

Written Response to the Children and Young People's Committee Report: Child Poverty in Wales: Eradication through Education? November 2008 by Jane Hutt, the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills and Brian Gibbons, the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

January 2009

Executive Summary

Many of the recommendations can be accepted as they directly reflect current or proposed Welsh Assembly Government policy activity. In particular, in response to Recommendation 3 relating to a call for a new and Child Poverty Strategy for Wales, following the current evaluation of the effectiveness of Assembly Government child poverty policies and programmes it is intended that work will begin on developing a new Strategy.

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

Recommendation 1

The Welsh Assembly Government increase internal resources dedicated towards co-ordinating policies that impact on child poverty. This should include greater staffing facility for its Child Poverty Unit to co-ordinate policies tackling child poverty. It should also include a senior policy lead official, within each Department, responsible for the delivery of relevant departmental targets within 'Eradicating Child Poverty in Wales – Measuring Success'.

Response: Accept in principle

The Child Poverty Unit, situated within the Social Justice & Local Government Department, is responsible for co-ordinating the Assembly Government's policy response in relation to tackling child poverty and supports the Minister in his cross Department lead on child poverty. In addition, the Unit is responsible for mainstreaming child poverty issues across Assembly Government policy and strategy. The team also supports the work of the Child Poverty Expert Group established as a result of a 'One Wales' commitment in April 2008.

The Assembly Government fully acknowledges the importance of joined up policy development and delivery and have taken steps at national level, through setting up a Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People, chaired by the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning & Skills, to make sure that cross-cutting responsibilities for children and young people, including in respect of child poverty, are coordinated effectively across Government. A support group of senior officials from the relevant policy departments with a Ministerial Chair has been established to support the work of the Cabinet Committee.

In addition, and in order to drive forward the delivery of key child poverty policies and programmes, the Social Justice Minister has established a Child Poverty Delivery Group comprised of senior officials from across Assembly Government Departments. The Delivery Group which met for the first time on 1 December 2008 is chaired by the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government. Its purpose is to

- examine and monitor the delivery of those policies and programmes likely to have the greatest impact on reducing child poverty in Wales;
- monitor cross-Assembly Government action in taking take forward specific 'One Wales' commitments aimed at tackling child poverty in Wales;

- monitor the Assembly Government's progress in meeting its cross-cutting targets set out in *'Eradicating Child Poverty in Wales: Measuring Success'*;
- facilitate cross-Departmental action on child poverty and promote a cohesive strategy to reduce levels of child poverty in Wales.

Senior Assembly Government officials responsible for Departmental targets contained in *'Eradicating Child Poverty in Wales: Measuring Success'* are represented on the Delivery Group.

In addition, the head of the Child Poverty Unit chairs a multi-disciplined Child Poverty Analytical Team which has a key role in monitoring the Assembly Government's child poverty targets and ensuring a strong evidence base for the Assembly Government's ongoing child poverty work.

Although the Child Poverty Unit itself is small it seeks to secure additional analytical and policy resource from across the Assembly Government as necessary. For example, as announced by the First Minister on 15 July 2008, the Assembly Government will be proposing a Child Poverty and Vulnerable Children Measure and consultation has already taken place across four broad policy areas. A central resource from the priority and legislation project team is co-ordinating this work and taking it forward during 2009.

Staffing in the Child Poverty Unit will be subject to review in the light of additional burdens in the usual way.

Financial Implication: Current staffing for the Child Poverty Unit can be met from the SJLG Departmental Running Cost budget. As at January 2009 there is currently no running cost provision to accommodate any increases in staffing of the Unit.

Recommendation 2

The Welsh Assembly Government ensure participation of front line professionals (including teaching unions) at the earliest possible stages in policy development, rather than only through formal consultation following policy development.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to working closely with the teaching unions as it develops policy.

The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills and the Deputy Minister for Skills regularly meets all teaching unions as part of their ongoing strategic engagement with key stakeholders. These meetings

provide the opportunity for the Minister to engage in pre-consultative dialogue with front line professionals. The Foundation Phase Task and Finish Group provide a model of working that ensures professionals at the sharp end are represented both in policy development and implementation. This model has been replicated by the 14-19 Implementation Group, which also includes representation by front line professionals.

In addition the Director of DCELLS meets the workforce unions' regularly on specific issues and is committed to regular termly meeting to discuss issues that the unions would like to raise. There is agreement that the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning & Skills (DCELLS) will engage with the unions on a similar basis and that, wherever practicable, policy development will be carried out in partnership at an early stage.

Financial Implication: None. This is met through existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 3

The Welsh Assembly Government produce an updated and refreshed Child Poverty Strategy and Implementation Plan, taking into account new initiatives, and changes within existing programmes, such as Communities First and Communities Next.

Response: Accept.

The Assembly Government's Child Poverty Strategy, '*A Fair Future for our Children*' was published in February 2005. It represented the Assembly Government's response to the findings of the 2004 Independent Task Group on Child Poverty.

