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# CYTŪN POLICY BULLETIN

## APRIL 2015

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### PRAY AND PREPARE FOR ELECTION 2015

#### Statement from the Bishops of the Church in Wales - Make your mark on May 7

Christians want to make the world a better place. That's why churches have always been involved in caring for those most in need, both at home and abroad. Because the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus himself called for good news and social justice for all people, churches are involved, every day, in running food-banks, credit unions, family centres, shelters for the homeless, and projects to support young parents.

Wanting to make the world a better place also means caring about how our society is organised. By voting and being active in politics we exercise our power to change society. Our right to vote is not something we should take for granted. It was a hard-won right, and one which millions of people in the world still don't enjoy.

#### Be prepared

- Find out who promises to improve not just your life but the lives of those who are in greatest need.
- Try to work out who you believe can best work for what is good and fair.
- If you can, engage with candidates or party members. Talk to them when they call at the door. Read their pamphlets and manifestos, and organise or attend hustings run by our churches or other groups.
- Don't be disillusioned. Remember that while some politicians have brought the game into disrepute by abusing their privileged positions, most of those who stand for election genuinely want to make a difference for the better.

We believe that an election is the opportunity to make a mark, not just on a ballot paper but one which can shape our future. It's an opportunity too important to neglect, however you choose to vote in the end.

#### Exciting video resources from the Salvation Army



As part of a public campaign, the Public Affairs Unit of the Salvation Army has worked with their in-house video production team to make a series of short films highlighting The Salvation Army's work. Each week for the next six weeks two new videos will be released: the first video will feature the story of a person helped by The Salvation Army

(Friday release); the second will feature politicians from the major political parties being interviewed by a Salvation Army service user or employee (released the following Monday).

The films are designed to inspire voters to ask the questions that matter to them in the election. The films can also be used in conjunction with the Worship Resources Pack, which will be issued simultaneously with the first release of video, to aid congregation and small group reflection.

To view the films please click on the link below to take you straight there

<http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/2015-general-election-asking-questions-matter>

If you use any of the videos, please attributed them to The Salvation Army.



***Love your neighbour: Think, Pray, Vote*** is a resource from the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland. It invites Christians, and

indeed all responsible citizens, to look beyond self-interest and to pursue a political agenda that seeks the good of all, especially those who are often left excluded, marginalised and stigmatised – these are the very people that Jesus invites us to consider as neighbours. The pack of short films, Bible reflections and prayers is designed primarily for use in a church service, but could also be the basis of a home group programme or similar. Each week a different core theme is presented, connecting some key Biblical messages with the political narratives of our election campaign – truth, justice, peace and wellbeing. These lie at the very heart of our vision of God's Kingdom, and as such lie at the heart of a wholesome society.

Through a postcard, members of the congregation are invited to reflect on these and introduce some key questions into any discussions and narratives in which they participate, whether this is talking to a canvasser on the door, joining in a radio phone-in or something similar. At the same time, the denominations across the UK will work to inject these themes into media debates. By working together in this way, the churches hope to influence the key narratives of the United Kingdom in the weeks ahead. [You can order the pack here](#). For those who wish to explore issues from a Christian perspective in more detail, [JPIT has also produced a number of briefing documents](#).

## ELECTION DEBATES

All broadcasters will be covering the election in detail. Cytûn has been contacted by ITV Wales who will be staging an election debate on **April 22nd, 2015, from 18:30 until 21:30**, at the **Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama in Cardiff**. With an audience of 200 people, it will be broadcast live and feature a representative from the main 6 political parties; Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Greens, Plaid Cymru and UKIP. Applications to be in the audience are welcomed by **Friday 10th April 2015**. Please send a short profile of each person who would like to attend, including how they intend to vote in May and whether anyone has accessibility requirements to [rosie.mercer@itv.com](mailto:rosie.mercer@itv.com) or ring Rosie on 07880 475 645

ITV is also producing **Voter voice** These are pieces where we are out and about round Wales talking to people about the issues that concern them. If you know of a good diverse, chatty group who would be keen to be involved please get in with [carl.edwards@itv.com](mailto:carl.edwards@itv.com).

Many church groups are organising **constituency hustings**. Details can be found on Twitter at **#ChurchHustingsWales** or on the churches' election website at <http://ctbielections.org.uk/> and the Evangelical Alliance site at <http://election2015.eauk.org/> We have been notified of many hustings in south-east Wales, but very few in the north and west. **Could you please tweet or contact us with your details?**

The websites above contain many more resources and links to other sites with background material for the election.

## THE GREAT DEBATE ABOUT THE DONALDSON REPORT

The first phase of the **Great Debate** about Professor Donaldson's report on the national curriculum in schools in Wales runs until **8 May** and will act as a consultation on what the Review has recommended.

