
CYTŪN POLICY BULLETIN

SUMMER 2015



BRING YOUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE SENEDD

These children came from the Rhondda to the National Assembly, and your children could do the same. The Assembly's Education Officer has devised a programme which will help young people to understand more about the Assembly and its responsibilities, about the



Members and their work and about how young people can bring matters to their attention.

Visit slots are available on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and begin at 10.00, 11.00 and 13.00. A visit could last between 1 and 2 hours and might consist of:

- A debate in a fully equipped youth debating chamber
- An activity
- A tour of the Senedd
- Tickets for the group to watch part of the Plenary meeting (the meeting of all the

Assembly Members) on a Tuesday or a Wednesday afternoon

Local Assembly Members will be invited to meet the group during the visit.

A subsidy of £1 per mile is offered to help with transport costs for those groups based more than 10 miles from Cardiff Bay.

If you would like to book one of these visit slots, which are available on a first come first served basis, please contact our Information Centre on 0300 200 6565.

Please take a look at the website <http://www.yourassembly.org/> and encourage the young people that you work with to do so.

VOTE @16?

On 15 July at a youth conference in the Senedd, the results were announced of the Assembly's survey of the attitudes of young people in Wales regarding voting at the age of 16. The majority of the 10,339 young people polled were in favour – but only 53%, with 29% against and the remainder not sure.

16 and 17 year olds were able to vote for the first time anywhere in the UK last year during the referendum on Scottish independence, which resulted in over 100,000 of them registering to vote. It is not only in Scotland where registration for young voters increased upon the extension of the franchise. In the Isle of Man the rate of registration amongst 16 and 17 year olds was 'very close to the turnout figure for the electorate as a whole'. Voters are also able to vote at 16 in Jersey and Guernsey.

Of the parties currently represented in the Welsh Assembly, Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats are in favour of lowering the voting age in Assembly elections. The First Minister Carwyn Jones has also voiced his support for lowering the voting age following the referendum on Scottish Independence.

Control over the Assembly's own elections is expected to be devolved in a forthcoming Wales Bill, announced in the Queen's Speech. However, the earliest it is likely to be introduced will be during the term of the Fifth Assembly. By the time of the 2021 Assembly elections, the youngest voters may be for the first time younger than the institution which they will be voting for.

PROTECTING AND USING HISTORIC PLACES OF WORSHIP

Wales is well endowed with historic places of worship. According to Cadw, 3000 of them are listed buildings. Cadw has just published a [draft strategy](#) for protecting and ensuring the use of these buildings, and Cytûn has prepared a response in consultation with its member churches and bodies. While welcoming the strategy and Cadw's willingness to consult, many of our members believe that maintaining 3000 listed buildings is no longer



viable for churches in Wales. Some simpler chapels – like the one pictured in Llwynrhydowen, Ceredigion - can be adapted for community use while retaining their historic interest. But in other cases, the historic features that make them so interesting architecturally also inhibit their use for modern worship or community activity. If you would like a copy of the churches' response, please contact Gethin Rhys (see final

page). Cytûn is facilitating meetings with interested AMs on this topic during August and September.

The Welsh Government is also consulting on how best local communities can ensure that buildings, locations and services of community importance can be secured for community use when they are under threat of being sold. The consultation document can be found at: <http://gov.wales/consultations/people-and-communities/protecting-community-assets-consultation/?lang=en>

The kind of legal steps that might be involved are setting up a register of community assets, and when one of the buildings or locations on that register comes up for sale, giving 'first refusal' to the community to bid for it (at market price – none of the proposals involve obliging owners to sell below market price). This would entail a delay of 6 months or even longer to allow the community group to seek funding, before the asset could be offered on the open market. In some circumstances, rather than buying the building, the community might ensure that the services they value which are based in that building or location might be transferred elsewhere before an open market sale could go ahead. This proposal might affect churches as both potential buyer and as seller.