The Strategy confirmed that the Assembly Government would take forward its action in relation to tackling child poverty in the context of three broad areas – income poverty, participation poverty and service poverty. The Strategy recognises that the Assembly Government has limited ability to influence the first area but has significant control over the policy levers that influence the second and third policy areas.

Although this framework remains current it is clear that there have been a number of developments since 2005 in relation to the child poverty evidence base and in policy developments. In addition, the UK Government has recently announced its intention to consult on a Child Poverty Bill and Strategy to 2020. Accordingly, the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government has requested work to begin on a revised child poverty strategy from 2009 onwards. The Assembly Government is taking forward a '*One Wales*' commitment to evaluate its existing anti-poverty strategies and it has been agreed that this work will initially focus on those programmes aimed at reducing child poverty. Preliminary work assessing available evidence and to

establish a framework for future evaluation of child poverty initiatives should be completed by March following which work will begin on a new child poverty strategy.

Financial Implication: The *One Wales* commitment to evaluate Assembly Government anti-poverty initiatives is being led by the Office of the Chief Social Research Officer in liaison with policy officials and other analytical expertise and builds on the recent publication of the 2008 Children and Young People's Well-being Monitor for Wales and the latest statistics on child poverty in Wales. OCSRO have a budget in 2008-09 to establish the evaluation framework. Development of the Child Poverty Strategy will be led by SJLG.

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Assembly Government demonstrate a clear commitment to ensuring the child poverty proofing of all its policies. This should include:

- a) publication of specific annual targets for each Ministerial Portfolio, to address Child Poverty;**
- b) annual publication of each Ministerial Portfolio's progress towards meeting these targets; and,**
- c) a scheduled annual debate, in Government time, on the Welsh Assembly Government's progress towards meeting these targets.**

Response: Accept in principle

In 2006, and in order to take forward a specific policy proposal in the Child Poverty Implementation Plan, specific questions on the impact on disadvantaged children and disadvantaged communities were included in the Assembly Government's Policy Gateway Tool. All strategic Assembly Government policies must complete the Policy Gateway process before submission to Cabinet. The Policy Gateway Tool has recently been revised to reflect the priorities set out in the '*One Wales*' document and a number of versions are being trailed. Child Poverty Unit officials have been liaising with colleagues in the Strategic Policy Unit and have been assured that the final version of the Tool will continue to include a specific question to assess impact on child poverty. It is also worth noting that child poverty is one of the specific cross-cutting issues highlighted in the Gateway Tool. In addition, the Child Poverty Unit seeks to child poverty proof a range of other policies and programmes on which it is consulted from across the Assembly Government.

In October 2006 the Assembly Government published its own cross cutting child poverty 2010 milestones and 2020 targets in '*Eradicating Child Poverty – Measuring Success*'. The targets, based on 31 indicators, span a number of Ministerial portfolios covering Income and Work, Education, Health and Housing.

The Assembly Government is committed to monitoring progress against the cross-cutting targets and has put in place robust arrangements to achieve this. This includes the publication on 20th November 2008 of the first Children & Young people Monitor for Wales which reports against the targets and, importantly sets child poverty progress within the wider context of child well being. The Monitor will be published again in 2010 and thereafter to coincide with the Children and Young People Plan reporting cycle.

In addition, on 25 November 2008, a new blended report was published on the Assembly Government's *Statistics Wales* website which reports on progress in meeting the child poverty targets. Importantly, the *Statistics Wales* website will include updated data on the 31 indicators underpinning the targets as and when the data becomes available – providing an ongoing opportunity to assess Assembly Government progress.

The agreed terms of reference for the Child Poverty Expert Group include a responsibility to provide the Assembly Government with advice on the wider policy requirements necessary to meet the child poverty targets set out in '*Eradicating Child Poverty – Measuring Success*'. In addition, the Child Poverty Delivery Group, chaired by the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government, will have a role in monitoring progress towards the targets.

Assembly Government Ministers are fully aware of the importance of monitoring progress against the agreed targets and are able to report on progress through the Cabinet Committee for Children and Young People which has overarching responsibility for all policies affecting children and young people. The Assembly Government considers that there are robust arrangements in place to ensure its accountability relating to the child poverty targets.

The Assembly Government is currently developing legislation that will make statutory provision, through a legislative framework to take forward its commitment in relation to child poverty. This will increase the importance and profile of child poverty related across public agencies.

Financial Implication: The costs associated with existing policies and programmes in meeting the targets and for monitoring can be met from existing programme budgets. Financial implications associated with new legislation are currently under consideration.

Recommendation 5

The Welsh Assembly Government should review and rationalise its funding of local agencies with the intention of enabling coherency throughout its funding regimes.

