now-Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales, Emma Wools. The taskforce recommended committing to recording "ethnicity data and collaborate on data analysis and exploration at a local and national level" within Wales.

Within a UK-wide framework, the [Police Race Action Plan](#)¹⁹ recommends the police "*adopt an 'explain or reform' approach to address the negative impact and outcomes experienced by Black people*", that policing will "*ensure that officers and staff understand the history of policing Black people, and the ongoing impact and trauma of disproportionality*", with a desire to reduce racial disparities, and to promote consistency in recording, analysis, and monitoring. Welsh forces could be failing to produce the recommendations within the Police Race Action Plan if they cannot produce child strip search data cross-referenced by ethnicity.

Background to demography and population in Wales

From 1991-2021, the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic population has grown in Wales. In 1991, 1% of the population was identified with this category²⁰, and in 2011, Wales was 4% minority ethnic²¹. In 2021, 6.2% of Wales was non-White British²².

Notably, 0.9% of people in 2021 identified as "Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean, or African", an increase from 0.6% in 2011. In comparison, the Black population in England is 4.2%, and 3.8% of people in Cardiff are Black²³

The largest concentrations of minority ethnic populations in Wales are within South Wales, with the following areas having the highest percentage of people who are Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic within Wales: Cardiff, Newport, and Swansea²⁴.

This is important to note, because of the disproportionality of strip searches of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic children as detailed within the English Commissioner's report, with an acute problem of child strip search emerging within Black African, Black Caribbean, African and Black populations (see: Child Q case).

¹⁹ College of Policing (2022). [Police Race Action Plan](#). College of Policing. Last Updated: 2022. (Accessed: 27.09.24)

²⁰ Welsh Government. (2003). [2001 census of population, first results on ethnic groups and identity](#). (Online). Welsh Government. Last Updated: 19 March 2003. (Accessed: 27.09.24)

²¹ Office for National Statistics. (2012). [2011 Census: Key Statistics for Wales, March 2011](#). Office for National Statistics. Last Updated: 11 December 2012. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

²² Welsh Government. (2022). [Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion in Wales \(Census 2021\)](#). Welsh Government. Last Updated: 29 November 2022. (Accessed: 27.09.24)

²³ Office for National Statistics. (2023). [How life in Cardiff has changed Census 2021](#). (Online). Office for National Statistics. Last Updated: 19 January 2023. (Accessed: 27.09.24)

²⁴ StatsWales. (2023). [Ethnicity by year and ethnic group](#). Welsh Government. Last Updated: February 2023. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

Data picture on strip search of children in Wales

Strip search of children in police custody

12. In evidence collected by the [Home Office](#) as part of experimental statistics for the Annual Data Requirement, across 3 of the 4 police forces in Wales (North Wales Police force did not share data), 183 children were strip searched in police custody during 2021/2022. This is the first-time data had been made available on the numbers of children strip searched in police custody in Wales.

In the year ending March 2023, the Home Office [reported](#) 225 strip searches of children in police custody across the 4 Welsh police forces (Dyfed-Powys 9, North Wales 4, Gwent 63, South Wales 149).

Strip search of children under stop and search powers

13. The Children's Commissioner for England [report](#) published March 27th 2023, confirmed that children across England and Wales had been searched by police officers who failed to adhere to the requirements of statutory guidance on the exercise of [Stop and Search](#) powers.

Data from police forces in Wales showed that in 2018-2022, there were 134 strip searches of children. North Wales Police Force recorded 12 searches, and Gwent Police Force 14 searches. South Wales Police Force reported strip searching 108 children, a figure above the national average for England and Wales. The Children's Commissioner for England failed to publish a full data picture for Wales, as Dyfed Powys police did not respond to the Commissioner's request for data under the 2004 Children's Act. Likewise, several English forces did not give data to the report.

Research and advocacy relating to strip search of children in Welsh context January 2023 – March 2025

Communicating concerns regarding strip search of children with relevant agencies in Wales

14. Dr Rhian Croke first communicated concerns regarding strip search of children to relevant Welsh agencies in January 2023. These concerns were communicated in an article laying out the existing data on strip search of children in Wales and how strip search is a violation of children's rights, not compliant with Wales specific legislation on children's rights or indeed the national trauma informed framework. (The article found here) ²⁵. Dr Croke also reported that strip search of children had been inadequately monitored and reported on by police forces in Wales and across the country. The data from the Home Office Annual requirement was also shared as per numbers of children strip searched in police custody.

²⁵ Croke, R. (2022). [*Strip Search of Children: A violation of children's rights*](#). Children's Legal Centre Wales. Last Updated: December 14 2022. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

15. Dr Croke communicated these concerns in a meeting in January 2023, to officials at Welsh Government, Police and Crime Commissioner Lead for Children, Police Liaison Unit, and Wales Youth Justice Advisory Panel. She recommended that data be urgently collected that is transparent and demonstrates whether the police in relation to strip search of children are complying with UK PACE and UK Equality legislation. These concerns were shared with the Welsh Government Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip. The Minister, subsequently met with the Police and asked them to commit to collecting full and comprehensive data on strip search of children in Wales, and post this to review current practice. They agreed to report on the data directly to the Welsh Government Minister for Social Justice.

Strip search is a violation of children's rights

16. In March 2023, Children's Legal Centre Wales and Youth Justice Legal Centre hosted a global webinar on strip search, Chaired by Shauneen Lambe, Impact for Justice, and key speakers from the UK including Dr Croke and Saqib Deshmukh, and Florence Cole, Just for Kids Law, Lawyer for Child Q, US, Jessica Frierman, Juvenile Justice Law Center, and from South Africa, the incoming Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Professor Ann Skelton. Prof Ann Skelton agreed with Dr Croke's analysis that strip search is indeed a violation of children's rights. (For the children's rights analysis, see the transcript of Dr Rhian Croke's presentation accessed [here](#))²⁶.
17. It was both emotional and powerful when Child Q joined the webinar and asked questions of the panel via her lawyer, Florence Cole. Child Q during her legal case said:

'I can't go a single day without wanting to scream, shout, cry or just give up. I don't know if I'm going to feel normal again. But I do know this can't happen to anyone else, ever again.'

Use of alternative technologies

18. Dr Croke in the same webinar (see transcript of presentation [here](#)) considered the use of alternatives to strip searches such as the use of full body scanners, and metal wand detectors etc. She argued that alternative technologies should be used in cases that get presented that suggest it is in a child's best interests to strip search a child because children may be for example concealing objects, such as weapons that put them at an immediate risk of self-harm, protection of life, risk to others or when a child may have drugs that could be a risk to them or the community. Dr Croke argued that if there is reasonable suspicion of concealment of an illegal object, transparent and accountable safeguards must be in place, an appropriate adult should be present, and alternative technologies must be available to prove without reasonable doubt that a child is concealing an object. This will negate the need for a traumatic and intrusive search, as well as eliminate the need for discretionary decision making by the police.
19. These technologies are already used in the youth secure estate and the UK Government [publicly announced](#) in January 2023, how successful the use of alternative technologies is in the adult secure estate.

²⁶ Croke, R. (2023). *Strip Search of Children*. Children's Legal Centre Wales. Last Updated: 7 March 2023. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

‘Game-changing X-ray body scanners have foiled more than 28,000 attempts to smuggle drugs, phones and weapons behind bars.’ (UK Government)²⁷

To reduce the traumatic impact of an intrusive strip search and the long term negative and damaging impact on any child (which has been quite clearly reported by Child Q and other children) Dr Croke asked why is there not investment in the use of these technologies across police forces across the UK?

Sharing evidence from Children’s’ Commissioner for England report pertinent to Wales April

20. In April 2023, Dr Croke on behalf of CLCW issued a statement in response to the Children’s Commissioner for England report in reaction to their research on strip search of children under the stop and search powers. The statement can be found [here](#)²⁸. The Children’s Commissioner’s research made it clear that police forces have not been complying with statutory guidance on strip search across the UK, including in Wales. CLCW issued strong recommendations regarding better monitoring and recording strip search of children and ultimately ending the practice. In April, Dr Croke shared the evidence pertinent to Wales from the Children’s Commissioner for England report with relevant Welsh agencies.
21. The Alliance for Youth Justice also published a statement sharing their concerns in response to the Children’s Commissioner for England’s report. Their statement can be found [here](#). Saqib Deshmukh, as Interim CEO of AYJ was interviewed for the BBC and [spoke strongly regarding the need for complete cessation of strip searches](#).

Reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

22. Alongside this timeline of events, between December and June 2023 Dr Croke, contributed evidence to the 6th/7th reporting process to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, communicating concerns regarding strip search to the UN Committee via the Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group report (December 2023)²⁹ at the pre-sessional hearing at the UN in Geneva (February 2023) and in additional written information (May 2023).

