

RFW 30

Ymateb gan : Rhwydwaith Dileu Tlodi Plant Cymru  
Evidence from : End Child Poverty Network Cymru

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

ECPN Cymru welcomes this opportunity to provide written evidence to the Committee's follow up inquiry into rethinking food in Wales. We believe this subject cannot be discussed without raising the following issues.

### Food Poverty

Food poverty is at an all-time high in Wales; the latest figures published by the [Trussell Trust](#) show that 5,185 three day emergency food supplies were provided for children by foodbanks in Wales during July and August 2016. It is likely that the figures for July and August this year will be higher. Trussell also stated of the emergency food supplies in Wales that went to children:

- 27% went to 0-4 year olds
- 47% went to 5-11 year olds
- 21% went to 12-16 year olds
- 5% went to children for whom their age was not known

Whilst foodbanks play an important role in helping to address hunger, one of the main issues is that the food is mostly packets, tins and bottles, which means that children are not always getting nutritious fruit and vegetables needed for a healthy diet.

In 2016 Children in Wales, a member of the ECPN, undertook their annual [Child and Family Poverty Survey](#) and food poverty was one of the topics surveyed. Respondents to the survey were drawn largely from professionals and practitioners working with families. When asked the question 'Is food poverty an issue?' 86% of respondents said 'Yes'; we then asked if the situation was the same as last year, worse or better. 75% said that it was more of an issue and 21% said there was no change. The reasons cited for high foodbank usage was mainly changes to benefit entitlement and delays, and financial challenges for those working on variable hour contracts and low/insecure

income. We also asked the views of young people on food poverty; they recognised that a child whose nutritional diet is poor, is likely to have a low attention span and poor concentration, resulting in poor school attainment.

Respondents to the survey also talked about the 'rural premium' of having to pay higher prices for food and the cost of transport to large supermarkets, where food is typically cheaper. We heard of two cases where food bank volunteers have to deliver emergency food parcels, sometime travelling as far as 50+ miles.

The survey then asked what might be the solution to the problem and the following suggestions were made:

- Review the current entitlement to free school meals
- Healthy food vouchers for families with children up to 12 years
- A more strategic approach to the funding of food banks
- Education for families on healthy eating on a low budget
- Develop stronger links between food banks and other agencies/services
- Setting up food and veg banks with food produced on community allotments
- Better co-ordination of corporate responsibility and partnerships with commercial businesses

### Holiday Hunger

Holiday hunger is a growing issue in Wales and the UK as illustrated by the [2017 APPG for Hunger](#) report and the [Welsh Governments funding commitment](#) to the WLGA's Food and Fun programme. The Food and Fun programme was [evaluated in 2016](#) and described as 'an innovative and cost-efficient multi-agency model that can be implemented across a range of school sites and local authorities in Wales to reduce the impact of poverty and social deprivation during the school holidays.' Other parts of the UK and world are looking at the Food and Fun programme in Wales as best practice and it is continuing to develop, with all Welsh local authorities expressing an interest for 2018. ECPN welcomes and supports the Food and Fun initiative and would urge the Welsh Government to lend support to further recommendations in the APPG e.g. A statutory requirement for local authorities to facilitate and coordinate the delivery of free meals and fun for children during school holidays.

**ECPN recommend that the Committee consider the issue of food poverty under the 'healthy, locally produced food that is accessible and affordable' category of the Consultation.**

## Free School Meals

The situation with free school meals (FSM) in Wales is not straightforward. All school aged children, whose parents are in receipt of some prescribed welfare benefits are entitled to FSM (whereas in England all children aged 5-7 are also provided with FSM). Not all children in low income families in Wales are eligible. With the high levels of children living in low income working families, many miss out on a nutritious and hot meal due to cost. In 2013 the ECPN Cymru published a briefing paper, '[The Cost of Education – Free Schools Meals](#)', calling on the Welsh Government to provide all school children, aged 5 – 7 with free school meals, making it a universal service that would eliminate costly and bureaucratic administration process typically associated with means testing. Not only would universal FSMs improve health and education outcomes, it would ensure equitability and remove the stigma felt by many children accessing the service, as evidenced in the [Welsh Government's Case Study Report](#) on the take up of FSMs.

More recently, the [BBC](#) reported that one Assembly Member had drawn attention to the inconsistent and out of date systems across schools was leading to children who are currently entitled being bullied, or being discouraged from using the service. Different systems are in place across different local authorities, including fobs, cards, biometrics and online payments.

At the National Child Poverty Conference held in June this year, a young person ask a panel of experts "*Why pupils in secondary schools who are on free school meals don't also have an allowance for breakfast?*" The young person gave an example from their area where pupils on free school meals were given a card and the money wasn't loaded onto the card until lunch-time, therefore, if they wanted to get something for breakfast or at break-time, they couldn't. The morning is very long in secondary school, with lunch break often after 1pm, which is a long time to wait if you haven't had any breakfast.

**ECPN recommends that the Committee give consideration to recommending that the Welsh Government give consideration to introducing Universal Free School Meals for all children aged 5-7 years old and ensures that all local authorities introduce up to date and consistent systems to administer the service**

### **Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (2015)**

The Welsh Government recognised the importance of action to tackle food poverty as it impacts on children and families by identifying food poverty as one of the 5 new key priorities outlined in the revised statutory [Child Poverty Strategy for Wales](#) (2015)

*Food Poverty: Food poverty (defined as an inability to afford or have access to food which provides a healthy diet) is a growing issue in Wales. It is an issue underpinned by a number of different*

*factors – including affordability, awareness (related to education, information and skills) and access or availability.*

ECPN welcomes the Welsh Governments funding and further roll out of its School Holiday Enrichment Programme, 'Food and Fun' aimed at tackling holiday hunger and providing physical activity and enrichment sessions to children in deprived areas during the summer holidays, this year. The creation of the Wales Food Poverty Alliance is also a welcome development.

**The Committee may well wish to consider the achievements made by the WG in delivering the key WG priority of tackling Food Poverty as underpinned by the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales.**