Response: Accept

The National Assembly's Communities and Culture Committee recently undertook an inquiry into the Assembly Government's funding of the Third Sector in Wales. One of the recommendations was that the Welsh Assembly Government should review the various funding streams provided either directly or through its agents, to identify the scope for consolidation; and to assess whether the balance between revenue and capital funding achieves the most efficient use of resources.

Officials are currently implementing this recommendation. Business Development Division (IDEAS) will shortly be undertaking an Assembly Government-wide scoping study on grant funding to establish a sustainable structure.

The Assembly Government acknowledges that it should be approving grants which enable the voluntary sector to undertake work which will help meet its wider strategic objectives set out in *One Wales*. This includes those which the Assembly Government cannot take forward directly itself.

The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government will provide an update of progress on implementing the Communities and Culture Committee's recommendations in February 2009 during the Plenary debate on the Annual Report of the Voluntary Sector Scheme.

Additionally, the Welsh Assembly Government's Voluntary Sector Scheme includes the 'Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector', which is published as a separate document. The Code sets out the key principles which underpin Assembly Government funding for the sector, to ensure that best practice is applied in the administration of its grant schemes and those of agencies which manage funds on its behalf.

"The Third Dimension – A Strategic Action Plan for the Voluntary Sector Scheme" called for the revision of the Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector to include Full Cost Recovery and to take account of procurement best practice. It also requires all Assembly Government Departments and sponsored public bodies to adopt and comply with the Code, and urge local authorities and other public bodies to do likewise.

The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government formally launched the revised Code at the WCVA AGM on 27th November 2008.

Coherence of funding regimes is effective programme management and should potential overlaps be identified the Assembly Government agrees that these should be removed. The recommendation does not restrict itself to child poverty and it should be noted where multiple government objectives are being addressed this may bring a necessary complexity. The majority of local funding is the responsibility of local authorities and the Assembly Government seeks to work in partnership with all its delivery partners.

Financial Implications: None. Removing overlaps in funding where they exist could release revenue.

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Assembly Government should ensure that, when applying for any 'non recurrent funding' as opposed to core funding, local authorities should be required to demonstrate how money granted will impact on the authority's ability to tackle child poverty.

Response: Accept in principle

Around 80 per cent of local authority revenue funding comes from unhypothecated revenue support grant (RSG) paid by the Assembly Government. The formula for distributing RSG between authorities include indicators that take account of a local authority's relative need to spend to address child poverty related issues (for instance, the number of school pupils entitled to free school meals; dependent children in out of work households and dependent children in lone adult households).

All hypothecated or specific grants are already subject to grant terms and conditions which prescribe monitoring arrangements and set out outcomes required from the grant funding. Not all grant schemes (for instance, some forms of capital equipment grants will have direct relevance to child poverty issues). Where appropriate, however, the Assembly Government will consider ways in which monitoring arrangements and outcome setting can better reflect the impact of grant funding helping to eradicate child poverty.

The Assembly Government is currently developing legislation that will make statutory provision, through a legislative framework to take forward its commitment in relation to child poverty. This will increase the importance and profile of child poverty related action amongst local authorities and their partners.

Financial Implication: None

Recommendation 7

The Welsh Assembly Government should review its extant statutory guidance in Circular 23/02, issued July 2002, in order to require that proposals for school reorganisation, or the rationalisation of school places, include an impact assessment statement detailing how the proposal will impact on the authority's ability to help eradicate child poverty.

Response: Accept in principle

The existing guidance on School Organisation proposals, to which local authorities must have regard when bringing forward statutory proposals for changes to schools, has been reviewed. The Communities Directorate has contributed to that review emphasising the importance of tackling child poverty. The revised guidance, which is currently subject to consultation, places greater emphasis on child poverty issues than the current circular. The Assembly Government will take the Committee's view into account as part of the consultation process. The draft circular lists a number of key principles which promoters should take into account in the development of proposals to change the pattern of school provision. Amongst these is consideration of "whether a proposal contributes to "*A Fair Future for Our Children*", the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for tackling child poverty"

The circular also states that "the interests of learners should override all others and inequalities in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, groups and individuals must be narrowed in the interests of all"

The draft circular indicates that in considering the closure of small schools authorities should consider whether there would be any impact on child poverty in the communities affected. The draft states that Local Authorities identifying the need to close schools should consider means of reducing impacts prior to bringing forward proposals.

The Assembly Government is currently developing legislation that will make statutory provision, through a legislative framework to take forward its commitment in relation to child poverty. This will increase the importance and profile of child poverty related action amongst local authorities and their partners.

Financial Implication: None.

Recommendation 8

The Welsh Assembly Government introduce more effective monitoring and evaluation of policies' impact, including longitudinal studies.

Monitoring should be a key requirement of local authorities when applying for grant funding, with RAISE funding linked to monitoring of the performance of pupils entitled to free school meals, for example.

Monitoring should not focus exclusively on educational attainment, but rather should also include targets related to pastoral care, such as numbers of permanent exclusions from school.