- As buyer, churches might wish to seek to take on an asset in their community, probably in partnership with other local organisations.
- As seller. The minister, Lesley Griffiths, in her Foreword to the consultation, mentions churches as an example of the kinds of assets communities might wish to register and protect. Therefore sale of churches and other faith community buildings might become a lengthier process if communities wish to bid for them.

Cytûn will be responding to this consultation also, which closes on 11th September 2015.

Any church or reader of the Bulletin who would like to offer comments as part of a Cytûn response should submit these to Gethin (see back page) by 21st August.

ALCOHOL MINIMUM PRICING

The Welsh Government is consulting on setting a minimum price for the sale of alcohol in Wales. The consultation continues until December, so there is plenty of time for churches and individuals to respond. The details are on the Government website [here](#).

BUDGET 2015 AND ITS EFFECTS IN WALES

Shortened from an article by [Hannah Johnson](#), National Assembly Research Service

On 8 July, the Chancellor announced a raft of new reforms to the welfare system, as part of the UK Government's efforts to reduce the welfare bill by a further £12 billion by 2020. Alongside the introduction of a National Living Wage, there will be cuts to a number of particular benefits (see below). However, the biggest single cut to welfare spending is set to come from extending the freeze in working age benefits, tax credits and local housing allowance out to 2020. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that it will affect 13 million families in the UK, who will lose an average of £260 a year as a result of this one measure.

As Wales is more dependent on welfare, and has a higher rate of poverty compared to other UK nations, the impact of these changes will be high up the political agenda in the Assembly. It is worth noting that most of these measures will only affect new claimants:

- Automatic entitlement to housing benefit for 18 to 21 year olds will be cut from April 2017. The Welsh Government claims that 1,200 claimants in Wales could be affected by this change (without exemptions), with an average loss per claimant of around £90 a week, saving around £6 million a year. Around 55% of affected claimants are in the social rented sector in Wales.
- The benefit cap will be reduced to from £26,000 to £20,000 in Wales, which the Welsh Government estimate will affect 5,000 households in Wales. However, the BBC quoted Community Housing Cymru as estimating it to affect 7,000 households;
- The rates for the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) within Employment Support Allowance (ESA) will be brought in line with Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), which will mean a cut of £29.05 per week. According to DWP statistics, in November 2014 there were 36,530 people in the WRAG of ESA in Wales, which represents around a quarter of all claimants.
- Child tax credits will be limited to two children from April 2017 for any new claimants and existing claimants who have more children after 2017. Community Housing Cymru estimate that 51,000 working families in Wales already have two children so will be hit by the change if they have any more children.

Other changes include:

- A reduction in how much families can earn before tax credits/universal credit (UC) start to be withdrawn:
 - Tax credits start to be withdrawn once family earnings are above £3,850 rather than £6,420;
 - Universal Credit also withdrawn much earlier (straight away for non-disabled households without children);
- Backdating for Housing Benefit will be limited to a maximum of 4 weeks;
- Family premium entitlement to housing benefit will be removed for claims made after April 2016;
- Changing support for mortgage interest from benefit to loan.

The Bevan Foundation has also published a [blog post on the new National Living Wage](#).

Even before these announcements, churches in Wales were expressing concern at the fate of the British welfare state. The Wales specific report on the effects of [benefit sanctions](#) will be launched on 5th August at 1pm in the churches' tent co-ordinated by Cytûn on the National Eisteddfod field at Meifod. Church Action on Poverty has also published a further report on the [holes in the safety net](#) for vulnerable people in our society.

The Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee of the Assembly has also published a report on [Poverty and Inequality in Wales](#).

BUDGET 2016-17 FOR WALES

As the Chancellor of the Exchequer was announcing his Budget and Spending Review, Jane Hutt, Finance Minister in the Welsh Government, was undertaking a Budget tour as she prepared her budget for 2016-17 in Wales. Cytûn was represented at one of the meetings, as were a large number of local authorities, statutory bodies and voluntary organisations.

