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# BWLETIN POLISI CYTÛN

## CYTÛN POLICY BULLETIN

**MAY 2013 / MAI 2013**

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### **WELFARE CHANGES**

**Minister, Huw Lewis AM warned this month that welfare changes are throwing a question mark over the Welsh Government's ability to deliver support to some of Wales' most vulnerable people.**

Speaking in the Senedd, he set out how Westminster's plans to replace all benefits with the 'Universal Credit' will have a knock-on impact on Welsh Government support such as free school meals. In Wales the receipt of various welfare benefits is used as a measure when assessing an individual's entitlement to the Welsh Government's various systems of assistance and support such as free school meals, the school uniform grant scheme and free NHS dental treatment. These are known as 'passported' benefits.

The Minister is highly concerned that the UK Government is not releasing key information to enable the Welsh Government to put new arrangements in place for these 'passported' benefits under the Universal Credit system. He made a commitment that the Welsh Government will do all it can to make sure those entitled to assistance continue to receive help despite the changes to welfare. He also questioned claims that the new benefits system will get more people into work.

The Welsh Government has taken a number of initiatives to assist certain people with targeted support, including:

- £22 million in 2013-2014 to ensure that the 330,000 families who previously received Council Tax Benefit do not lose out.
- Providing Local Authorities with £2.6 million for the Council Tax Support Transition Grant following the abolition of Council Tax Benefit.
- £3.9 million of additional support to pensioners in paying their Council Tax.
- Expanding the Flying Start programme so that 36,000 children and their families will benefit by the end of this Assembly term.

- £75 million is being invested up to March 2015 to support a range of community based projects through Communities First, which is now a Community Focussed Tackling Poverty Programme.
- The introduction of a Discretionary Assistance Fund following the UK Government's decision to abolish Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants.
- An additional £750,000 to local authorities to help people affected by the cut in housing benefit for tenants with 'spare' bedrooms.
- The Digital Inclusion programme to help to mitigate the impact of digital elements of welfare reform.
- In the summer the Welsh Government will also launch a refreshed Tackling Poverty Action Plan.

Research about the impact of welfare changes on Wales has been published by the Welsh Government, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and Sheffield Hallam University. Key findings include:

- Those with children and those from low-middle income families will be hardest hit by the income losses from the reforms.
- Merthyr Tydfil is the fourth worst affected local authority in Great Britain. Blaenau Gwent, Neath Port Talbot, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Caerphilly also fall within the 25 worst affected local authorities.
- Once the welfare reforms have come into full effect, Sheffield Hallam University estimate that Wales will lose around £1.1 billion a year as a result. This is even worse than indicated by the IFS research.
- The benefit and tax credit cuts will hit Wales even harder than the UK as a whole due to its higher levels of welfare dependency.
- One of the UK Government's main aims is for the welfare reforms to get more people into work. However, IFS research suggests that any effects on employment in Wales are likely to be, at best, very modest, and will depend on wider economic conditions.
- An estimated 42,500 people in Wales will lose their entitlement to Disability Living Allowance, an average loss of up to £83 per claimant per week and an annual loss of up to £183 million in Wales as a whole.

## **FUTURE OF FREE ADVICE SERVICES IN WALES UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT**

**A review into services that provide people with free advice on issues such as debt, housing, employment and welfare benefits has been published by the Welsh Government.**

Welsh Ministers commissioned the review of not-for-profit advice services, such as those provided by the likes of Citizens Advice Bureau, in light of the unprecedented pressures faced by such organisations given the reduction in their funding, alongside the rising demand for advice in the current economic climate.

The sector is expected to lose around £3.36 million over the next eighteen months with the equivalent of 50 full time jobs disappearing.

Organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter Cymru, Consumer Focus Wales, Age Cymru and the Disability Law Society are among the many groups who provide free advice. Changes to the Legal Aid system alone will see the Citizens Advice Bureau in Wales lose 42 specialist case workers.

The Minister for Communities & Tackling Poverty Huw Lewis is examining the findings of the review to make sure people can access the help they need.