²⁷ UK Government. (2023). *Beefed-up prison security captures record level of contraband*. Last Updated: 15 January 2023. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

²⁸ Croke, R. (2023). *Children’s Legal Centre Wales Response: Report by Children’s Commissioner for England on Strip Search of Children*. Children’s Legal Centre Wales. Last Updated: April 4 2023. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

²⁹ Wales United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Monitoring Group, (2022). *State of Children’s Rights in Wales: Alternative country specific report on the situation of children’s rights as defined under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*. Cardiff, Children in Wales. (Accessed: 28.09.24)

23. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child communicated their response to concerns on strip search of children across the UK and issued the following recommendation in June 2023 in their [UK Concluding Observations 2023](#)³⁰:

'30 (a) To take legislative measures to explicitly prohibit, without exception.... the use of (ii) strip searches on children.'

Communicating to relevant agencies the recommendation from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

24. In June 2023, Dr Croke communicated this recommendation to Welsh Government, Police and Crime Commissioner Lead for Children, Police Liaison Unit, Wales Youth Justice Advisory Panel and asked the Police for an update on their data collection process relating to strip search of children and also how they were going to implement the UN Committee's recommendation to end the practice. A response was not forthcoming at that time from Police or Police and Crime Commissioners. The Welsh Government however responded that they were still actively working with the Police to obtain a full data picture.

Question to Welsh Government Minister for Social Justice in Senedd Plenary

25. Further confirmation that the Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt MS had sought data from the police on the extent and use of strip searches was highlighted in Senedd plenary [June 21st 2023](#)³¹, in response to a Question raised by former barrister and current member of the Senedd MS Rhys Ab Owen. In response, Minister Jane Hutt stated:

'What is important now is that we look at the extent and use of strip searches. I've raised this with the police and crime commissioner, as I've said, and we recognise that strip searches are potentially extremely traumatic for young people, and it's crucial that we understand from the police what the data is. And, as you say, this is something that we are concerned about.'

I have met with the children's commissioner on this issue, and I have been assured that policing in Wales leads are bringing together data from each force in Wales, to ensure that we have a full picture of how such searches are used, where the issues are, and where we need to take action. So, that will give us a more complete picture than the one that we currently have, and also, a picture of any disproportionality. I have stressed the urgency of this task, and asked for a projected timescale, and I have written to the Children's Commissioner for Wales to confirm how seriously we take this issue, and I'm

³⁰ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2023). [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#)* CRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7. (Accessed 29.09.24)

³¹ Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament. (2023). [Plenary](#). Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament. Last Updated: 21 June 2023. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

happy to report back when we get that data picture on what appropriate action should be taken in terms of this practice.'

The Minister for Social Justice publicly asserted the urgency of the issue, the need for a full and comprehensive data picture and appropriate action taken within a clear timescale. (However, please see Pt. 34, that indicated there was still no clear data or clear course of action as of April 2024). Hutt did not specify if she would be meeting with the Children’s Commissioner of England, who has purview on policing and justice, but mentioned she had been in correspondence with the Children’s Commissioner of Wales.

It is also to be noted the Welsh Government committed to responding to the UK Concluding Observations in their Children’s Scheme Compliance report and in the Senedd plenary on November 14th, 2023, they would respond to Concluding Observations in advance of the summer recess.

Freedom of Information Requests on Strip Search of Children from Police in Wales

Police Force	Children’s Commissioner of England Report Strip Search Data 2022	Freedom of Information request Data 2023	Disparity
Dyfed Powys Police	0 Searches	18 Searches	n/a
Gwent Police	14 Searches	75 Searches	61 Searches
North Wales Police	12 Searches	61 Searches	49 Searches
South Wales Police	108 Searches	106 Searches	2 Searches

26. From January 2023 to December 2023, Insaafi CiC experienced significant challenges in collecting data on strip searches of children from all police forces in Wales, especially in obtaining cross-referenced information on ethnicity. FOI requests were submitted to all police forces and no police force responded to requests within the statutory period.³² In total, it took 9 months for police forces to respond to the requests to obtain a fuller data profile on child strip search in Wales.

Dyfed Powys Police

FOI request to Dyfed Powys police in March 2023, and in October 2023, Dyfed Powys police responded:

“Due to an unprecedented demand for information received by the unit we are still processing the request and are seeking confirmation as to whether your original request is still required? If you no longer require the information then you need not respond to this letter, however if your request is still valid please respond to this

³² Hard Copies for FOIs can be accessed on request from Insaafi CiC and Associates.

email and the matter will be dealt with as a priority. If we do not hear from you in the next 10 working days then we will assume that the request is no longer required and the file will be closed.

It is with regret that the 20 working day deadline under section 10 of The Freedom of Information Act, in respect of this request has not been met and I again apologise on behalf of Dyfed-Powys Police for not complying with this legal requirement in respect of this matter as well as for any inconvenience this may have caused.

Once again please accept my apologies for non-compliance in respect of this matter.”

Dyfed Powys police eventually fulfilled request 320/20 and reported 48 strip searches between 2018-2022 but disclosed 0 strip searches in the Children's Commissioner's report. Insaafi CiC asked which is the correct number and they are still awaiting a response from the force.

Gwent Police Force

On 5th June 2023, Gwent Police Force responded to an FOI request and submitted a data set that was much higher than the reported figure to the Children's Commissioner for England and then sent a second data set that was much lower and excluded child strip searches in police custody on 7th July 2023. Neither data set matched the figure provided by the Children's Commissioner for England. Gwent Police rejected large parts of the FOI on child strip search citing excess cost, explaining that the force would have to undertake a manual trawl of records for information to provide qualitative and quantitative data on child strip search including information on ethnicity.

FOI data received from South Wales police was also contrary to Home Office data. Furthermore, very few police forces were able to share cross-referenced data on ethnicity.

Children's Legal Centre Wales and Insaafi CiC asked to be given access to the Welsh specific data from the Children's Commissioner for England but failed to secure a response.

North Wales Police

Insaafi CiC submitted an FOI request to North Wales Police on 15th June 2023. North Wales police force was the only force to respond with child strip search data on ethnicity. The force explained:

“Although excess cost removed the forces obligations under the Freedom of Information Act, as a gesture of goodwill, I have supplied information, relative to your request, retrieved or available before it was realised that the fees limit would be exceeded. I trust this is helpful, but it does not affect our legal right to rely on the fees regulations for the remainder of your request.”

South Wales Police

Insaafi CiC submitted an FOI request to South Wales in March 2023. South Wales Police responded to the FOI request (428/43) in December 2023.

In October 2023, Insaafi CiC wrote to the now-Police and Crime Commissioner, Emma Wools, to ask for any information on child strip search. Wools sent data from the FOI department which detailed 2325 child strip searches in South Wales from 2018-2023. Insaafi CiC asked about the disparity between 108 searches and 2325 searches and was told that the police had accidentally sent stop and search statistics, not strip search statistics.

In the response, South Wales Police disclosed a data set which slightly differed from the published data the Children's Commissioner's report for England, and later sent a second set of data which mirrored the report. Upon inquiring about the discrepancies, the FOI unit commented:

'Because we don't have static data sets and pull everything from the live system, they are subject to small changes – after the request from the children's commissioner we did go through quite an extensive QA process of the data that had been submitted so it is likely we found some that should not have been included in that original data request and this more recent data reflects that'

27. We question whether the struggle to access data across various agencies and governments is a question of competence: it is unclear if it is a failure to achieve basic professional standards of transparency or if it is an act of obfuscation, a failure to share clear and intelligible data to avoid legal challenge.³³
28. There are 58,680 minority ethnic children living in Wales³⁴. Of this number, around 57% live in the district of South Wales Police, spanning Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Neath Port Talbot, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Swansea, and the Vale of Glamorgan. A further 19% live in the authority of Gwent Police, and 8.7% in Dyfed-Powys police force. Dyfed Powys Police, South Wales Police, and Gwent Police refused to give any data on child strip search cross-referenced by ethnicity. 18 months on from the Children's Commissioner of England's report, we did not have any data on child strip search and ethnicity for 83.7% of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic children in Wales from 2018-2023.
29. Insaafi CiC submitted an FOI request to South Wales Police on 5th September 2023 to request correspondence between the Children's Commissioner of Wales and South Wales Police. The assistant Chief Constable Jason Davies from the Crime, Justice and Safeguarding and Public Protection unit on 16th May 2023 wrote:

'The review also identified a disproportionality in the number of children and young people from black and other ethnic minority groups strip searched

³³ Duff, K and Kemp, T. (2024). [Strip-searching as abjectification: Racism and sexual violence in British Policing](#). *Theoretical Criminology*. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

³⁴ StatsWales. (2024). [Number of pupils aged 5 or over by local authority, region and ethnicity](#). Welsh Government. Last Updated: 31 July 2024. (Accessed: 27 September 2024).

