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# CYTŪN POLICY BULLETIN

APRIL 2020

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## EMERGENCY SENEDD

Although taken on 1<sup>st</sup> April, this picture could not be more serious, representing the first online meeting of a parliament in the United Kingdom. A small number of Assembly Members joined a video conferenced session of the Senedd from their homes, as they observed the restrictions imposed on Welsh society to combat the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. The quorum for voting was set at just 4 of the usual 60 members (but no votes were needed in this session).

Not surprisingly, the session focussed on the pandemic, with questions to the First Minister, Mark Drakeford AM, and the Minister for Health, Vaughan Gething AM, on the progress of the disease and the measures being taken by the Welsh Government. Subsequent sessions will include some other business as well.

Because the situation is changing daily, this *Policy Bulletin* does not attempt to outline the complex and extraordinary legislation which has been made nor how it has been implemented in Wales. It is important for churches, faith groups and other readers to note that the secondary legislation made in Wales is in important respects different from that which applies in England – for example, around the conduct of funerals. A regularly updated guide to the legislation, with particular reference to its effect on Christian churches, can be found on Cytûn's website: <http://www.cytun.co.uk/hafan/en/covid-19-briefing-paper/>

The Cytûn website also includes statements from church leaders, links to online worship and calls to prayer, and links to the information provided by our member churches and organisations. Cytûn also tweets regularly @CytunNew and there is a new [Facebook page](#) with a wide range of inspirational content and links. The Interfaith Council for Wales has also established a new [Facebook page](#), with content drawn from across the faith groups which are members.

Cytûn provides an email briefing service for denominational leaders and others who need to be apprised of legislative developments relating to COVID-19. Any readers who wish to subscribe should contact [gethin@cytun.cymru](mailto:gethin@cytun.cymru).

Distributed with this Bulletin is a letter from Deputy Minister Jane Hutt to Wales's faith groups.

## A BUDGET WITHOUT LIMITS?

The preparation of the governmental budgets for the financial year 2020-2021, which began on April 6, has been the most chaotic in recent memory. Due to the controversy over leaving the EU, the prorogations of the Westminster Parliament and the December UK General Election, the Welsh Government had to bring forward its budget before knowing the content of the UK Budget, on which much of its funding is dependent. The [final budget](#) was published on February 25 and agreed by the Senedd on March 3. The [UK Budget](#) was presented on March 11.

These supposedly final budgets were knocked off course within days, and in effect replaced by a commitment by UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak MP, to do "[whatever it takes](#)" to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in the passing at Westminster of the [Contingencies Fund Act 2020](#) which permits the UK Government to increase the level of its contingency fund from 2% of annual expenditure to as much as 50%. This gives an extraordinary degree of freedom to the UK Government to spend money as it sees fit to tackle the emergency. This may be by diverting money from other areas, or by borrowing, or a combination of the two.

The devolution settlement does not permit such arrangements to be in place for the Welsh Government, which has only a small contingency reserve and very restricted borrowing capacity, and has to obtain extra resources either from the UK Government or by diverting expenditure from other areas. As areas such as health, social care, local government and economic development

are devolved to Wales, this has created challenges for the Welsh Government and the other devolved administrations at this time, as described in a [briefing](#) by the Wales Governance Centre at Cardiff University.

The Welsh Government had intended to lay a supplementary budget, taking into account the announcements in the UK Budget, as soon as possible. However, subsequent events mean that the original timetable is now impossible to achieve.

Some changes to Universal Credit announced in the **UK Budget** were [welcomed by Christian based foodbank charity Trussell Trust](#). They were pleased that the Government will double the time people have to pay back an advance payment and reduce the amount that can be deducted from a Universal Credit payment, although the change will not take effect until October 2021. However, Trussell Trust and other foodbank providers remain concerned that the five-week wait between applying for Universal Credit and receiving the first regular payment is pushing many people into crisis. They are continuing to put pressure on the UK Government to end the wait **#5WeeksTooLong**. Trussell Trust welcomed some of the steps taken to amend Universal Credit during the COVID-19 epidemic, but felt that these also pointed out fundamental flaws in the system. The latest news of Trussell Trust's foodbanks' response to the crisis can be read [here](#).

In response to the **Welsh Government's final budget**, [Cymorth Cymru](#) Director Katie Dalton, [Community Housing Cymru](#) Chief Executive Stuart Ropke and [Welsh Women's Aid](#) Chief Executive Eleri Butler said:

*"We are disappointed that the Housing Support Grant has not been increased in the final Welsh Government budget for 2020-21. However, we recognise that the Welsh Government has been placed in the extraordinary position of having to table their budget before the UK Government has made its spending plans clear.*

*"We have been heartened by recent comments made by the Housing Minister and Finance Minister who have recognised the cross party calls for further investment and indicated that the Housing Support Grant will be the priority for additional funds from the UK budget. "We know that services are at a tipping point, following over £37million real term cuts over the past decade of austerity. We urge Welsh Ministers to ensure that the Housing Support Grant is first in line for additional funding."*

Although the Welsh Government has subsequently announced [additional funding for substance misuse and homelessness services](#) during the COVID-19 crisis, housing charities will not be alone in awaiting the eventual publication of the Welsh supplementary budget with some concern.

# LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION IN WALES



It is an irony that, the Welsh Government published [Connected Communities](#), its strategy on combating loneliness and social isolation in Wales, on February 11, just a few weeks before tackling the COVID-19 pandemic instituted policies that are in direct contravention of the recommendations of that strategy. This, however, means that this strategy will become all the more important when more normal social interaction resumes.

The strategy was produced following extensive consultation in which Cytûn and other faith groups took an important role. We were disappointed therefore that there is only one direct reference to the role of faith communities, which is in the context of the negative effect of church closures.

Nonetheless, churches will gain from studying this strategy and thinking through how they might contribute to tackling the greatly increased loneliness and social isolation now forced upon us. Recognising that government on its own cannot tackle loneliness and social isolation, the report points to several areas where it believes that it can help, with the support of other organisations in society:

1. Increasing opportunities for people to connect, through supporting sport, volunteering, time credits, heritage and cultural opportunities, digital inclusion, social prescribing, and the [Dewis Cymru](#) platform for people to find grass-roots and community organisations with a focus on well-being (which would include many of the activities provided by churches).
2. A community infrastructure that supports connected communities, through the planning system promoting vibrant high streets, good transport networks, a 20mph speed limit, widening access to school and college facilities as community hubs, improved digital infrastructure, and grants to support local natural resources.
3. Cohesive and supportive communities, with stronger community cohesion teams tackling tensions within communities, improved community health and social care, reformed funding of schemes tackling child poverty, and ensuring that public services recognise loneliness and social isolation and respond to it. A key recommendation is to make Wales a 'Compassionate Country', building on ideas promoted by [Byw Nawr](#) (Dying Matters in Wales), in which Cytûn is an active participant. This initiative relates to improved openness around death, dying and bereavement, and compassionate social care.
4. Building awareness and promoting positive attitudes through a national conversation on mental well-being, promoting healthy schools and developing understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their effects, developing mental health social prescribing with the third sector (which could include church projects), helping business to tackle employee loneliness, and promoting the role of kindness in public services.

Churches and faith organisations have a key role in supporting these aims, and Cytûn is commissioning work on thinking as to how this can happen once the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

# Passing a new Children's Bill for Wales

On 20 March 2020, the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Bill received Royal Assent and became the [Children \(Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment\) \(Wales\) Act 2020](#). The occasion was noted by First Minister Mark Drakeford officially sealing the Bill, meaning that the law will come into effect on **Monday 21 March 2022**, following a two year period of public education and awareness raising in Wales.

The Welsh Government says that the law when implemented will try to end the physical punishment of children in Wales, will help to defend their rights and strengthen the commitment of the Welsh Government to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, Julie Morgan, who has led on the Bill, said: *"There is never a reason to hit a child – that may have been considered appropriate in the past but it is no longer acceptable. Our children deserve to be treated with the same respect and dignity as adults. Although sealing the Bill happened behind closed doors because of the cases of Covid-19, we are pleased that we have taken this historic step to help to safeguard children and their rights. I would like to thank everyone who campaigned for this legislation and has supported it."*

On the same day, Welsh Government published [impact assessments](#) of the Act, including the [equality impact assessment](#), which acknowledges that some (but by no means all) religious groups may find this a difficult change to accept.

## FAST TRACK CARDIFF & VALE



The current pandemic is not the first of our lifetime, though it is the swiftest. Fast Track Cities is a partnership of more than 300 cities committed to improving HIV services, eliminating new cases and tackling the stigma surrounding the virus. It supports greater collaboration and the sharing of new ideas.

Every UK city that has joined has seen a dramatic drop in new HIV diagnoses and we aim to make Cardiff & Vale the first participating city area in Wales.

Locally we have brilliant HIV care and treatment, but there is evidence that we could do better at diagnosing people and helping them get that treatment - because once on treatment, people with HIV can't pass it on. **Fast Track Cardiff & Vale**, working through the Health Board, Cardiff & Vale local authorities and community groups (which is where churches come in) aims to get more people tested and into life saving treatment, and to tackle the stigma which still makes some people reluctant to test. We aim to get to zero new diagnoses by 2030.

As soon as circumstances permit, we will be holding community consultations in Cardiff to let people have a say in what can be done - and what your organisation can do to stop HIV in its tracks here in Wales. If you'd like an invite to one of those meetings, an e-copy of our initial report on the current situation, or just a chat about HIV issues locally and any ideas you might have, email us at [fasttrackcities@hiv.wales](mailto:fasttrackcities@hiv.wales). If you have Twitter, you can also follow our progress at @CardiffFTC.