## **PROGRAMME TO PROMOTE LOCAL DEMOCRACY SET OUT**

**Welsh Local Government Minister Lesley Griffiths has set out her programme to promote open and transparent Local Authorities. This includes measures to ensure elected representatives better reflect the communities they represent.**

Speaking during a debate on promoting local democracy in the Assembly, the Minister announced her intention to establish an expert group to consider how to encourage greater diversity in Local Government.

The expert group will consider the recently published results of a survey of successful and unsuccessful candidates in the 2012 local elections; take evidence from interested groups, and set out a plan of action for the Welsh Government and political parties to collectively encourage greater diversity in Local Government.

The Minister also encouraged Local Authorities to make the most of the £660,000 over 3 years available to help Local Authorities improve scrutiny and urged County Councils to take advantage of Welsh Government funding to help them broadcast council proceedings.

The Minister also called on town and community councils to embrace the opportunities which websites will offer to engage with their communities effectively.

## **NATIONAL READING AND NUMERACY TESTS BEGIN**

The new national tests, which will be sat by pupils in years 2 to 9 from 8<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> May, will replace the commercially produced tests previously used by schools.

By tracking progress from the end of the Foundation Phase right the way through into secondary education, the tests are designed to give teachers a clearer insight into a learner's development and progress. This will allow them to identify strengths and areas for improvement and to intervene at an earlier stage if learners are falling behind.

The tests have been designed to be as flexible and as learner-friendly as possible. Younger learners, for example, can sit the numeracy and reading tests in shorter sessions, rather than for a continuous full hour if the school feels this would help them perform to their best of their ability.

Learners in Welsh medium schools will take a reading test in Welsh only in years 2 and 3 but in both English and Welsh from year 4 onwards. Schools will have the option to use both tests in year 3. Learners will take the numeracy test in either English or Welsh.

The tests will generate reports to parents/carers which will provide a clearer picture of their child's abilities, and also enable them to raise any potential issues with teachers at an early stage.

*Further details about the tests can be found [here](#).*

## **70 PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATIONS JOIN NEW NATIONAL PROCUREMENT SERVICE**

**Over seventy public sector organisations have agreed to join Wales' new National Procurement Service, Welsh Finance Minister, Jane Hutt has announced.**

The National Procurement Service for Wales (NPS), which will launch in November, will set up and manage contracts for common and repetitive spend across the public sector in Wales. It will reduce expenditure, eliminating duplication, developing a sustainable procurement model and increasing efficiency. It will also develop local supply chains to maximise the opportunities for Welsh businesses to benefit from public sector spend.

Common and repetitive goods and services comprise about 20 – 30% of the total public sector procurement expenditure of £4.3 billion and include items such as stationery, office furniture, professional services, IT hardware and software and fleet.

Once fully operational, the NPS could generate savings of up to £25m per year – which will be re-invested in strengthening front-line public services.

The Welsh Government, all Local Authorities, Health Boards, Universities, Colleges, Fire & Rescue and Police Authorities in Wales will join the new service.

## **NHS WALES STAFF SURVEY RESULTS PUBLISHED**

**The results from a new survey of more than 22,000 NHS staff were published this month by Welsh Health Minister Mark Drakeford.**

Key findings of the survey include:

☒☒ More than eight in 10 staff say they are happy to go the extra mile at work and more than eight in 10 feel their role makes a difference to patients.

☒☒ Only one in ten staff disagree with the need for change in the NHS.

☒☒ Almost eight in 10 staff agree their employer encourages them to report errors or near misses, and nine in 10 saying that such issues were reported.

☒☒ The majority of staff would be happy to recommend the standard of care provided by their organisation.

☒☒ Almost nine in ten staff who witnessed an error said that it was reported, and four in five agreed that their employer encouraged staff to report such incidents.

The survey, the first since 2007, was responded to by 22,392 staff – around 27 per cent of the NHS workforce. It was developed by the Welsh Partnership Forum, made up of Welsh Government, NHS management, unions and staff associations.

*The survey can be found [here](#).*

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