As the Donaldson Review recognises, successful implementation of any new curriculum will ultimately depend on what happens in the classroom. Professor Donaldson himself made plenty of reference to the importance of Professor John Furlong's report, [\*Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers\*](#), which has also been published. The Donaldson Review identified the 'fundamental interdependency between the purposes of the curriculum and pedagogy' (the study and practice of how best to teach). In his report, Professor Furlong describes initial teacher training as being at a 'critical turning point' and recommends that a more 'expansive' form is needed for teachers to be able to deliver on the Donaldson blueprint.

Professor Donaldson himself is very clear that one of the recurring issues raised with the review team during their evidence gathering was whether mechanisms for implementation of previous reforms had sufficiently considered whether schools and teachers had the capacity to deliver them. He recognises that his proposals are 'radical and fundamental', and 'imply deep and enduring change'. He suggests that the changes will take time and should be 'carefully phased in', stressing that 'building a robust basis of support across all stakeholders and political parties is key'.

The faith communities of Wales have already begun to respond to the Report. Rheinallt Thomas, education adviser to the Free Church Council for Wales, has welcomed the report, saying, "There is much in the Report about which we can be positive. Religious Education would remain compulsory until 16 years of age (within Humanities), and there is no recommendation to alter the role of county Standing Advisory Committees on Religious Education (SACREs) nor the right of parents to withdraw their children from RE lessons. Other elements in the Report emphasise the importance of RE and ethical teaching.

"Another positive," he adds, "is that the Report recommends the 'strengthening' of the place of the Welsh language within the curriculum, beginning teaching it as a second language at an earlier stage, so that a third language could be added earlier than at present. The emphasis would be on oral skills and everyday communication in order to promote the relevance of the Welsh language to pupils. A curriculum revised in this way would be more flexible in terms of teaching and assessment techniques, and in terms of school timetabling. It will offer greater professional freedom to teachers within a framework of continued accountability."

However, some churches have expressed concern at the absence of the spiritual dimension of the human person in Donaldson's summary of what it is to be human, and of the importance of a spiritual formation for all children in his review.

The Report itself, an online survey and a one-page questionnaire are available on the website <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/curriculum-for-wales/?skip=1&lang=en>

You can also comment by e-mail to: [CurriculumReview@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:CurriculumReview@wales.gsi.gov.uk) or by post to: Curriculum Review, Welsh Government, Cathays Park 2, Cardiff CF10 3NQ.

The Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis, is expected to deliver his response to the Report after the end of the first phase of the Great Debate on 8<sup>th</sup> May, and before the summer recess.

## WELSH GOVERNMENT BONDS

The St David's Day proposals for further devolution to Wales, which were outlined in the [March 2015 Policy Bulletin](#), included a reference to allowing the Welsh Government to issue bonds to borrow for capital expenditure. In [documents released with the UK Budget](#) on 18th March, it was announced that this power will not commence until April 2018. The level of borrowing for capital investment will remain up to £125 million per year within an overall cap of £500 million. The UK government says that the devolution of bond issuance powers will broaden the sources of financing available to the devolved administrations for capital investment such as major transport projects, hospitals, schools and flood defences when their borrowing powers are implemented. The Welsh government will be solely responsible for meeting its liabilities and the UK government will provide no guarantee on any bonds issued by the Welsh government. The Welsh government would need further approval from HM Treasury to issue in any currency other than sterling.

## NEW WELSH LAWS PASSED

During March, the National Assembly approved two major new pieces of legislation.

- The [Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Bill](#) places duties on Welsh Government, local authorities and health boards to have strategies in place for combating domestic violence and abuse and sexual violence, and a National Adviser will be appointed to assist and monitor this process.
- The [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Bill](#) introduces a duty on public bodies to consider the interests of future generations as they make decisions. It establishes Public Service Boards and local well-being plans (one for each local authority) to realise this aim, and a Commissioner will be appointed to assist with and monitor the work.

The two Bills are now in the intimation period, when the law officers of the UK have the right to object if they believe that either is outside the powers of the Assembly. If there is no objection, Royal Assent will follow for both bills during April.

Both measures attracted a great deal of third sector lobbying, and in both cases there came a point when it looked as if the bill could not be enacted in a form which would achieve its original aims. The Assembly and the sector are still learning how best to use the Assembly's legislative powers and the influence which external bodies have on the government and AMs.

## OXFAM LAUNCHES WELSH DOUGHNUT REPORT

Oxfam has published a report called the [Welsh Doughnut](#). The report provides a framework for environmental sustainability and social justice tackling the twin challenges of delivering a decent standard of living for everyone, while living within our environmental limits. At a national level the Welsh Doughnut model suggests areas of life that might constitute a social floor below which no one in Wales should fall, and begins the process of identifying which environmental boundaries might be useful for incorporation into a Welsh national analysis. It provides a snapshot of Wales' status by assessing its current position against this suggested set of domains and indicators. This report is immensely relevant to the implementation of the Future Generations Bill (see above).

## FINDING OUT ABOUT WELSH ASSEMBLY AND GOVERNMENT

You can read our guide about how to get hold of information about the activities of the Assembly and the Government of Wales in the [January 2015 Policy Bulletin](#) on Cytûn's website. You can access the National Assembly Research Service on <https://assemblyinbrief.wordpress.com/>. The May 2015 Policy Bulletin will be published shortly **after** the General Election.