*compared to children of white British heritage. The Chief Constable and I acknowledge this statistic, and as part of our robust ongoing work around disproportionality towards minority ethnic groups we will endeavour to do our utmost to better understand it and address it.*³⁵

30. It is unclear why South Wales Police both admits disproportionality in the number of children from black and other ethnic minority groups and undertook a review of child strip search but cannot publish this data in the public domain.

Ongoing advocacy to access the full data picture

31. In September 2023, Children’s Legal Centre Wales and Insaafi CiC were made aware that the Welsh Government had been continuing to liaise with Police and Crime Commissioners and policing colleagues, to try and secure a full data picture on strip search and that police had committed to share this data by the end of November 2023. The data, we believe, was not shared with the Welsh government in November 2023, and this data later became available in 2024.
32. In October 2023, Sioned Williams, Plaid Cymru MS as part of the [Senedd plenary debate](#)³⁶ asked for an update on action to address the worrying violation of children’s rights that were highlighted by the Children's Commissioner for England, Wales and Northern Ireland report regarding the 134 strip searches of children in Wales between 2018-2022 and she emphasised that South Wales had strip searched 108 children. Sioned Williams said that the CLCW communicates that strip searching of children is a violation of children’s rights and is contrary to the nation’s commitment to the UNCRC and the Wales only legislation that promotes children’s rights. Sioned also said that following the shocking case of Child Q, and the IOPC’s call for the substantial review of police powers and laws relating to strip searches of children, she asked the Minister what information she had received and also asked her to comment and consider that without the full devolution of powers on justice and policing on Wales how does the Minister propose to uphold children’s rights?
33. The Minister for Social Justice responded that policing is not yet devolved to Wales, and is the responsibility of the UK Government, but they have taken the issue of strip searching of children very seriously, as its potentially extremely traumatic and every case must be fully justified, appropriately conducted, and used as a last resort. The Minister reported (as noted in June Senedd Plenary) that she had met with the Police and Crime Commissioners and Police in Wales who have agreed to undertake a data mapping exercise to improve data and assurance available on this issue and to identify further action to be taken. She also noted that this links in with Welsh Government wider social justice policy and is relevant to an anti-racist Wales action plan. The Minister reported that she had asked for information on ethnicity and the number of searches undertaken.

³⁵ Please see hard copy

³⁶ Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament. (2023). [Plenary](#). (Online). Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament. Last Updated: 24 October 2023 (Accessed: 27.09.24).

Data picture shared by Welsh Government with Senedd

34. After several meetings with Welsh Government officials (November 2023 – February 2024). Children’s Legal Centre Wales and Insaafi CiC, were informed that the Minister for Social Justice was finally able to share information on the data capture on strip search of children by the Police with Chair of Senedd Equality and Social Justice Committee on March 20th. This [Letter](#) indicates that the police had begun a data collection process across the 4 police forces. However, the data is still not comprehensive. The police review reported that a total of 5,428 strip searches of children were undertaken in Wales over the two-year period between 2021-22 and 2022-23. Reporting that 6 of the searches were on children aged under 13 years. 85 of the 5,428 searches involved a more thorough search, or a search requiring the exposure of intimate areas (see [Letter](#))³⁷.
35. It is not clear from the information that was shared in the letter, the breakdown according to age, ethnicity, and indeed other protected characteristics e.g. disability/neurodiversity correlated across **all** levels of searches. We are concerned that without a clear understanding across **all** levels of searches, of the data in Wales, that disproportionate impacts on specific groups of children could be occurring.
36. It is also important that data is collected that records the reasons for the search and whether an illegal object was found, the location of the searches, if the child was treated with dignity etc. if there was an appropriate adult present, same sex officers present etc, correlated according to the different levels of searches and in relation to each police force area.
37. Under the Home Office’s Annual Data Requirement (ADR), police forces are already required to record the age and self-defined ethnicity of individuals stopped and searched. From 1 April 2024, it was made mandatory for forces to record the level of intrusiveness of a stop and search – for example whether the search involved the exposure of intimate parts (EIP). In addition, from 1 April 2024, the Home Office has also introduced two new ADR categories in relation to any EIP search. These are the location where the search took place, and whether an appropriate adult was present. It has been indicated that these latter two categories are being collected on a voluntary basis in the first year to allow police forces to update their systems and embed recording practices.
38. Appropriate and consistent data collection should really have been embedded at the outset of the introduction of the PACE and Equality Legislation, and not as an afterthought. There is an urgent need for comprehensive data that better monitors and reports on which groups of children are disproportionately searched across all levels of searches and whether relevant legal requirements are being appropriately carried out. Only then might it be possible for the police to demonstrate whether they are compliant with the Equality Act 2010 and with the PACE legislation and guidance.

Recommendations to UK Home Office

39. While we are aware that the Home Office is taking into consideration the recommendation of the Independent Office for Police Complaints and Children’s Commissioner for England, to

³⁷ Hutt, J (2023), [Letter to Jenny Rathbone MS](#) and Chair of the Senedd Equality and Social Justice Committee in relation to Strip Search of Children, March 19 2024, Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament. (Accessed: 27.09.24)

review PACE legislation in relation to strip search of children, we believe that this does not go far enough to protect children’s rights. The changes are subject to a statutory consultation (Access UK Home Office consultation [here](#))³⁸. The Children’s Legal Centre Wales, Just for Kids Law, and Youth Justice Legal Centre wrote a detailed response to this consultation in June 2024, that can be found [here](#)³⁹. In particular, the organisations called for the UK Home Office to:

- Conduct and publish a Children’s Rights Impact Assessment (which includes consultation with children) as well as an Equality Impact Assessment and demonstrate compatibility with the ECHR.
- End the use of Exposure of Intimate Parts (EIP) practices with urgency through investing in alternative technologies.
- Develop statutory guidance that supports a distinct approach for children, focused on the specific needs and rights of children with a child friendly version in multiple languages

40. We are also aware, and as noted in pt 5 above, there has been an agreement for training of police officers, and so-called new processes of authorisation, this does not assure us that harm can be prevented while strip searching children continues. Duty bearers in Wales, with further devolution of youth justice and policing, should take action to end the practice of strip-searching children.

Children’s Commissioner for England Report August 2024

41. The Children’s Commissioner for England published their third report on strip search under the stop and search powers – giving evidence that Wales as a region is disproportionately strip searching 10–17-year-olds per population. However, on reading a final [footnote](#) in the Commissioner’s report, it appears that Dyfed Powys Police, submitted the wrong data and inaccurately inflated the figures. Demonstrating the continued inadequacy of proper monitoring and reporting on this issue. However, to be noted that South Wales Police is on the list of forces that have high numbers of strip-searching children (one of the 5 police forces with the highest rate of strip searches) comparatively to other forces across England in Wales and also to be noted that Black children in England and Wales are still disproportionately more likely to be strip searched, compared to national population figures (4 times more likely). The Children’s Commissioner’s Report, Executive Summary and Recommendations can be found [here](#), including also calling for investment in alternative technologies. (further detail on alternative technologies can be found in CLCW, Just for Kids Law and Youth Justice Legal Centre response [here](#)).

³⁸ UK Government. (2024). *Proposed amendments to PACE Codes of Practice A and C: strip searches*. (Online). UK Government. Last Updated: 30 April 2024. (Accessed: 27.09.24).

³⁹ Children’s Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), part of Just for Kids Law, Children’s Legal Centre Wales and Youth Legal Justice Centre. (2024). *Proposed amendments to PACE Codes of Practice A and C: strip searches*. (Online). Children’s Legal Centre Wales. Last Updated: June 2024. (Accessed: 27 September 2024).

Police Liaison Unit Report on strip searching of children in Wales

42. In October 2024, Insaafi CIC submitted an FOI request to the Welsh Government for any reports on the topic of child strip search. In response, the Welsh Government published the [Police Liaison Unit's Report on Strip Searching of Children in Wales](#) (dated 11/1/2023) in November 2024. This report appears to have been shared by the Police Liaison Unit with the Welsh Government, with elements of it presented by Welsh Government to the Senedd in March 2024 (as referenced in the letter see Pt. 34 above). It is disappointing that this more detailed report was not shared earlier with the Children's Legal Centre Wales, especially given that the Centre, alongside the Children's Commissioner for Wales, was cited within the report as a justification for requesting better monitoring and recording of strip searches of children in Wales.
43. While the report provides some clarity on the Police Liaison Unit's method of categorising different types of strip searches, it still lacks sufficient detail to demonstrate how these searches are correlated with protected characteristics or how they comply with the necessary elements of the PACE legislation. We would like to emphasise the following key points:

Search Outcomes

44. The report communicates that in the majority of cases, no items were found during searches conducted in custody. This was not made clear in the report to the Senedd. This raises significant concerns (as we've noted with reference to England/Wales-wide data above) about why children are being subjected to such traumatic searches when, in most cases, nothing is actually discovered. This calls for an urgent review of the practice.