Response: Accept in principle

The Assembly Government is taking forward a '*One Wales*' commitment to evaluate its existing anti-poverty strategies and it has been agreed that this work will initially focus on those programmes aimed at reducing child poverty. Preliminary work assessing available evidence and to establish a framework for future evaluation of child poverty initiatives should be completed by March 2009. In addition, the Assembly Government provides funding for the Millennium Cohort Study in relation to longitudinal studies.

There has been extensive monitoring of RAISE initiatives over the three years of programme. This has involved a requirement that schools should report annually on the self-evaluation of their initiatives and that local authorities should monitor RAISE activity in their schools. In September 2007, the Assembly Government issued the 'RAISE: Evaluation handbook for schools' to support those engaged in programme funded activity. Whilst pupil take-up of free school meals have been used as a proxy indicator of poverty, in allocating RAISE funding, we have not restricted RAISE activity to such pupils. Schools have been encouraged to use the widest range of evidence in identifying those pupils who should benefit from RAISE funding because of their socio-economic disadvantage. In addition to the monitoring at school and local authority level, there have been robust external evaluative reports from Estyn, the People and Work Unit and the regional RAISE co-ordinators. In all aspects of the monitoring and evaluation of RAISE initiatives, prominence has been given to schools' success in developing the social and emotional skills and attitudes that will make disadvantaged pupils more effective learners, as well as to the immediate academic outcomes of the interventions.

Financial Implication: None

Recommendation 9

The Welsh Assembly Government should ensure better dissemination of good practice amongst schools and other formal and informal education settings in tackling the effects of poverty.

Response: Accept

The Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that tackling child poverty is at the forefront of the work of schools and other education settings. In order to achieve this aim it is important that the Assembly Government works closely with its delivery partners in local authorities and other public sector partners. Accordingly, in 2007, the Assembly Government agreed to fund a two year child poverty local authority pilot project.

The aim of the project is to support local authorities and their partners to prioritise child poverty and mainstream policies that support the reduction of child poverty across Wales. The project commenced in October 2007 running for a period of 2 years and is supported by a dedicated staff resource at Save the Children and the WLGA. The work of the project is supported by a National Steering Group, drawn from the wider public and voluntary sectors, including the Assembly Government.

The structure of the project is two fold with national and local elements. At the national level the project team have developed a web-based 'Improvement Tool' called '*Child Poverty Solutions Wales*'. This provides all authorities and partners with a sustainable resource, from which to determine corporate policy direction on child poverty issues. This should include advice and guidance on how schools and other education settings can prioritise work on child poverty. The Website also includes a 'Best Practice' section where innovative work on child poverty issues at the local level can be shared.

The RAISE Programme has served effectively to focus the attention of administrators and practitioners more sharply on the implications of deprivation for young people's ability to make appropriate progress in school. It was launched as a two-year initiative in spring 2006 but the Assembly Government was able to identify additional resources to allow the programme to continue in 2008-2009.

Initially, very many schools saw RAISE grant funding as an opportunity to provide additional time-limited support for disadvantaged pupils currently at school. The Assembly Government's RAISE team, in conjunction with the RAISE regional co-ordinators, has consistently sought to encourage schools to give greater attention to the opportunities provided for producing sustainable outcomes from the funding. As a result, schools have gradually given greater emphasis to capacity building and professional development activities, with a view to making changes in schools that will make them better equipped to address pupils' needs in the future.

A major element in this strategy has been a series of fourteen regional and national events that have combined inputs from experts in the field of education or child poverty with invaluable opportunities for schools to showcase their practice. In turn, many local authorities and consortia have organised more localised activity to promote the principles of RAISE. These events have led to networks of activity across Wales, in which schools have made formal and informal connections with each other to share and develop good practice. During the summer term of 2008, the Assembly Government was able to make an additional £100,000 available to the consortium to support developmental and dissemination activities. A prominent feature of these activities was the organisation of learning visits between schools.

Although the RAISE programme that is currently operating will come to an end in August 2009, the Assembly Government is making £6.29 million available for 2009-2010. Schools, their local authorities and the regional consortia are to use this funding to consolidate the work of the first three-years of the RAISE programme and the lessons learned from it. In this fourth year, the programme will shift its focus to give a much higher profile to sustainable outcomes from RAISE activity. Funding will go to regional initiatives that, operating on the basis of action research principles, will generate publishable outcomes that may be used for developmental activity in the future.

Financial Implication: None. Assembly Government support for the Child Poverty Local Authority pilot project can be met within existing budgets. This work in relation to RAISE is funded within the RAISE programme budget.

Recommendation 10

The Welsh Assembly Government should swiftly establish the proposed RAISE website to facilitate sharing of ideas good practice.

Response: Accept

The RAISE website has been live for some months. It is currently accessible through NGfL Cymru or through the direct web addresses www.raise-wales.org.uk and www.rhagori-cymru.org.uk. It will also become available through the DCELLS website.