Ms Hutt warned that “everything is under review” as the Chancellor has asked all unprotected spending areas in the UK and England to prepare plans for 25% or even 40% cuts in budget. The effect on Wales is likely to be substantial, and as the UK spending review will not be announced until November 2015, the timetable for preparing a budget for Wales will be very tight indeed.

The principles underlying the Welsh Budget (prepared before the July 2015 announcements in Westminster) can be found [here](#) and Ms Hutt’s statement following the 8 July Budget can be found [here](#).

The Welsh Government has also published the [Tax Collection and Management \(Wales\) Bill](#), preparing the way for setting the first specific Welsh taxes for nearly 800 years in 2018.

FAIR FUNERALS

The Society of Friends is promoting a campaign for Fair funerals, and the [Fair Funerals pledge](#) is now online for funeral directors to sign up.

The pledge asks funeral directors to:

1. Recognise funerals can be expensive and many people struggle with the cost.
2. Make their most affordable funeral package visible to the public, including third party costs.
3. Charge clear prices for goods and services so people know what they’re buying.

Communicate prices in initial conversations and prominently display full price lists.

Click here to get involved and contact funeral directors in your area about signing the pledge: <http://www.quakersocialaction.org.uk/ask-your-funeral-director-to-sign>

The hashtag is #FairFunerals and you can follow the campaign at

<https://twitter.com/endfuneralpov> Dawn Foster in the Guardian wrote [this piece](#) about the pledge. The Presbyterian Church of Wales has declared its support for the campaign.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

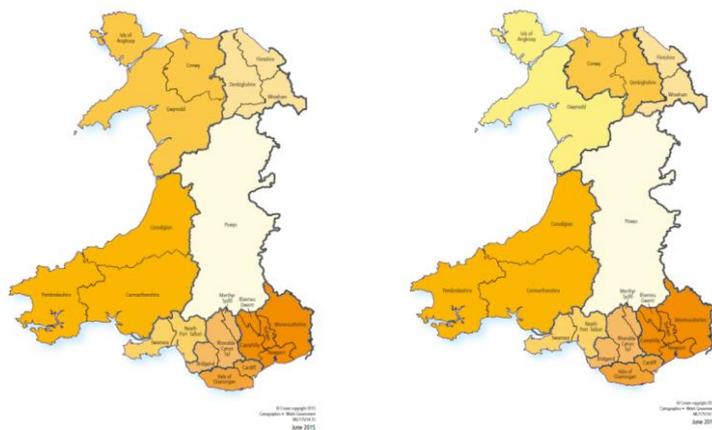
An Assisted Suicide Bill, based largely on Lord Falconer’s Bill which failed to become law in the last session at Westminster, is back on the table in the House of Commons. Labour MP Rob Marris, who was recently re-elected to Westminster, chose it as a private members’ bill. While some faith groups have sympathy with the Bill, a majority are likely to oppose it. The Evangelical Alliance website gives an overview of the Bill and the Parliamentary procedure it will follow, with the Second Reading debate on the principles of the Bill on 11th September. <http://www.eauk.org/current-affairs/politics/contact-your-mp-about-new-assisted-dying-bill.cfm>

WHAT FUTURE FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION?

During Education Questions in the Assembly on 15th July, the Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis, announced that Religious Education in schools in Wales is to be replaced by Religion, Philosophy and Ethics as part of the new *Humanities* area of study in the National Curriculum proposed by the [Donaldson Report](#). Cytûn has written to the Minister asking for further details, but no response has yet been received.

REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN WALES

The Welsh Government published in February a White Paper [Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People](#), about the principles which lie behind its proposed reform of local government. Following initial consultation, the Minister for Public Services, Leighton Andrews, announced his initial findings to the Assembly, together with [the Welsh Government's preferred map of new local government areas on 17 June](#). After giving "further consideration" to a "range of issues", the Minister proposed a configuration of either eight or nine local authorities (with the option of having either two or three councils in north Wales).