## WELSH GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP WITH THE THIRD SECTOR

Uniquely in the Western world, the Welsh Government is under a legal obligation to consult with the 'Third sector' - voluntary and community organisations of all sorts, including religious groups. Since this duty was instituted in the Wales Act 2006, it has evolved into the [Third Sector Scheme](#), implemented through the [Third Sector Partnership Council](#). The Council meets twice a year, chaired by Jane Hutt, the Minister for Finance and Government Business, to discuss issues affecting the third sector across government. In addition, each departmental minister in the government also meets twice a year with the sector to discuss matters specific to that department. These are valuable opportunities for formal discussion, to present papers on topics of concern, and to flag up key issues. They provide government with a chance to test opinion and to flag up issues on which consultation may take place in due course. They often lead to more informal opportunities to meet with ministers or officials to pursue issues in more depth.

There are an estimated 33,000 third sector organisations in Wales. They range from large charities such as Tenovus, and the Welsh parts of much larger organisations such as Christian Aid, to community hall committees and very small local organisations. To try to ensure fair representation of such a diverse sector, they are grouped in 25 networks, covering fields such as animal welfare; disability; older people; Welsh language; and so on. Religion takes its place as one of these networks. The [Inter-faith Council for Wales](#) arranges representation from the religious sector to cover all of the subject areas. Revd Gethin Rhys is the lead representative – contact details on the final page of this Bulletin. The Council has elected two alternates to assist him. They are: Julie Jones of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and Nor'dzin Parmo of the Buddhist Council of Wales. Gethin would welcome expressions of interest from any who might wish to assist in this role with regard to a particular subject area. Potential representatives need to be aware that they would be required to represent the *whole* of the sector to government, and not only their own particular religion or standpoint.

Gethin can also offer assistance to religious groups who wish to make representations to Welsh Government. These do not have to be channelled through the Partnership – indeed, if they are the concerns of one particular group or relate to a specific concern they cannot be. Please contact Gethin in the first instance for advice on how best to proceed.

## VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR



Over a million people in Wales help their communities and each other in all sorts of remarkable ways. And since 2004 the Wales Volunteer of the Year Awards has been shining the spotlight on these incredible people. If you know of an inspirational individual or group that has made a real difference to their area or to the lives of others why not take this opportunity to nominate them in the **Wales Volunteer of the Year Awards 2015** so

they can be recognised for their fantastic work.

More information and nomination forms can be found at:

<http://www.wcva.org.uk/what-we-do/celebrating-the-sector/wales-volunteer-of-the-year-awards>

**The closing date for nominations is 10 April 2015**



## MORE MONEY FOR COUNCIL HOUSING IN WALES

The Welsh Government has brokered an agreement with the UK Treasury which will result in greater investment in Wales' council housing. From 2 April, the eleven local authorities in Wales which have retained their social housing stock, will exit the UK Government's Housing Revenue Account Subsidy (HRAS) system and become self-financing.

Councils will be given more powers over their housing stock which will enable them to keep all the rental income they receive from tenants. Councils will have control over their housing assets which are forecast to generate around £18 billion of rental income over the next 30 years. This will be invested locally to help improve existing homes and build hundreds of new council homes.

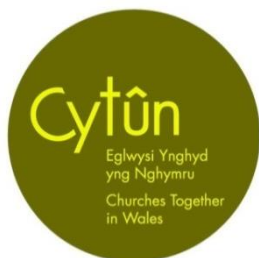
The HRAS exit follows the Welsh Government's recent announcement of their intention to end Right to Buy, which allows eligible social housing tenants to buy their home at a discount of up to £16,000. The policy has resulted in the sale of 138,423 Welsh council homes since 1981 - a 45% reduction in the social housing available when the policy was first introduced.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Consultation continues until **28<sup>th</sup> April** on the Government's White Paper on Local Government in Wales, [Devolution, Democracy and Delivery](#). The paper makes recommendations on improving the representativeness of local authorities and clarifying the division of responsibility between councillors and officers; improving the administrative efficiency of authorities; and improving their relationship with their communities. Amongst the recommendations are establishing Area Boards, including not only elected members from each area but also representatives of key public services, community councils, community representatives and the voluntary sector.

In responses so far, a number of the opposition parties in the Assembly and other organisations have expressed concern about the number of statutory Boards being established – including the Local Service Boards (see p. 3 of this Bulletin) and the Strategic Planning Boards to be established under the [Planning \(Wales\) Bill](#), which is currently proceeding through the Assembly. The multiplication of these bodies, and the capacity of other organisations to fill places on them, are both matters of concern.

A second Local Government White Paper will be published in June, including a map of proposed boundaries for fewer local authorities, and a second consultation period will begin in November. Legislation will be introduced after the Assembly elections in May 2016.



### CONTACTING THE CYTÛN POLICY OFFICER

To discuss any matter in this Bulletin, or to seek the Policy Officer's assistance, here are the contact details:

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