Presence of an appropriate adult

45. The report indicates that North Wales Police were only able to confirm the presence of an appropriate adult in about half to two-thirds of searches. This evidence was not made clear in the report to the Senedd and represents a failure to comply with PACE legislation requirement to have an appropriate adult during strip searches. It is also reported that Forces were not able to differentiate from their records, when an appropriate adult had been requested but the local authority were unable to service the request.

Disproportionality

46. There is an acknowledgement of disproportionality in the report. This was also not made clear in the report to the Senedd. It is stated '*that if we scale the data for every 1000 of each ethnic population, there is evidence of disproportionality, however given the numbers are so small for most of Wales, the figures cannot be concluded as statistically reliable*'. This is an inadequate explanation and requires urgent further consideration, particularly in light of Chief Constable Jason Davies' clear acknowledgment of disproportionality (see Pt. 29 above).

Safeguarding Referrals

47. It is positive that it is reported that safeguarding referrals are being regularly submitted on a range of concerns, however, it is concerning that referrals were more likely to be submitted in relation to police custody, as children who are strip searched via stop and search should also be referred. It also appears that there is inadequate data being collected to monitor effectively what is happening with regards to safeguarding referrals. Without transparency, this could again raise questions about the safeguarding practices in place.

48. This report has taken over a year to come into the public domain. It is a report of significant public interest that reveals a lack of compliance with existing legislation, a failure to uphold children’s rights, and raises critical questions about the continued practice of strip searching. We urge the Police Liaison Unit to ensure that a new, more detailed report, demonstrating clearly whether PACE and Equality legislation and children’s rights have been complied with, is published without delay. This updated report should provide an urgent review of the current position concerning the strip-searching of children in Wales, with specific attention to data from 2024.

Conclusion

49. As noted above, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has communicated in its 2023 Concluding Observations that it should be explicitly prohibited (Concluding Observation 30 (a)). This has also most recently been endorsed by Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Concluding Observation 32 (b)). Children in contact with the police, may have already experienced layers upon layers of trauma, to then inflict a strip search on a child is completely inappropriate. Strip search of children should be seen as both traumatising and degrading. It is important to note, in that context, that trauma-led and trauma-resolving approaches are an intrinsic aspect of the Wales Youth Justice Blueprint. Strip searching children who may be in possession of illicit drugs/weapons is not a child first, trauma informed or a safeguarding approach and is a violation of children’s rights. It is also important to reiterate that in most cases nothing illegal is found, yet the degrading practice continues.

Instead of traumatising and degrading children, including those who may be involved in offending behaviour, children should be treated as ‘children’ first with dignity and respect. In Wales, strip search is contrary to the nations’ commitment to the UNCRC and the Wales-only legislation that promotes children’s rights and the national trauma informed framework.

Wales should take the lead on ending the practice of strip search and instead invest in alternative technologies so that children have their rights protected.

Recommendations

50. Immediate action is needed from Welsh authorities to protect children's rights and explore non-invasive alternatives to strip searches. These include:
1. Amending laws to explicitly prohibit strip searches of children.
 2. Investing in alternative technologies to reduce the need for invasive strip searches.
 3. Improving data collection and reporting to ensure accountability.
 4. Implementing a child-centred and children’s rights approach to policing and youth justice.
 5. Provide training to police officers and other relevant personnel on the harmful effects of strip searches and best practices for child-friendly procedures.
 6. Further research into the practice of child strip search in Wales, exploring the areas of anti-racism, and children’s rights within a devolved framework.

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y
Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Agenda item 3.4


Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JH/PO/104/25

Jenny Rathbone MS
Equality and Social Justice
Committee

5 March 2025

Dear Jenny,

I am writing to provide an update following my last correspondence of 30 September 2024. I apologise for the delay in this correspondence. However, given the cross-cutting nature of this area this has provided an opportunity for my officials to consult across portfolios which I hope will address the points raised in your letter of 02 October 2024.

I am also copying this letter to Jane Dodds MS, Mark Isherwood MS, Julie Morgan MS and Sioned Williams MS, as this response addresses the points raised in their joint letter of 20 December 2024. I am thankful to the members as well as to yourself for your continued championing of this issue.

There was a suggestion in your letter that the note of the summit held on 24 January 2024 had not been shared with the RCSLT nor the attendees of the summit. I can confirm that the note of the summit was shared with attendees including the RCSLT on 28 March 2024 and feedback was provided from colleagues from the RCSLT. To provide additional assurance the note will be resubmitted to RCSLT.

I am also able to provide an update on the action relating to the cross-department meeting between health, education and crime and justice colleagues. Senior leads from across these policy areas met on 29 November 2024 to consider the current position on Speech Language and Communication Provision including the points raised by the RCSLT this year.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care spoke about Speech Language and Communication needs in the criminal justice system in the Senedd on 22 January 2025, as part of a wider Debate on Speech and Language Therapists.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Jane.Hutt@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Jane.Hutt@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that Local Health Boards are responsible for determining population health needs and for determining the best way to meet their population's needs. All Local Health Boards in Wales provide speech and language therapy as a health treatment where it is clinically required. This service is available to all children who are assessed as requiring speech and language therapy in Wales, including children in contact with the justice system, subject to a referral process. Not every child with a speech, language and communication need may require or benefit from specialist therapy.

The Cabinet Secretary set out that it would be for youth justice service teams to provide any further services relating to speech language and communication needs, beyond that delivered by their Local Health Board, in order to deliver on their reserved statutory role.

Local authorities who consider there to be a need for additional provision can employ their own speech and language therapists directly or commission and fund provision via another employer, such as the NHS or private sector. They have access to a number of funding streams which could be used to support this, and our work with local authorities ahead of last year's summit highlighted several examples of where this is already working well. This includes local authorities using the UK Government's Turnaround funding scheme, which has been renewed into 2025-26, to fund provision.

I hope this letter answers your queries. We will continue to engage with the UK Government on their reserved responsibilities relating to this issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Hutt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line above the first letter "J".

Jane Hutt AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y
Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Agenda Item 3.5


Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JH/PO/172/25

For the Attention of the Post-Custody Accommodation Working Group

Sarah Rhode - WG Chair
Sarah.Rhodes@gov.wales

Louise Forman - HMPPS Chair
Louise.forman@justice.gov.uk

10 April 2025

Dear Chairs,

I am writing to you regarding the recent Supplementary Oral Questions that were raised in Plenary on 12 March, in relation to prisoner release ([Plenary 12/03/2025 - Welsh Parliament](#)).

Lesley Griffiths (Wrexham) initially asked, 'What discussions is Welsh Government having with the UK Government regarding the provision of appropriate support for prisoners being released from Welsh prisons?'

The Member then provided context for this question, noting the assistance she offered a newly released prisoner from HMP Berwyn, whilst waiting for a train at Wrexham General Station. The prisoner had been dropped off at the station with a travel warrant to get himself back to the North-East of England. He told the Member he could not write and had no idea how to navigate the rail system, which required multiple changes for him to get through his journey.

This prompted further discussion among Members, including Laura Anne Jones, who raised her experience of visiting the Salvation Army. The Member noted she was told there is a crisis of homelessness for those leaving prison.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Jane.Hutt@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Jane.Hutt@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I responded to Members by providing an overview of the important work undertaken by the Post-Custody Accommodation Working Group, co-chaired by Welsh Government and HMPPS. I took an interest in hearing these experiences and assured Members I would share these encounters with the Post-Custody Accommodation Working Group directly, for you to consider in your capacity as Chairs of the group.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Hutt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the top.

Jane Hutt AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Jane Hutt AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y
Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Agenda item 3.6


Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JH/PO/203/25

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee
Welsh Parliament

29 April 2025

Dear Jenny,

I am writing to thank you and your committee for the insightful report, "Anything's Achievable with the Right Support: Tackling the Disability Employment Gap". I also want to extend my gratitude to the many individuals and organisations who contributed to the Committee's inquiry by providing oral and written evidence.

I enclose the Welsh Government's response to the seven recommendations in the Committee's report. We have accepted or accepted in principle all the recommendations.

I acknowledge that the report also sets out several conclusions. I welcome the broad thrust of these conclusions. I agree with the Committee's view that those who can and want to work should have access to support, that employers should provide reasonable adjustments, and that misconceptions and negative attitudes should be challenged at every turn. These themes resonate strongly with the Disability Rights Plan that we expect to publish for consultation in the coming weeks.

I look forward to the plenary debate on the Committee's report.

Yours sincerely,



Jane Hutt AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Jane.Hutt@llyw.cymru
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We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.



ESJC Report: Anything's Achievable with the Right Support. Tackling the Disability Employment Gap

Welsh Government Response

17/04/2025

Introduction

This document sets out the Welsh Government's response to the Equality and Justice Committee's report 'Anything's Achievable with the Right Support. Tackling the Disability Employment Gap'.

