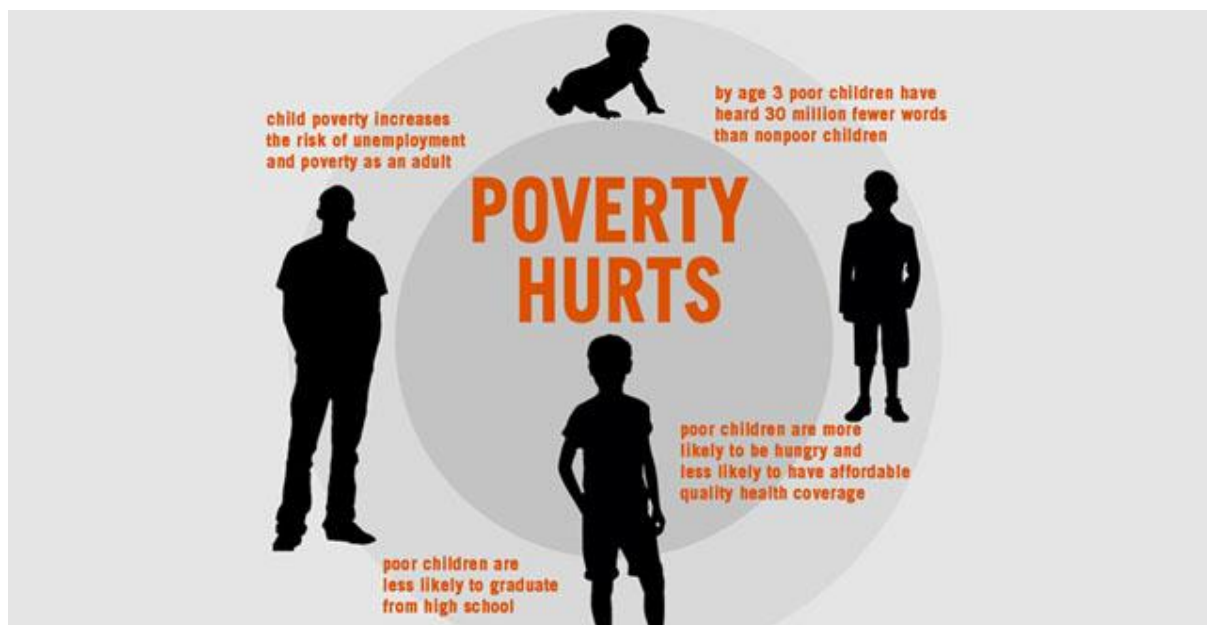




Children in Wales Plant yng Nghymru

Child and Family Poverty in Wales: Results from the Child and Family Survey 2018



www.childreninwales.org.uk

www.youngwales.wales

Children in Wales – Plant yng Nghymru

About the organisation

Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals who work with children, young people and families in Wales. Its aims are to promote the interests of these groups, to improve services in Wales and to put children high on the Welsh agenda.

Children in Wales is a membership organisation and works closely with its members who comprise of professionals, policy makers and consumer groups to improve the lives of all children living in Wales, but especially young children, those affected by family instability, children with special needs or disabilities, and those suffering the effects of poverty and deprivation. It collects and disseminates information about children and promotes good practice in children's services through research, policy and practice development, publications, conferences, seminars, training and access to an extensive information service.

Children in Wales was established in March 1992, and became a registered charity in 1993, and has offices in Cardiff and Bangor.

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DISCLAIMER

Please note that the views in this report are those of respondents to the questions in the survey and are not necessary shared by Children in Wales.

Introduction

Poverty happens when a family's resources are below what they need, including taking part in their local community or society more generally. Measuring poverty accurately is difficult, with different measures often giving a different picture or interpretation. The most common used measure in the UK is 'relative poverty.' This applies to a household whose income is less than 60% of the median income of the country. It is, however, widely acknowledged that families' experience of poverty is multi-dimensional.

One problem with using this measure, in isolation from other factors, is that it measures 'household' income and thereby excludes a significant proportion of the population which are likely to be living in poverty. This includes those living rough or in bed and breakfast accommodation, people in prison, students living in halls of residence and women (many with children) living in refuges.