The Minister has emphasised that his proposals are meant to "drive down the cost of politics and administration". During passage of the *Local Government (Wales) Bill*, the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee has often discussed the potential costs of the merger programme. Issues around council tax harmonisation and use of the Welsh language within the new authorities have also been prominent. So have the implications for current collaborative and regional

working, as well as staffing considerations.

In June 2014, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) published its [In Defence of Localism](#) document, in which it criticised the Welsh Government for "developing a more centralised and assertive approach" to public services. It then suggested that local government should be given more "freedom and flexibility to deliver services according to local circumstances".

The Minister has stated that the published map "is not a final decision" and merely a "platform" on which his party will campaign in the run-up to the 2016 Assembly elections.

Local churches engage with their local authorities across a range of issues – ranging from planning decisions for a new building to car parking charges on Sundays, the provision of social care for the elderly and education in their community. Cytûn will therefore be responding to the proposals for local government, and welcome comments from members. Please send them to Gethin (details on final page) by **30th September**.

THE WALES WE WANT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act is now law, and the Government is advertising for a Future Generations Commissioner to work with all the 44 public bodies named in the Act to transform their way of working so that sustainability becomes the key goal of their decisions and actions.

In the meantime, current Sustainable Futures Commissioner Peter Davies has been holding events across Wales, attracting over 200 delegates to share ideas and views on developing the Statutory Guidance to support the Act. Cytûn was represented at the Cardiff meeting, and you can read the findings [here](#).

Cytûn hopes to prepare a response to the formal consultation process due during the autumn, as the well-being goals for a sustainable Wales are goals which churches and other faiths groups will surely share. The WFG Act links with much forthcoming Welsh legislation - Planning, Environment, Public Health Bills, among others.

ARMED FORCES IN WELSH SCHOOLS

A Welsh Assembly Petitions Committee [report](#) has raised concerns about the high level of visits made to Welsh secondary schools when compared to other parts of the UK. An investigation was carried out in response to a petition from Cymdeithas y Cymod (Fellowship of Reconciliation in Wales). The petition states: “We call on the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to recommend that the armed forces should not go into schools to recruit.” The Petitions Committee received written evidence from campaign group, Forces Watch. Their research showed a disproportionately high number of visits to Wales when compared to other parts of the UK. They said that during 2010-11 and 2011-12 the army had visited 163 (74 percent) of state secondary schools in Wales.

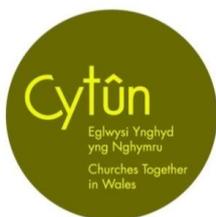
The report concludes: “Some Members of the Committee share the petitioners’ grave concerns that the armed forces use school visits as a recruitment tool and that their visits are targeted on areas of relatively high deprivation. There does seem to be evidence that the armed forces disproportionately visit schools in areas of relatively high deprivation. However, there is no compelling evidence that shows that the armed forces deliberately target schools in these areas. Moreover preventing the forces from visiting schools, as the petitioners wish, could disadvantage some young people, including those from less affluent backgrounds, from accessing careers and training of a very high quality.” The report recommends that the Welsh Government considers carrying out further research into why Welsh schools receive a disproportionate number of military visits. It also recommends that the government reviews the advice given to schools to ensure that pupils have an *open and honest exchange of views* regarding the role of the military.

FUTURE OF THE BBC

Cytûn hopes to respond on behalf of churches in Wales to the [public consultation](#) on renewal of the BBC Charter. Gethin would like to hear from readers what they would like to see from the BBC and other licence fee funded services (such as S4C) over the next ten years to help inform our response on your behalf. Please let us know by **30th September**.

ELECTIONS 2016

With the May 2016 Assembly election approaching, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action has published a [briefing paper](#) outlining how to contribute ideas to the political parties’ manifestos. Cytûn will be sending suggestions to the parties, and providing information about their policies and guidance on organising hustings with the candidates in your areas. Further details will be included in the Policy Bulletin and on www.cytun.org.uk.



CONTACTING THE CYTÛN POLICY OFFICER

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Hapus i gyfathrebu yn Gymraeg ac yn Saesneg. Happy to communicate in Welsh and English

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