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1. Recommendation 1

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government should ensure that expectations of disabled people are met by delivering on its stated policy agenda before the end of the Sixth Senedd. Laudable commitments need to be translated into tangible action including:

- Concluding the work of the Disability Rights Taskforce and any remaining work to develop and co-produce policy arising from the 'Locked Out' report at the earliest opportunity and no later than May 2025.
- Publishing the Disability Rights Action Plan which takes account of regional variations in the DEG and is inclusive of targets and a timeline for implementation as soon as possible and by May 2025 at the latest
- Delivering its Programme for Government commitment by incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into Welsh law before Dissolution of the Sixth Senedd scheduled for April 2026.

If the Welsh Government were to reject any of the steps in this recommendation it should indicate in its response what alternative action, inclusive of timescales, it intends to take in mitigation and in pursuance of the stated aim.

Response: Accept in Principle

The Disability Rights Taskforce convened its final meeting in January 2025 to receive the framework for the draft Disabled People's Rights Plan.

A principle of the Locked out: liberating disabled people's lives and rights in Wales beyond COVID-19 | GOV.WALES report and development of the Disabled People's Rights Plan has been the sustainable and meaningful engagement of disabled people. This engagement is intended to happen across all the regions as a genuine partnership with disabled people and Disabled People's Organisations.

The draft Disabled People's Rights Plan and its associated actions will be published in May 2025. This 10-year cross-government plan sets out the short-term actions we will take, and the long-term outcomes needed to ensure disabled people can thrive as equal members of Welsh society. This plan includes consideration of the employment and pay differences between disabled people and non-disabled people, and the measures needed to reduce these variations. The plan's 12-week consultation will provide an opportunity to consider regional variations across Wales. As part of our duties under the Equality Act, the Welsh Government has 7 National Equality Objectives (NEO's), this plan will support

these objectives including NEO 6: We will create a Wales with fair and equal opportunities to gain employment and for fair and equal treatment in the workplace, including fair pay and conditions. We will also set up an External Advisory Board to provide advice and support on the implementation, delivery, and impact of the plan.

As explained in evidence provided to the Committee a Legislative Options Working Group (LOWG) has been established in relation to the Programme for Government commitment to incorporate into Welsh law the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRDP). Welsh Ministers' powers to legislate in this area are not unfettered and the LOWG is analysing the Treaty articles and identifying where incorporation would strengthen rights protections alongside use of non-legislative levers. This work is essential prior to taking forward incorporation, and will ensure that Wales takes a coherent, well-informed, realistic, and strategic approach to human rights.

Financial Implications: A grant of £44,515 was provided in 2024-25 to support a pilot to develop and test the methodology of the analysis. Further funding of £99,000 has been approved for 2025-26 to advance this work.

2. Recommendation 2

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should undertake a comprehensive review of current arrangements within Business Wales to ensure that their activities align with the overall goal of eliminating the disability employment gap by 2035. This includes reviewing current sources of guidance; how current guidance is promoted, and customer journey pathways to maximise the number of opportunities for raising awareness when employers interact with business support services. The review should be undertaken at pace and completed by July 2025.

Response: Accept in principle

Business Wales reviewed the current service in 2023 and undertook an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) to ensure the service promoted and maximised the opportunities for disabled people accessing the Business Wales service. As part of the commitment to the Programme for Government to close the gap between disabled people and the rest of the working population, Business Wales works closely with the Welsh Government's Disabled People Employment Champions to provide support and guidance to SME's and business start-ups on the recruitment of disabled workers. Business Wales will review sources of guidance that are currently available to employers looking to recruit through the Business Wales service, working with the Welsh Government's Disabled People Employment Champions to explore whether the customer journey for employers maximises the number of opportunities to raise awareness.

Financial Implications: None

3. Recommendation 3

Recommendation 3. In order to monitor the effectiveness of the Disability Employment Champions the Welsh Government should set targets for their work and report on these annually. The targets should provide a basis for continuous improvement and use quantifiable metrics including:

- the total number of engagements with external stakeholders
- the total number of engagements that lead to permanent offers of employment;
- the number of engagements that lead to changes in recruitment and retention policies or processes.

We would expect this recommendation to be implemented quickly and no later than by July 2025.

Response: Accept in Principle

We have published the strategic objectives that the Disabled Peoples Employment Champions are tasked with delivering. These objectives have been provided in the written evidence to the Committee. The objectives form the basis for regular performance discussions with the Disabled Peoples Employment Champions, including their engagement activities and the outputs from these activities.

While we acknowledge the Committee's suggested targets, we believe that measuring the number of engagements alone will not provide a comprehensive picture of the value that the Disabled Peoples Employment Champions bring. Instead, we will effectively communicate the work of the Disabled Peoples Employment Champions and the impact of their contributions through a Written Statement which we will commit to publishing every 6 months.

Financial implications: None

4. Recommendation 4

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government must seek urgent changes to the Disability Confident Scheme which address the concerns regarding the general effectiveness and levels of trust in the Scheme, particularly at Levels 1 and 2. The Welsh Government should, by the end of April 2025, set out in detail:

- what improvements it would like to see made to the Disability Confident Scheme (including its accreditation arrangements);
- how it intends to secure these changes and a timeline by which we can expect the improvements to be implemented.

Should the Welsh Government fail to secure the necessary changes to the Disability Confident Scheme within existing structures, then it should give full consideration to developing a new, ambitious Welsh kitemark which commands the respect of employers and employees in Wales. The Welsh Government should report back on progress with this recommendation by December 2025.

Response: Accept

We have brought the Committee's report to the attention of the UK Government and are actively engaging with them to seek improvements to the Disability Confident Scheme. The UK Government has expressed interest in exploring ways to make the scheme more robust, and we will continue to engage with them on this matter. We have also been working with members of the Disability Rights Taskforce to co-produce evidence that will test the feasibility of a Welsh specific scheme.

Additionally, we are using our influence to raise awareness of Disability Confident and increase the number of Disability Confident Leaders (Level 3) in Wales, particularly in the devolved public sector. Recently, we hosted three regional events with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to strengthen relationships between DWP Disability Employment Advisors, Business Wales Disabled People's Employment Advisors, Careers Wales Disability Advisors, and Welsh Government Disabled People's Employment Champions.

We commit to reporting back to the Committee on progress in relation to this recommendation by the end of the year.

Financial implications: None

5. Recommendation 5

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should require devolved public sector bodies, where possible, to make a more substantial contribution to the aim of eliminating the Disability Employment Gap. This should include requiring them to:

- review their policies and practices to ensure alignment with the forthcoming Disability Action Plan;
- set a target to become Disability Confident Leaders within a specific timescale;
- include eliminating the disability employment gap as a formal objective in their well-being plans.

Where possible, this recommendation should be implemented within a specified and realistic timescale which we suggest would be by the end of 2025.

Response: Accept in principle

We support the principle of devolved public sector bodies leading by example in contributing to addressing the Disability Employment Gap through their actions. The Disability Rights Plan, which we will be publishing and consulting upon in the next few weeks, will contain relevant actions in this regard.

Financial implications: None

6. Recommendation 6

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should address gaps and introduce greater flexibility into the eligibility criteria of key support programmes for disabled applicants. This includes ensuring disabled people are subject to a higher age limit than others within each cohort in the next iteration of the Jobs Growth Wales scheme. This will ensure that disabled young people are able to access support at the right time and at an appropriate pace.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government has set itself an ambitious goal to unify Jobs Growth Wales Plus, ReAct+ and Communities for Work Plus into a cohesive employability support programme. This transformative approach aims to streamline and enhance the delivery of services, ensuring that individuals seeking employment can access comprehensive support through a consolidated system. Starting on 29th April 2025, Welsh Government officials will conduct a series of engagement events across Wales.

Support for disabled people will be a key discussion point at these events. The outcome of events will be used to ensure that the new model meets the needs and expectations of those out of work, employers, and service providers.

Financial Implications: None

7. Recommendation 7

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should ensure that the Disability Disparity Evidence Unit (DDEU) improves its engagement with the disability rights sector and report on the issues and data gaps it will work on by May 2025.

Response: Accept in principle

In line with the [strategy set out for each of the Equality, Race, and Disability Evidence Units](#) (the Units), the Disability Disparity Evidence Unit (DDEU) has engaged with various stakeholders from the disability rights sector throughout its current workplan. This includes collaboration with academics, Disabled People's Organisations, and private business owners through its work with members of the Disability Rights Taskforce to support the development of the forthcoming Disabled People's Rights Plan and in piloting the co-production of Government Social Research.

A summary of work carried out in response to policy and stakeholder needs was published [on the Welsh Government website](#) in 2024, with a second progress update planned for spring this year.