For the last three years Children in Wales has published reports of surveys undertaken into child and family poverty in Wales, namely ["Child and Family Poverty in Wales: A snapshot of key issues raised by families"](#), [Child and Family Poverty: results from the Child and Family Survey 2015](#) and [Child & Family Poverty Survey Results 2016](#). In previous reports, we identified the following as the main issues impacting on children, young people and families in poverty in Wales:

- The impact of Welfare Reform and associated changes to the benefit system (including a lack of awareness about changes, concerns around sanctions and delays in payments)
- Housing (in relation to sufficiency and availability of social housing and housing quality)
- Impact of the Bedroom Tax or spare bedroom subsidy
- Food Poverty (including the increase in the use of foodbanks)
- Debt
- Energy costs
- Rising cost of living (notably families struggling with everyday essential costs)

We were also able to capture and understand how much had changed and whether previous issues identified remained pertinent, and was there a perception amongst professionals supporting families that the situation for households with children had got worse or improved, or had there been little or no change

For the last four years Children in Wales has developed and circulated an annual questionnaire, through our membership and contact database, to help reach frontline practitioners working in Wales. As well as seeking responses to the main concerns previously raised, we were also interested to capture any additional issues which were impacting on households with children. We were also keen for respondents to share their thoughts and ideas in terms of solutions which could help prevent, resolve or mitigate the impact of the issues raised. For the most recent survey we changed the format and, instead of having specific subject headings, we asked respondents to identify their top five poverty-related issues facing children and families in 2017/18.

For the first time this year we sought to gather the views of children and young people through a separate survey. This was available online through Survey Monkey or could be completed manually. The survey was based around three themes: money, housing and school. Respondents were given five statements on each theme, related to child poverty, and were asked to select two which they thought were most relevant and the reasons why they chose them. A copy of the survey can be found at Appendix 1.

In the current survey a total of 114 individuals accessed the questionnaires between February and April 2018. Not all respondents chose to provide a response to every question, and only those responses received to specific questions have been included in this report. Although respondents had the option to remain anonymous, which many did, from those who chose to provide some level of information about themselves we were able to identify responses from a broad mix of professionals within local authorities, public sector bodies including health, housing and education and the third sector. One key feature from this year's survey is that 10% of respondents, working in different agencies, responded in a personal capacity and gave personal experiences of living in poverty.

The following report provides a summary of the responses received to each question. Hyperlinks have been inserted where external material has been quoted.



Top Issues: Child & Family Poverty

Respondents were asked to rank these poverty related issues in order of importance:

Impact of benefit changes	Housing barriers
Food poverty	Rising cost of living
Insecure employment/income	Transport costs/availability
Debt	Rural poverty
Low Wages	Additional costs of education
Fuel poverty	Access to further education
Childcare costs/availability	
Loss of Services	
Health Barriers	

Chart 1 below shows the top five most popular and Chart 2 gives an overview of scoring on all the above issues.