The Assembly Government has very largely devolved RAISE activity throughout Wales to four consortia of local authorities. When two of these consortia expressed interest in developing a RAISE website, the Assembly Government made £20,000 available for 2007-2008 to support their development of a web presence. We have indicated that, in the funding we are making available for regional RAISE activity and co-ordination for 2008-2009, at least £30,000 is designated to further this work. The consortia have worked with NGfL Cymru to initiate the website. However, they have found it

difficult to generate material from their schools that is suitable for publication on the website. Assembly Government officials have discussed with the consortia ways of overcoming this problem. As a result, all have identified ways of progressing development more productively. We have delegated additional money to the consortia in 2008-2009 for RAISE events and development activity. The consortia will seek to link these activities, as far as possible, to the production of good practice material for schools.

In 2009-2010, the RAISE programme will shift its focus to give a much higher profile to sustainable outcomes from RAISE activity. Funding will go to regional initiatives that, operating on the basis of action research principles, will generate publishable outcomes, many of which should be suitable for the RAISE website

Financial Implication: None. The above work is funded within the RAISE programme budget.

Recommendation 11

The Welsh Assembly Government ensure increased poverty education within mainstream teacher training and in training of other professionals working with young people in education settings. This education should encompass the impact of poverty upon children and their education. This should also incorporate teachers' responsibilities to provide pastoral care.

Response: Accept in principle

At the end of October 2008, the Children and Young People's Workforce Development Network (facilitated by the Care Council for Wales in its sector skills role) presented a draft Children and Young People's Workforce Development Strategy and the Common Core of Skills Knowledge and Understanding. These are now being considered in detail by officials across a number of Assembly Government departments. A wide range of issues of varying complexity needs to be taken into account as part of this analysis

The Assembly Government intends to issue a draft plan that sets out a phased approach to the implementation of the Strategy in the spring of 2009. Given the number of stakeholders who will be playing a part and the nature of the proposals, it is likely that a further period of consultation will be needed, before a final implementation plan is available. Detailed aspects of training for professions, including teachers, will be considered in the context of common elements set out in the Common Core, once the broad implementation issues have been decided. This recommendation will be taken into account in the process.

Financial Implication: Details of any resource implications and additional costs are being considered by officials in preparing an implementation plan for further consultation. Final assessment will be made once consultation responses have been taken into account in the final plan.

Recommendation 12

The Welsh Assembly Government undertake a review of interpretation of 'The National Agreement: Raising Standards and Tackling Workload' in relation to teachers' responsibilities to enable provision of pastoral care. This review should determine whether the way in which agreement has been interpreted is militating against teachers, without specific responsibilities for providing pastoral care, offering sensitivity to the needs of pupils in poverty, or who are experiencing other barriers to learning. If the agreement is being so interpreted, the Welsh Assembly Government should put out clear direction to education authorities and schools, clarifying all teachers' enduring responsibility to show sensitivity to issues of social poverty, and other social issues, in their interaction with pupils and to direct pupils to further support if appropriate.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Assembly Government is a signatory to the National Agreement: Raising Standards and Tackling Workload and supports the adoption of a wide range of models for the provision of pastoral care within schools. Teachers remain responsible for the learning of their pupils, and this includes being able to identify and adopt suitable strategies to overcome a range of barriers to an individual pupils learning, including those caused by poverty and other social issues. Our focus on Pedagogy makes clear that creating the right environment and relationships for learning are critical factors in successful teaching and learning. We will ensure that our work on pedagogy draws on examples of excellent practice where teachers' professional skills have supported pupils learning in conditions where they face particular social disadvantage or poverty. We will continue to work with the other signatories to the Agreement to monitor implementation and continue to draw out examples where excellent pastoral care arrangements have contributed to overcoming the barriers to learning experienced by children facing poverty.

Financial Implication: None. Can be contained within existing budgets.

Recommendation 13

The Welsh Assembly Government enable monitoring of the take up of free school breakfasts, among children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, and commission research into the potential benefits of amending timings of breakfast clubs. This should also encompass monitoring of whether schools and local authorities were making free breakfasts available. Monitoring in this fashion would not entail fingerprinting of children and young people.

Response: Accept

The Assembly Government currently collects data on schools and pupils who participate in the primary school free breakfast initiative on a termly basis – this is not through the Pupil Level Annual School Census. From January 2009, collection of this data will be moved to PLASC, and will therefore be collected on an annual basis. The new items to be included in the PLASC are as follows:

- Number of pupils who took a free breakfast on census day
- Number of pupils eligible for free school meals who took a free breakfast on census day
- Number of pupils who took at least one free breakfast in the week prior to census day
- Number of pupils eligible for free school meals who took at least one free breakfast in the week prior to census day

Data on take-up of school meals (paid and free) is already collected via PLASC. This information, together with that collected from the primary school free breakfast initiative will help shape and inform other strategies targeted at improving food and nutrition in schools. It will also enable us to undertake an analysis of the numbers attending the primary school free breakfast initiative that are also in receipt of free school meals; this information is not currently collected.