Key projects for the DDEU in 2025-26 will include the continuation of our project to develop Social Model compliant survey questions, the delivery of ongoing research into employment barriers and related interventions, scoping research to develop the evidence-base around British Sign Language, and a new programme of work to evaluate the implementation and impact of the Disabled People's Rights Plan.

As these projects progress, the DDEU will continue to engage with stakeholders across the disability rights sector to develop and deliver its future workplan.

Financial implications: None



The Welsh Government's Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Employment Rights Bill Response to the Equality and Social Justice Committee

April 2025

Summary

The Employment Rights Bill ("the Bill") was introduced in the House of Commons on 10 October 2024. Certain elements of the Bill require the legislative consent of the Senedd, and on 5 December 2024, I laid a Legislative Consent Memorandum for the Bill ('the LCM') before the Senedd. On 19 December I laid a supplementary LCM in respect of certain Government amendments to the Bill ('the SLCM').

On 31 January, the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee ('LJCC') wrote to me requesting further information on certain matters related to the Bill, to which I responded on 7 February. On 28 March the Equality and Social Justice

Committee ('ESJC') published a report ('the Report') on the LCM and the SLCM (which included references to the correspondence outlined above).

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1. Response to issues raised by the Committee

This response addresses the single conclusion and single recommendation of the Report and uses the section numbering found in the Bill as introduced in the House of Commons (which was used in the Report).

The Bill has not yet been debated by the Senedd.

ESJC Conclusion 1 – The Committee is satisfied with amendments made to clause 25 of the Bill and has no objection to granting legislative consent in relation to this clause.

No response required.

ESJC Recommendation 1 – The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government seeks clarity from the UK Government in relation to clause 26 and the points raised by the Llywydd on behalf of the Senedd Commission and informs Members of the outcome before the Senedd is asked to consider the Legislative Consent Motion in Plenary.

The Welsh Government accepts this recommendation.

Agenda Item 3.8



Comisiynydd
**Cenedlaethau'r
Dyfodol**
Cymru

**Future
Generations**
Commissioner
for Wales

By email

4th of May 2025

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter regarding the inquiry into Social Cohesion. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion, particularly as social well-being is one of the four dimensions of sustainable development, central to the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

As others have noted the Well-being of Future Generations Act provides a clear and ambitious vision for a Wales of cohesive communities—'communities that are attractive, viable, safe, and well-connected'. However, as highlighted by respondents to your consultation, achieving this vision requires a sustained commitment to long-term thinking, preventative action, and meaningful community involvement. I share the concerns raised by Carnegie UK regarding the need to empower public bodies with the skills and support necessary to embed this approach effectively.

In order to support public bodies to achieve the goal of a Wales of cohesive communities, my team and I regularly convene and advise public sector leaders and organisations on setting good well-being objectives and how to deliver on all the seven well-being goals. My team provides around 700-800 pieces of advice and assistance every year, the majority of which are to public bodies and Public Services Boards. My office also publishes detailed advice on the steps that public bodies can take. There is dedicated advice for each goal. This advice is available to see on my website.

I recently commissioned the Institute of Welsh Affairs to undertake an assessment of all public body well-being objectives and their corresponding steps in order to monitor progress. The analysis showed that of all five ways of working, 'involvement' was the least prevalent in the steps and we frequently hear from public bodies that resources (time and money) are a key barrier to meaningfully involving citizens and communities throughout policy, delivery, and evaluation. Disappointingly, the analysis has shown that just 14.7% of objectives spoke to the Cohesive Communities Goal. While we know that many public bodies value the role of their communities and the importance of involvement – action and future ambition is not necessarily aligning with these values.

Comisiynydd Cenedlaethau'r Dyfodol Cymru

Tramshed Tech, Heol Pendyris

Caerdydd, CF11 6BH

cystylltwchani@cenedlaethaurdyfodol.cymru

cenedlaethaurdyfodol.cymru

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

Tramshed Tech, Pendyris Street

Cardiff, CF11 6BH

contactus@futuregenerations.wales

futuregenerations.wales

There are excellent examples of projects that work with communities – as listed below – but it is not yet consistent in how public bodies are implementing the WFG Act. I have asked my team to give increased attention this year to supporting public bodies to implement the cohesive communities goal in our learning and development programme.

Another way in which I monitor progress is through the Ways of Working Journey Checker, which is a self-evaluation tool to understand how public bodies are delivering the five ways of working and provides guidance about what more they can do. The latest position shows that the majority of public bodies that have responded position themselves at level 3 of 5 in terms of implementing the involvement way of working.

My office is actively engaged in strengthening social cohesion across Wales, and this is a key area in my [Future Generations Report](#), which was published on 29th April. The report is an important part of my work to support and advise public bodies on how to implement the seven well-being goals. A central theme of my report is the power and opportunities within our communities. Whether it is through keeping people well, improving access to nature, investing in placemaking, or investing in sustainable and affordable local food systems, communities play a vital role in shaping our collective future.

While significant efforts are being made, I remain concerned that communities are not yet being meaningfully involved in decision-making processes. My report recommends that **public bodies increase public engagement** to build trust, strengthen consensus, and bridge the gap between policymaking and citizens. To further support communities, I am calling for the introduction of a **Community Right to Buy Act**, which would empower local people to take ownership of community assets and strengthen social ties. I am also advocating for all **public bodies to implement volunteering plans** that enable employees to actively contribute to their communities. This not only builds social capital but fosters a deeper sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

Whilst these recommendations provide a few illustrations of how I am taking action on social cohesion, I would strongly encourage the committee to take account of my full report.

I would also encourage the committee to draw on the Well-being of Wales Report, independently produced by the Welsh Government's Chief Statistician, which tracks

progress against each national goal and provides insight into the key milestones and indicators shaping our social fabric.

The majority of the public correspondence I receive is from people passionate about their communities and spaces, and range from concerns around community involvement in planning decisions and cuts to local transport services, to groups sharing how they're embedding the Act in local projects and asking for support in how they can go further.

These letters are particularly insightful in my monitoring and assessing of public bodies' progress and consistently show how people across Wales care about decisions being made by public bodies that impact our current and future well-being, including how they meaningfully involve people in decisions that affect them and how decisions are made with long-term impacts and trends in mind.

Additionally, my collaboration with the voluntary sector is deep and long standing as we seek to work together to build social capital. I hold regular partnership meetings with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and its members. I will be jointly hosting GOFOD3 this year, the main third sector annual conference in Wales and an important platform for sharing best practice and fostering collaboration on social cohesion across sectors.

My Future Generations Report is filled with case studies highlighting good practice in social cohesion, demonstrating how different communities and organisations are driving positive change.

- Case-study: **GwyrddNi** is a community-led movement, bringing people together from five areas in Gwynedd to take action on climate change. Delivered by [Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig](#), [Partneriaeth Ogwen](#), [Yr Orsaf](#), [Cwmni Bro](#), [Ynni Llŷn](#) and [Cyd Ynni](#), GwyrddNi has led community assemblies to co-produce local action plans; worked with more than 600 school children to bring their ideas for a greener, more sustainable future to life; and are supporting action around repair and re-use projects, active travel, community energy, retrofit, and nature restoration.
- Case study: **Well North Wales** - Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board's Well North Wales partnership is placing communities at the heart of health transformation. This multi-agency approach works to address health inequalities and the wider determinants of health, embedding prevention across



all planning and delivery. By taking a joined-up approach, Well North Wales is ensuring that services are shaped by and for the communities they serve, leading to better, more sustainable health outcomes.

- Case study: **Caerphilly's Vision 2035** - Caerphilly's [Vision 2035 Placemaking Plan](#) is placing community and culture at the heart of new developments. Key initiatives include:
 - Ffos Caerffili market, with over 20 independent traders, supporting small businesses and local food producers.
 - Affordable, energy-efficient housing and business spaces redeveloped from underused buildings.
 - Revitalisation of the Workmen's Hall, transforming it into a cultural centre for the community.
- Case study: **Beyond Recycling with Benthg Cymru** - Benthg Cymru is creating Libraries of Things across Wales, allowing people to borrow items instead of buying them, reducing both costs and environmental impact. Since 2020, Benthg Cymru has facilitated 18,000 'borrows', saving households £500,000 and reducing carbon emissions by 220,000 kg.
- Case study: **The Talking Shops** – Supported by cross-sector partners and funding, Omidaze Productions established The Talking Shops — public spaces designed for creative, cultural, and democratic discussion. Over 13,000 people, aged six months to 96 years old, have taken part, using the spaces to share experiences, learn new skills, and engage with their community and democracy. These spaces provide an accessible, inclusive setting for people from all backgrounds to connect and contribute to shaping their local communities.