Chart 1

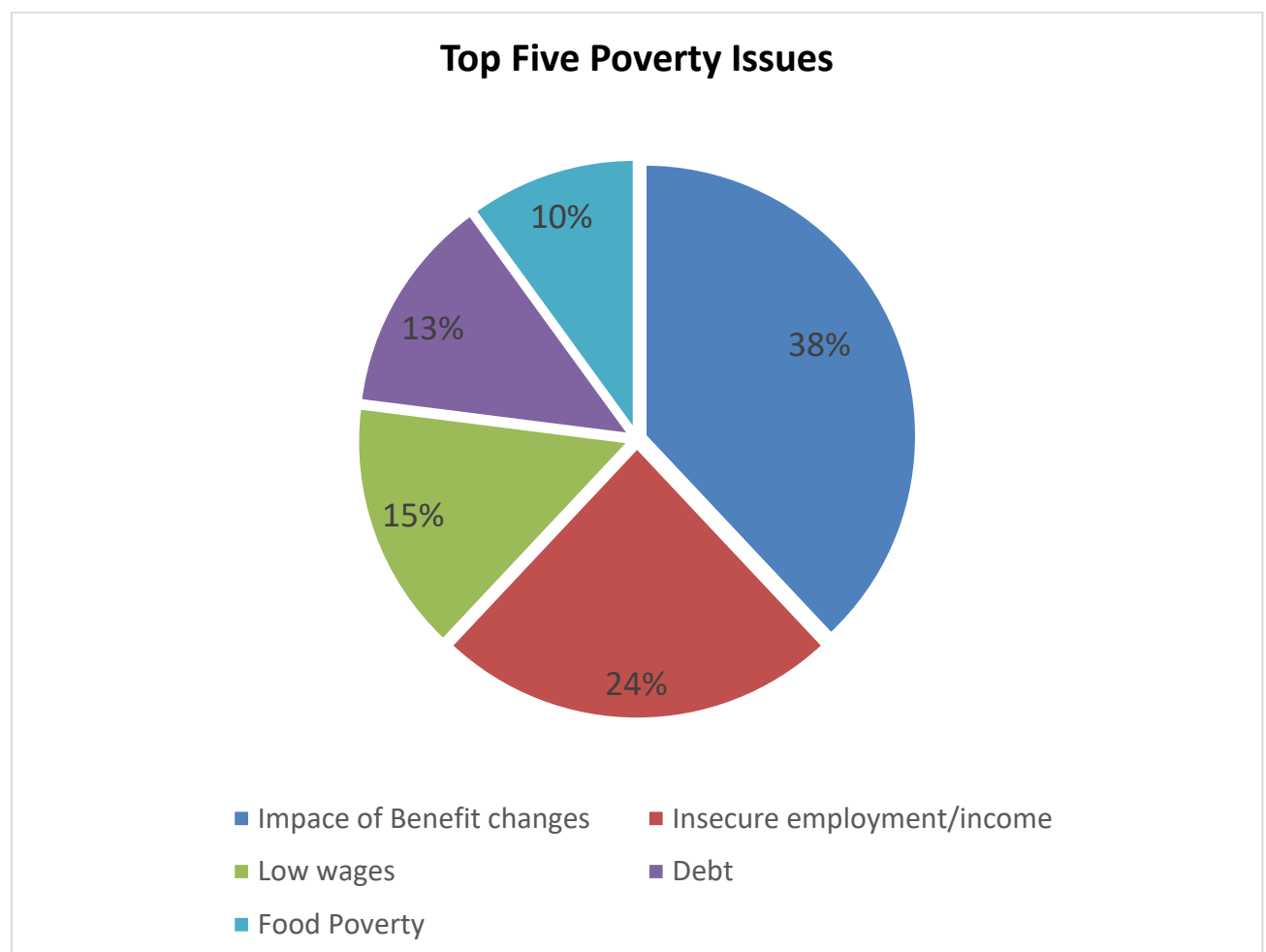
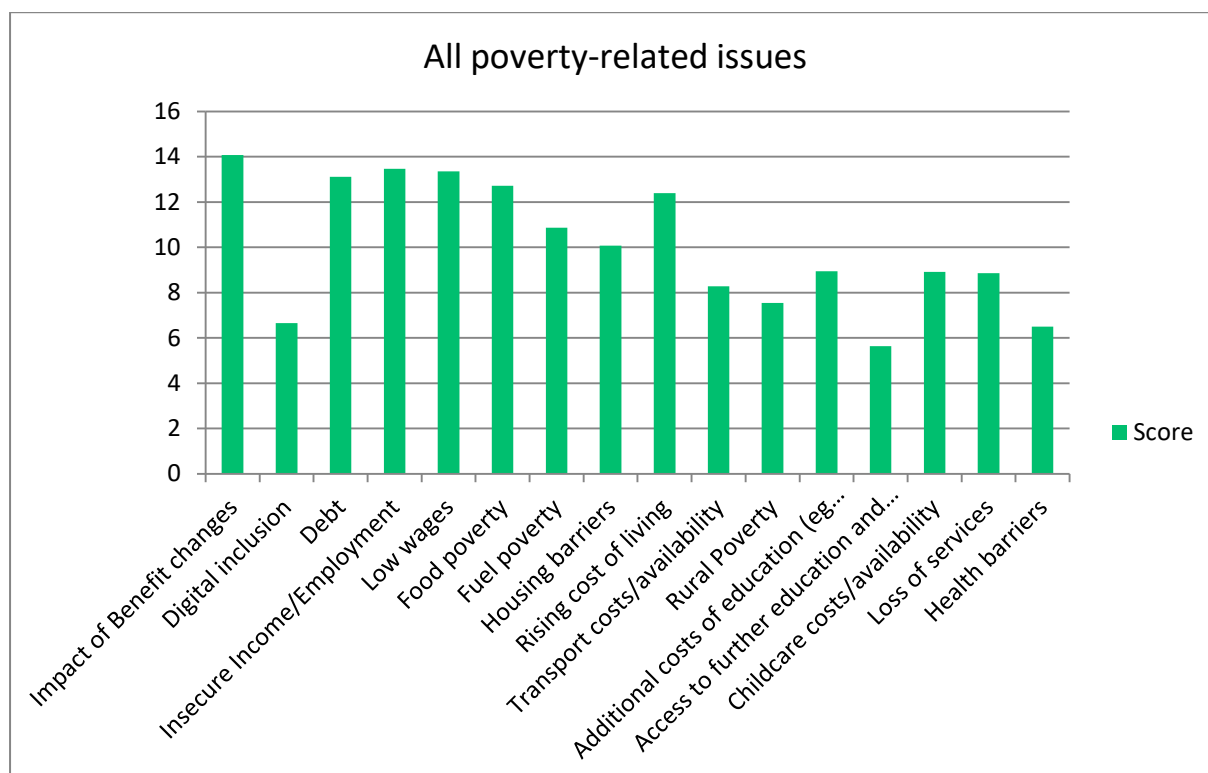