Schools have some flexibility regarding the detail of the timings for their breakfast sessions. Breakfast provision should normally be delivered as a short period (for example 30minutes) with the primary purpose of providing sufficient time to enable those children who attend the session to have a healthy breakfast before the start of the normal school activities

Financial Implication: None.

Recommendation 14

The Welsh Assembly Government enable monitoring of take up of free school meals, including the monitoring of the nutritional value of such meals.

Response: Accept

Data on take-up of school meals (paid and free) is already collected via Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC).

Currently the Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches)(Wales) regulations 2001 define the different food groups and sets out the minimum nutritional standards for school lunches for primary and secondary school pupils. These are minimum compulsory standards. Local authorities and schools are free to set higher standards.

The Appetite for Life Action Plan sets out the strategic direction and actions required to improve the nutritional standards of food and drink provided in schools in Wales. Nutritional analysis software has been procured to enable caterers to plan menus using their own recipes and to share their recipes with catering colleagues across Wales. This software is available to all school catering providers. It will enable the Welsh Assembly Government to monitor compliance with the more stringent standards proposed in Appetite for Life at a local and at a national level, and identify areas which may need refinement.

Financial Implication: None**Recommendation 15**

The Welsh Assembly Government commission research into the feasibility of delivering universal free school meals for children of different ages.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Assembly Government's current focus is on improving the nutritional standards of food and drink provided in Wales and this is being supported through our Appetite for Life Action Plan. Four local authorities, one from each region of Wales, will be involved in developing and testing new guidelines for implementing improved food and nutritional standards. The lessons we learn from this project will be crucial in improving the health and wellbeing of young people across Wales and in informing future decisions on commissioning work on the feasibility of universal free school meals.

School meals and especially the provision of free school meals are an important aspect of the Welsh Assembly Government's anti-poverty strategy. In deprived areas where many of the meals served are free, these set the standard for the whole service. Our successful Primary School Free Breakfast initiative is already helping children have a healthy start to the day, with around 928 primary schools participating in the scheme.

We have also made available funding to all local authorities whose schools are not involved in the Action Research Project who wish to progress towards the standards in Appetite for Life. The focus of this grant scheme is to address the requirements of the pupils themselves by adopting a whole school approach to delivering Appetite for Life – for example, to improve kitchens and dining rooms, to ensure that the whole dining experience is more attractive and well organized.

We will continue to monitor and learn from developments from across all parts of the UK - this will help inform how we take forward our whole school approach to improving food and nutrition in schools in Wales

Financial Implication: There are currently no financial implications. A review of the financial implications will be required when consideration is given to commissioning additional work.

<p>Recommendation 16 The Welsh Assembly Government consider piloting universal free school meals.</p>

Response: Agree in Principle

A decision to pilot universal free school meals will be taken following a review of the current work underway in relation to school meals. If the evidence gathered from work currently underway provides justification to introduce this work, consideration would be given to running a pilot. Evidence will be gathered from the Action Research Project and the literature review which is to be commissioned on the take-up of free school meals.

Financial Implication: See response to Recommendation 15 above.

Recommendation 17
The Welsh Assembly Government commission research into the effectiveness of schemes to reduce stigma associated with free school meals.

Response: Accept

Although we know that not all children and young people who are entitled to school meals take-up their entitlement, we do not have a clear understanding of the reasons why. Stigma is frequently quoted as the main reason; however the extent to which this is actually the case is unclear.

As a first stage, the Welsh Assembly Government is committed to commissioning a literature review of work undertaken on take-up of free school meal entitlement. Depending on the outcome of this work, there may be a need to commission a specific piece of research.

The recently published 2008 Children and Young People's Well-being Monitor for Wales has highlighted "research into the impact that free school meal eligibility may have on well-being for school children in Wales" as a key information gap. The Office of the Chief Social Research Officer (OCSRO) is currently looking at how to start addressing information gaps such as these - prior to the publication of the second edition of the Monitor in 2010.

Financial Implication: None.

Recommendation 18
The Welsh Assembly Government ensures that greater support and training is made available to school governors on the issue of child poverty.

Response: Accept in principle

The Assembly Government recognises the important role of school governors in recognising and responding to child poverty. It is important that school governors are aware of child poverty and its impact on education when setting school policies and evaluating school achievements. External evaluation of the RAISE programme by Estyn and the People and Work Unit has suggested that, in general, schools are far more comfortable in dealing with educational underachievement than they are with socio-economic impediments to learning. The same is likely to be true of school governors. Unless governors are aware of the pernicious effect of child poverty and its impact they will fail to take actions that properly take account of it.

The Assembly Government publishes a large number of guidance documents, many of which are directed at governing bodies. It undertakes to consider what should be said about child poverty, when it is relevant to the guidance topic, in future guidance documents. This was illustrated recently when published guidance about school uniforms was issued in 2008.