These case studies will illustrate innovative approaches to placemaking, social inclusion, and community-led initiatives that align with the ambitions of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

I fully agree with the Committee that ambition must be matched with effective implementation. Government and public bodies must ensure that adequate resources and capacity are built into decisions to translate policy into practice. My office remains committed to supporting this process, advocating for stronger community involvement, and ensuring that Wales continues to lead the way in creating cohesive communities.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and look forward to continuing our dialogue on this crucial issue.

Yours sincerely,



Derek Walker,
Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

Derek Walker
Future Generations Commissioner for
Wales

27 March 2025

Dear Derek,

Social Cohesion Inquiry

During our inquiry into Social Cohesion concerns have been raised about current and future risks to social cohesion in our communities.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 national goals for 'A Wales of cohesive communities' is described as 'attractive, viable, safe and well-connected'. Several [responses to our consultation](#) referenced this goal in the 2015 Act specifically.

For example, Carnegie UK emphasised the need to empower public bodies:

A significant amount of support is needed to equip people working in public bodies with the skills to think long term. Too often, legislation placing new duties on the public sector is passed without providing any support for the training, development and longer-term cultural change required to properly implement it. In a year where various implementation plans and strategies have been completed and published, the Welsh Government should not overlook the importance of ensuring public sector workers have the skills and knowledge to embed a preventative approach in practice.

Similarly the [Welsh Refugee Council](#) highlighted recent incidents concerning refugees and asylum seekers where they claim the approach adopted by public bodies were inconsistent with the 2015 Act.

Therefore your views on this matter and any details you can provide on work to support this well-being goal is key. In addition to any views on [the Terms of Reference](#) for this inquiry, we would be grateful if you could respond to the following questions:

- What actions or workstreams are you currently involved in which seek to strengthen the goal of social cohesion? How is social cohesion reflected in your current or future work?
- How are you monitoring progress towards the national goal of a 'Wales of cohesive communities'?
- How are you working with public bodies to support them to deliver this goal?

- How are you working with other organisations such as the Welsh Government and voluntary sector to build social capital and social cohesion?
- What examples of good practice are you aware of, or are you involved in, that demonstrate progress towards this goal?

As the inquiry is already underway and we are taking evidence through March and April, an early response would help to inform these evidence sessions. To enable us to consider your response before our final evidence session with the Cabinet Secretary, we would be grateful if you could respond no later than 5 May 2025.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Rathbone', written in a cursive style.

Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

Jayne Bryant AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Lywodraeth Leol a Thai
Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government

Agenda item 3.9


Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref 20250429 Chair to CSSJTCW re
democratic engagement grant

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee
Senedd Cymru

8 May 2025

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter of 29th April requesting information about the Democratic Engagement Grant (DEG), which arose during your Committee's evidence session on democratic health. As the grant falls within my portfolio, I am responding on behalf of the Government.

I am glad to hear the Grant mentioned in Committee as an example of the positive steps the Welsh Government has taken to encourage democratic engagement in Wales. The Committee might be interested to know that the Scottish Parliament has legislated (the [Scottish Elections \(Representation and Reform\) Act 2025](#)) to give Scottish Ministers powers to fund activities to increase democratic engagement. The Scottish Government cited our grant scheme and projects we have funded as examples of what they would look to carry out in introducing the legislation.

I have been pleased to talk about the grant several times in the Siamber, highlighting how work funded by the grant is helping to remove barriers and encourage participation in democracy in Wales. Since the launch of the DEG in February 2022 and up to 30 June 2025, we have allocated £657,093.85 of Welsh Government funding to support democratic engagement activity in Wales. This funding supported 22 organisations to deliver 27 projects across Wales, reaching a diverse range of people and communities, including young people (in school and out of school settings), adults with Additional Learning Needs, foreign-national communities, the gypsy and traveller community and disabled people. For your reference, I have attached a list of the projects funded to date.

In March I agreed the continuation of the Democratic Engagement Grant for a further 3 years from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2028, funded at £400 000 per year. Further information is available at <https://www.gov.wales/democratic-engagement-grant>, and Officials are currently managing the application process for the next cohort of projects.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Jayne.Bryant@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Jayne.Bryant@gov.Wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.


As part of our consideration of whether to continue, we commissioned an evaluation by Welsh Government researchers into the Grant and its operation of the grant during its first full financial year (2023-24). In that year, sixteen organisations were delivering projects, including four organisations with multi-year projects. The evaluation aimed to review the Grant's design and delivery, understand its perceived impact of the DEG, and understand how monitoring and evaluation could be improved. The report is being translated and will be published soon on the Research and Statistics pages of the Welsh Government's website.

As a condition of receiving DEG funding project leads must attend meetings of the Welsh Government's Democratic Engagement Partnership. The Partnership brings funded groups together alongside others active in the democratic engagement space like the Electoral Commission, Senedd Commission, local authorities, civil society groups and third sector organisations. Grant holders are invited to report on their work at these meetings which actively seek to encourage collaboration to reduce duplication, overcome barriers with collective problem and share best practice within the democratic engagement sector in Wales.

I think it is helpful that the committee recognises the importance of democratic health as part of its consideration of social cohesion. As highlighted by Professor Matt Ryan, Mick Antoniw MS, my predecessor as Elections Minister, asked the Wales Centre for Public Policy to explore how Wales's democratic health can best be defined, measured, and monitored. This was with a view to helping focus efforts on increasing participation and engagement in national and local democratic processes in Wales, especially among under-represented groups. Following that report we have commissioned work to identify options for specific measures and indicators to track, monitor and assess different components of democracy in Wales. The outcome of this work will be options of five or six indicators and a series of recommendations that the Welsh Government can use to measure and monitor democratic health in Wales. We expect the study to be finalised by the end of this calendar year.

I will be happy to write to the Committee again to provide updates on any of the issues raised in this letter and I am copying this to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jayne Bryant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jayne Bryant AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Lywodraeth Leol a Thai
Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government

ANNEX

DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT GRANT

Below lists the organisations who were successful in bidding for funding via the Democratic Engagement Grant. Funding figures shown represent the total amount of funding they were awarded, not actual expenditure.

No project has exceeded its budget allocation.

2022-2023 Projects

1. The Politics Project (**£208,125 – 2 year & 1 month project, ends 31 March 2025**) will continue to run their successful Digital Dialogue Sessions in schools across Wales. The sessions allow young people to ask questions and discuss issues of importance to them to their elected representative. Throughout the life of the project, the aim is to deliver 160 engagements between young people and politicians, working with 80 schools in total from 2022-23 through to the end of 2024-25.

2023-2024 Projects

2. Ceredigion County Council (**£10,000**) will create content specifically designed to reach out and engage with qualifying foreign nationals in their communities.
3. City of Cardiff Council in partnership with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and Vale of Glamorgan Council (**£6922**) are creating digital content (videos) in multiple languages focusing on what to expect at a polling station.
4. City of Cardiff Council (**£984**) have been awarded funding for a second, separate project which is focused on engaging and working with members of the Gypsy and Traveller community on the importance of democracy through workshops.
5. Democracy Club (**£35,000**) will look to expand their poll station finder's capabilities to include more accessibility information about the buildings that host polling places.
6. I Have a Voice (**£11,763**) will train and support young people studying in colleges in the Colleges Wales network to deliver voter registration drives in their college.
7. Innovate Trust (**£27,811.60**) will raise democratic awareness, increase voter registration and participation amongst people with learning disabilities in Wales.
8. Llanelli Town Council (**£1000**) will produce materials and run sessions in local schools focusing on good citizenship, the role of the Mayor in Llanelli, why we vote and the history of voting and democracy.
9. Llansteffan and Llanybri Community Council (**£940**) will establish a Youth Forum, encouraging young people to be involved with local issues and have a strong link with the Community Council (YF reps will attend meetings and cover topics of interest).

10. PLANED (**£15,000**) will hold activities centred around connecting young people to elected officials from town and community councils in west Wales.
11. South Riverside Community Centre (**£1000**) will support the democratic engagement of foreign nationals living in Cardiff - specifically asylum seekers, refugees and migrants for whom English is a second language.
12. Tenby Town Council (**£1000**) will establish a community forum to increase participation in their community on local matters.
13. *Vocal Eyes (**£3625.20**) project ended early due to the company informing officials of their inability to continue delivery in line with their grant award letter.*
14. Y Ty Gwyrdd (**£1600**) will hold a 'People's Assembly' focusing on how to make a community more sustainable, involving people in deliberative democracy and look to help people not normally engaged and vocal in local democratic processes, to find their voice.
15. Boys & Girls Club Wales (**£109,684.95 – 2-year project, ends 31 March 2025**) will continue to run their Pizza and Politics workshops and Raise your Voice Projects, with an emphasis on those who are marginalised. Including: people from ethnic minority backgrounds, LGBTQ+ young people and disabled young people and those with poor mental health.
16. British Deaf Association (**£33,165.96 – 2-year project, ends 31 March 2025**) will run in-person and digital workshops to their stakeholders on how democracy works to empower Deaf people.
17. Swansea MAD (**£44,886.90 – 2-year project, ends 31 March 2025**) will facilitate activities with young people/adults in Swansea (who are underrepresented and/or newly enfranchised), supporting them to engage with the democratic process; promoting/increasing meaningful/sustainable voice/participation and ensuring every citizen in Swansea can play their full part in democracy.