*Lisa Power, Fast Track Cardiff & Vale*



As reported in previous Policy Bulletins, Churches together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), in partnership with a coalition of Christian environmental charities – including Cytûn members ARocha UK (EcoChurch), Christian Aid and CAFOD – have been planning a Climate Sunday to unite churches in prayer and action in preparation for [COP26](#). This is the latest United Nations conference on climate change, a vital opportunity for the world to respond to the climate crisis.

COP 26 was originally due to be held in Glasgow in November 2020, so Climate Sunday was scheduled for September 6, with encouragement to local churches to choose an appropriate date during Creation Time 2020. However, due to COVID-19, COP26 has now been postponed to 2021, and the new dates are not yet fixed.

Christian Aid has [indicated its support](#) for the decision to postpone, so that the world can concentrate on tackling COVID-19. [CAFOD agreed](#), while emphasising that postponement of COP26 should not lead also to postponement of climate action, as the climate crisis continues.

A new date for Climate Sunday will be announced once the COP26 dates are confirmed. However, the Climate Sunday programme will begin as scheduled on September 6, encouraging churches to take a journey with world governments and civil society as they prepare for the conference.

Initial information will be available on the website [www.climatesunday.org](http://www.climatesunday.org) shortly, with the suite of bilingual materials developing over coming months. Churches will also be signposted to existing programmes such as [EcoChurch](#) and [Live Simply](#) to develop their own work as congregations, and be offered opportunities to participate in joint prayer and action across Britain and Ireland.

## WALES FEATURES STRONGLY IN UK SHADOW CABINET

Keir Starmer MP (pictured left) was elected as Leader of the UK Labour Party, and therefore Leader of the Opposition at Westminster, on April 4. He has now announced all his [frontbench appointments](#), and half of Wales's 22 Labour MPs have been included, three in the Shadow Cabinet (in bold). They are:

**Shadow Home Secretary:** Nick Thomas-Symonds

**Shadow Secretary for Culture, Media & Sport:** Jo Stevens

**Shadow Secretary of State for Wales:** [Nia Griffith](#)

Shadow Minister for Wales: Gerald Jones

Shadow Foreign Ministers:

Wayne David (Middle East & North Africa)

Stephen Kinnock (Asia & Pacific)

Stephen Doughty (Africa & International Development)

Anna McMorrin (International Development)

Shadow Minister for Scotland & Whip: Chris Elmore

Whips: Mark Tami, Jessica Morden

Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Leader: Carolyn Harris

The shadow minister for Faiths is [Janet Daby](#), MP for Lewisham East.

# New Director for Housing Justice Cymru



In a Zoom service led by Rt Revd Rob Wickham, Bishop of Edmonton, and Archbishop John Davies, Bonnie Navarra was inducted on April 14 to replace Sharon Lee (now Director of Aelwyd Housing Association) as Director of [Housing Justice Cymru](#). HJ Cymru is a member of the Cytûn family, and is the churches' agency for tackling homelessness in Wales in practical ways (especially by running night shelters and the Faith in Affordable Housing Project to use redundant church land as sites for social housing) and through influencing the policies of Welsh and UK Governments. A Steering Group for Wales oversees this work and supports the Director and other staff and volunteers. Cytûn is represented by Revd Gethin Rhys and several member churches have direct representation also. Bonnie can be contacted at [b.navarra@housingjustice.org.uk](mailto:b.navarra@housingjustice.org.uk) Latest news can be seen on HJ Cymru's [Facebook page](#).

## CONTACTING CYTÛN'S POLICY OFFICER

Gethin Rhys, Cytûn's Policy Officer, has been awarded a period of sabbatical study leave by Cytûn's Board of Trustees. Originally intended to last three months in May-July 2020, the changed circumstances mean that Gethin will now take the sabbatical in three distinct periods:

- From May 7 – May 31 2020, Gethin will be working with a team from across the third sector, led by the [Welsh Centre for International Affairs \(WCIA\)](#) in producing a 'think-piece' on Brexit and climate change, commissioned by WCVA and funded by Welsh Government.
- During July 2020, Gethin will be following some online university courses about climate change to improve his understanding of the scientific aspects of this crisis.
- During 2021, Gethin will visit Northern Ireland to study churches' engagement with the Assembly there, and will attend some other face-to-face courses which are not now available during 2020.

During Gethin's sabbatical periods, he will not be engaged in his regular work for Cytûn. Emails will be forwarded automatically to Revd Aled Edwards, Chief Executive of Cytûn, but please be aware that Aled will not be able to reply to all routine enquiries. Arrangements have been made for other members of Cytûn and denominational staff to deputise for Gethin at meetings where possible. The Chair of Cytûn's Wales & Europe Working Party, Revd Dr Noel Davies, will deputise for that aspect of Gethin's work, and volunteers from the Inter-faith Council for Wales will deputise for Gethin at meetings of the Third Sector Partnership Council.



**Parch./Revd Gethin Rhys - Swyddog Polisi/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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