Local authorities are duty bound by section 22 of the Education Act 2002 to provide governors with free training to equip them with the skills and knowledge to discharge their duties effectively. Tackling poverty requires holistic action and the Assembly Government expects local authorities to consider where reference to child poverty would be beneficial in governor training.

The Assembly Government is committed to ensuring Local Authorities are fully supported in their own role in tackling child poverty at a local level and recognises that local authorities and their partners need help and guidance on the issue of recognising and tackling child poverty. Accordingly, in 2007, the Assembly Government agreed to fund a two year child poverty local authority pilot project.

The aim of the project is to support local authorities and their partners to prioritise child poverty and mainstream policies that support the reduction of child poverty across Wales. The project commenced in October 2007 running for a period of 2 years and is supported by a dedicated staff resource at Save the Children and the WLGA. The structure of the project is two fold with national and local elements. At the national level the project team have developed a web-based 'Improvement Tool' called '*Child Poverty Solutions Wales*'. This provides all authorities and partners with a sustainable resource, from which to determine corporate policy direction on child poverty issues. This includes advice and guidance on training for elected members and other professionals on child poverty issues.

The Assembly Government is currently developing legislation that will make statutory provision, through a legislative framework to take forward its commitment in relation to child poverty. This will increase the importance and profile of child poverty related action amongst local authorities and their partners.

Financial Implication: None. Assembly Government support for the Child Poverty Local Authority pilot project can be met within existing budgets

Recommendation 19

The Welsh Assembly Government provide statutory guidance to governors and school leaders on the sort of leadership that they should be giving to address child poverty. This guidance should include practical steps to addressing child poverty such as balancing the educational value of residential trips against their financial cost. This guidance should also be accessible to parents, carers and pupils.

Response: Accept

School governors and leaders need to be aware of child poverty and how to take account of it when making policy and operational decisions. Accordingly, in the response to recommendation 18 undertakes to take account of child poverty in guidance documents published by the Assembly Government.

In recognition of the educational value of school visits and residential trips but also of the cost pressures they bring, in 2009-2010 DCELLS will publish guidance that clarifies in the circumstances in which education law permits charging.

We are currently reviewing the existing leadership programmes for school leaders and will consider ways to incorporate a greater awareness of the impact of child poverty within these programmes.

The Assembly Government is currently developing legislation that will make statutory provision, through a legislative framework to take forward its commitment in relation to child poverty. This will increase the importance and profile of child poverty related action amongst local authorities and their partners.

Financial Implication: The cost of publishing guidance on school charging will be met from the DCELLS publications budget and SMED's DRC budget

Recommendation 20

The Welsh Assembly Government commission research into the reasons why educational progress seems to decline in the early years of secondary school, with particular reference to children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds.

Response: Accept

The recently published 2008 Children and Young People's Well-being Monitor for Wales has highlighted "reasons for attainment dropping between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3" as a key information gap (page 111 of the full Monitor). The Office of the Chief Social Research Officer (OCSRO) is

currently looking at how to start addressing information gaps such as these - prior to the publication of the second edition of the Monitor in 2010.

With the benefit of advice from Estyn, we have identified current strengths and areas for improvement in the transition arrangements put in place by secondary schools and partner primary schools. As a result of Wales-only legislation, primary and secondary schools are now required to work together to produce and maintain a Transition Plan that focuses on improving continuity and progression in pupils' learning, as they move into secondary education. We have supported the implementation of Transition Plans with funding from the Better Schools Fund and provision made available to every local authority in the Key Stage 2-3 Transition Grant.

The Assembly Government has commissioned Estyn to track progress and provide recommendation on further issues to address. A first Estyn report (May 2008) concluded that the first set of Transition Plans, put in place from September 2007, appropriately covered the five core aspects of transition. A second report will be compiled in 2009-2010. In addition, one of the key themes for RAISE funding in 2009-2010 will be how transition planning can be best used to support the educational achievement of pupils from low income households. The regional consortia of local authorities will direct funding to initiatives that will develop effective practice in this connection.

The Assembly Government will use outputs from this programme of work alongside research planned by partners to identify areas for improvement and action needed.

Financial Implication: None

Recommendation 21

The Welsh Assembly Government place a specific duty on all publicly funded schools to promote social cohesion.

Response: Accept in Principle

Ministers will take the Committee's recommendations into account as part of the consultation on the current Community Cohesion strategy but will decide in the light of responses and government priorities how to give it effect.

Financial Implication: None. The cost of consultation and development of the Strategy can be covered by existing resources.

Recommendation 22

The Welsh Assembly Government initiate a study into the costs of education to provide comprehensive evidence to help formulate policy addressing such costs.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Assembly Government will consider this recommendation further within the context of the development of my Department's Evidence Strategy and Plans for 2009/2012. As outlined in the response to Recommendation 23 the Assembly Government already plans to commission research in 2009-10 on the costs of uniform and parents' views on school uniforms.