2024/25 Projects

18. Scouts Cymru (**£17,720**) will strengthen their Democracy Challenge Badge, creating an engaging programme to involve young people in the democratic process of Wales. It will create a blended approach combining existing activities for the challenge badge with digital resources, working with the Electoral Commission and participatory events with the Welsh Centre for International Affairs.
19. Elect Her (**£53,534.88**) aim to help women to engage with democracy, designing and developing and develop a series of digital resources for grassroots women's community groups to host democracy circles, demystifying democracy and supporting women to develop action plans for engagement. Alongside this, digital resources will be created, and training courses delivered specifically for Welsh women including self-led downloadable resources, video recordings, blended learning courses to equip them to move through the journey towards elected office.
20. Eco Hub Aber (**£11,490**) will enhance a popular existing community App to promote greater understanding of democracy and easier pathways for engagement. The grant will fund an additional democratic engagement section on the app to allow users to easily access information about democracy and be directed to relevant websites.

21. Aberystwyth Students Union (**£23,870**) aim to increase student participation and engagement with the democratic process in Wales, including creating content tailored towards the interests of students, holding voter registration drives and supporting students to engage with elected officials.
22. Aberystwyth Students Union (**£7130**) This separate project utilising the same activity but allows for a coordinator specifically focused on engaging and supporting international students with their democratic rights in Wales.
23. Shout Out UK (**£15,583.86**) will deliver media literacy training directly to young people in via schools on drop-down days, with a specific focus on students in years 11, 12 and 13, aiming to reach 330 students' total. The training will equip students with the knowledge and skills to identify various forms of misinformation, disinformation and extremist content, understand the motivations behind their dissemination and critically evaluate information sources in line with the Digital Competence Framework of the Curriculum for Wales.
24. Tenby Town Council (**£984**) will continue with their youth and community forums which were created in 2023/24 with support from this grant, with the aim to continue increasing participation in their community on local matters.
25. Boys & Girls Club Wales (**£9497**) assemble a diverse steering group consisting of marginalised young people who are care-experienced, LGBTQ+, homeless, adopted, travellers, ethnic minorities, and have disabilities from their partnerships and clubs. The steering group will collaborate in selecting impactful clips, drafting educational content, and providing personal insights to ensure the toolkit accurately reflects their experiences and needs. This toolkit will include guidelines, tips, and real-life examples to help politicians engage effectively with young people facing trauma and life challenges.
26. City of Cardiff Council (**£3775.50**) will hold their 'Democracy in Action' workshop. The workshop will allow Democracy Ambassadors from the 7 partnering schools to see what activities they could do in their setting. The workshop will contain 4 different activities: different governments lecture, a mock election, local ideas workshop with councillors and meet the lord mayor.

To note: The Politics Project, Swansea MAD, Boys & Girls Club of Wales (2023-24 multi-year project), Scouts Cymru, Elect Her, Eco Hub Aber, Aberystwyth Students Union, Shout Out UK, Tenby Town Council and City of Cardiff Council had their projects extended beyond their original end date of 31 March 2025 to 30 June 2025.

2025/26 Projects

27. Llanelli Township (**£1000**) will run a series of public engagement sessions across Llanelli, targeting a diverse cross-section of the local population. Activities will include interactive displays, workshops, and informal open consultations hosted at accessible community venues. Sessions will be designed to demystify governance structures, show how community benefit societies and community interest companies interface with public authorities, and provide practical ways people can get involved.

**Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb
a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol**

—

**Equality and Social Justice
Committee**

Jane Hutt MS

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd
and Chief Whip

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddCydraddoldeb@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddCydraddoldeb
0300 200 6565

—

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddEquality@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddEquality
0300 200 6565

29 April 2025

Dear Jane,

Social Cohesion Inquiry

During an evidence session on democratic health the 28 April, reference was made to the annual £400,000 Democratic Engagement Grant available to improve democratic engagement.

Members would appreciate further information on which organisations and projects have previously received grants, how their work was evaluated, reported and shared in order to learn and improve democratic engagement across Wales.

We look forward to hearing from you and would appreciate if you could provide a response prior to appearing before Committee on 12 May.

Yours sincerely,



Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref:
Ein cyf/Our ref:

Mike Hedges MS
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

8th May 2025

Dear Mike,

In accordance with the inter-institutional relations agreement, I am writing to notify you that a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department for Work and Pensions and Welsh Government was published on 29th April 2025. It can be found [here](#).

This Memorandum of Understanding sets out a clear set of conditions and principles for joint working between the Department for Work and Pensions and Welsh Ministers for the overall delivery of the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer in Wales (the “Trailblazer”) and covers the following:

- Aims of the Trailblazer
- Funding/Payment Schedule
- The principles of collaborative working

I have also copied this letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt MS, and the chairs of the Equality and Social Justice Committee, and the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Correspondence.Rebecca.Evans@gov.wales
Gohebiaeth.Rebecca.Evans@llyw.cymru

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: PO221

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

Copied to: Buffy Williams MS, Chair of the Children, Young People, and Education Committee.

8 May 2025

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter dated 27 March 2025 to Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chef Whip, Jane Hutt MS. As the issue relates to Free School Meal policy, it has been transferred to the education portfolio for a response.

As you are aware our Programme for Government commits us to continue to meet the rise in demand for Free School Meals resulting from the pandemic and review the eligibility criteria, extending entitlement as far as resources allow and at least to all primary school children.

Whilst the commitment of providing a free school meal to all primary school children was fulfilled in September 2024, I recognise that there are secondary aged learners who are living in socio-economic disadvantage that are currently excluded from receiving free school meals based on their parents' immigration status irrespective of household income.

This is why I wrote to local authorities in November 2024 to remind them of the vital role they play in meeting our shared commitment of tackling child hunger and to consider how they can use their discretionary powers to provide meals in secondary schools without charging – specifically targeting those children from low-income families with No Recourse to Public Funds whose immigration status means there is no automatic entitlement. I have also raised my concerns about this issue directly with the WLGA.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Lynne.Neagle@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Lynne.Neagle@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.



Extending eligibility to free school meals to include learners from low-income households with no recourse to public funds would require primary legislation, and whilst the Department of Education has indicated that it plans to legislate for the changes it has made, currently their extension of free school meals to learners from households with no recourse to public funds has been achieved through issuing non-statutory guidance only.

In adopting this approach, the Department of Education has not been able to accurately monitor the impact of the policy in terms of its efficacy or cost and given the very difficult decisions that have been made in setting the Welsh Government budget for 2025-26, pursuing a similar policy position in Wales in the absence of reliable data about the potential impacts, is not under consideration at this time.

However, I am aware that my recent communication to local authorities on the use of discretionary powers to provide meals without charging may not be having the desired effect. I am deeply concerned about this.

I have therefore asked my officials for urgent advice on what more can be done to support local authority efforts to identify and support NRPF learners in need of a meal, to understand and remove barriers that may be preventing these learners from accessing support, as well as maximising opportunities for the collection of data that can be used to reliably inform and monitor future policy decisions about support for NRPF learners in the longer term.

I will provide a further update to the Committee as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Lynne.Neagle@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Lynne.Neagle@gov.wales

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We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Jane Hutt MS

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief

Whip

Welsh Government

27 March 2025

Dear Jane,

Social Cohesion: eligibility for free school meals

We held a stakeholder session on 17 March as part of our inquiry into social cohesion. We discussed a range of matters including the relationship between the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy, the attainment gap and free school meals.

We understand that in England, the Government has extended free school meal eligibility to children in all households with NRPF, subject to maximum income thresholds. In Wales, however, local authorities are “encouraged to use their discretion to provide free school meals to any child who is not automatically entitled due to their parents’ immigration status.”¹ We heard fears that the discretionary approach adopted in Wales risks widening the attainment gap and exacerbating inequalities in educational and health outcomes. We would be grateful if you could please explain

1. Why the Welsh Government believes a discretionary approach is preferable to an automatic entitlement;
2. Detail of how the Welsh Government is encouraging local authorities to provide free school meals;
3. Detail of how the Welsh Government is monitoring the local authority response including levels of take-up to ensure that the guidance is being interpreted fairly and consistently.

I would welcome a response within usual timescales; I am copying this letter to Buffy Williams MS, Chair of the Children, Young People, and Education Committee.

¹ Welsh Government, [Free school meals: information for local authorities and schools](#)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jenny Rathbone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'J'.

Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

Agenda Item 6

By virtue of paragraph(s) vii of Standing Order 17.42

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