Financial Implication: None.**Recommendation 23**

The Welsh Assembly Government monitor schools' adherence to its guidance on school uniforms.

Response: Accept in principle

Welsh Assembly Government guidance on school uniforms is not statutory and it is therefore not enforceable in that sense. The guidance is broadly written because schools have discretion in setting uniform policy and very prescriptive guidance would not fit with that. For these reasons, it would not be appropriate to monitor schools' adherence to Assembly Government guidance as suggested by this recommendation.

However, the Assembly Government is concerned that schools take account of the cost of uniforms and how that can be a burden for low income parents. Accordingly, the Assembly Government intends to commission research in 2009-10 on the costs of uniform and parents' views on school uniforms. This work will inform any further action necessary to strengthen Assembly Government guidance or to change school practices.

Financial Implication: Estimated cost of new research £50K which can be met from existing budgets.

Recommendation 24

The Welsh Assembly Government enable greater consistency between schools, and across authorities, about minimising additional costs of education. This should involve clear statutory guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government on minimising such costs and include practical advice on balancing the educational value of such trips against their financial costs. This should enable all children to participate on an equal basis without stigmatisation due to financial or cultural constraints.

Response: Accept in principle

In response to recommendations 19, 23 and 25 the Assembly Government has undertaken to provide guidance about school charging and to research school uniform issues relating to cost. These actions will clarify in what circumstances schools are allowed to charge by law, raise awareness of child poverty and promote greater consistency between schools. The Assembly Government is also committed to ensuring that guidance documents for schools and local authorities contain reference to child poverty where relevant to the guidance topic.

In relation to school meals, local authorities must ensure that lunch is provided free of charge for those pupils eligible to free school meals. The value of a free school meal should be set to enable eligible pupils to have a standard two-course lunch and a drink. If pupils can leave the school premises at lunchtime, there is price competition with local traders, as well as with packed lunches. To encourage pupils to eat a healthy balanced diet, local authorities and schools should aim to offer a balanced meal at an attractive price.

The Assembly Government is currently developing legislation that will make statutory provision, through a legislative framework to take forward its commitment in relation to child poverty. This will increase the importance and profile of child poverty related action amongst local authorities and their partners.

Financial Implication: None.

Recommendation 25

The Welsh Assembly Government ensure that there is greater public clarity and awareness of guidance regarding the costs to parents and carers of school trips and support available to them.

Response: Accept

The Assembly Government will publish guidance in 2009-2010 about charging for school activities – recommendation 19 refers.

Financial Implication: None. The cost of publishing guidance on school charging will be met from the DCELLS publications budget.

Recommendation 26

The Welsh Assembly Government provide guidance to schools on training and establishing a member of staff as a school liaison officer for young carers, responsible for proactively identifying and engaging with young carers and support workers, and liaising internally with other teaching staff.

Response: Accept

Response: Information Document No. 013/03 "Caring for Young Carers" issued in June 2004 provides the current good practice guidance to schools regarding young carers, and includes advice to "Nominate a link teacher with specific responsibility for young carers". A pilots study published on the Assembly Government's website indicates that "the WAG Training pack received very positive feedback from the teachers" who were involved in the study.

The Carers' Legislative Competence Order which was laid on 9 December 2008 is drafted so as to enable the Assembly to bring forward Measures regarding young carers but it is still too early to describe the detail of what might be included in future Assembly Measures or to assess their full cost implications.

Financial Implication: None

Recommendation 27

The Welsh Assembly Government enable the establishment of more appropriately funded, well planned and community focused schools, starting with areas of high socio-economic disadvantage.

Response: Accept

Over the past three years local authorities have been given freedom to use the Community Focused Schools (CFS) grant to provide services in the light of local circumstances. All authorities were directed to pay particular attention to funding developments that support area-based initiatives, such as Communities First Programmes, Heads of the Valley Initiatives and Objective One Programmes.

However, the Assembly Government recognises that some local authorities are more advanced than others in developing the community focused schools agenda. However, all local authorities have made progress in enhancing the opportunities available within their communities. On this basis, this year has seen an extension to the Community Focused Schools programme with a £15.75m for a further 3 years being targeted towards building on existing provision and in considering what additional services or activities schools and their partners might develop. In considering these additional services or activities, local authorities plan on the basis of a shared vision between all the partners with the net result that its services and activities aim both to raise pupils' levels of achievement, whilst providing all community members with additional learning opportunities.

The findings of the on-going independent evaluation of RAISE by the People and Work Unit have highlighted the importance of schools' developing a community focus, if they are effectively to support the education of young people in the most challenging circumstances. In the light of this evidence, local authorities and their regional consortia have agreed that the development of a community focus in schools should be one of the key themes for RAISE activity in 2009-2010.

The twenty-first century schools capital investment programme will, also, place increasing emphasis on integrating public services in community-focused schools, where appropriate.

Financial Implication: None. Already covered within existing programme budgets.