Chart 2



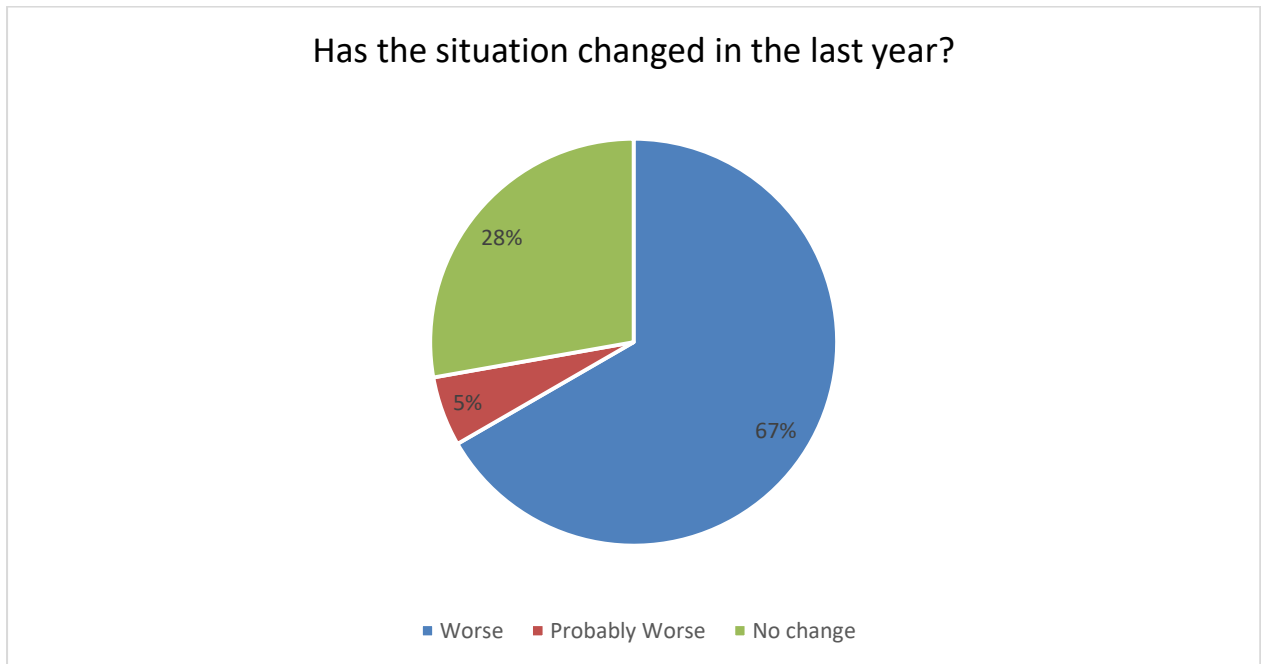
We asked respondents to clarify why they had chosen these issues, and a significant number noted that many of the above issues are inter-related and combinations of issues, such as insecure employment/income leading to debt, food and fuel poverty and low wages. This then impacts on parents' and children's health, children's education, family relationships, parenting capacity etc, resulting in poor educational attainment, poorer health outcomes for children and young people, poor mental health in both parents and children and overall poorer well-being.

The combined impact of low wages and the rising cost of living was also highlighted by a number of respondents, leading families to have to make difficult choices, for example, between paying for utilities and feeding the family. A [Briefing](#), published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in March 2018, identified that although good progress has been made in Wales in reducing poverty overall, the risk of poverty has increased for both working and workless households due to the impact of welfare reform, the rising cost of living (especially housing) and low paid jobs.

"As a grant giving organisation these are recurring themes that are given by applicants"

We asked respondents whether things had improved or got worse in the last year. Chart 2 below shows that the majority of respondents felt that issues around poverty have got worse over the last year. None of the respondents considered that the situation has improved since last year.

Chart 2



Some examples of what respondents told us about the different child poverty issues are grouped below under the above heading. The impact of benefit changes, low wages, insecure employment/income, debt and the rising cost of living are grouped under 'Financial,' as these are largely inter-related.

Financial

"Impact of benefits and low wages lead people into debt and food poverty. Cost of living goes up and wages do not reflect this."

"Those who are in poverty and trying to change their situation are often poorly paid or on zero hours/irregular contracts which can directly affect all benefit entitlements and lead to the Other Factors listed. There is little or no balance or advice for those in this type of poverty trap. Help in completing forms is also an issue for many."

"The introduction of Universal Credit has increased the numbers of people seeking help, particularly with the delay in initial payment."

"Balancing finances has become harder. Often needing to 'rob peter to pay paul!', as the weeks and months pass and just when you think you've got your head above water, along comes something else, new shoes, coat, birthday or the winter fuel bills"

"The cost of everything is rising and everyday essentials in supermarkets are going up more. Mental health is one of the biggest issues we see. We work closely with primary mental health and third sector services locally, but there are massive gaps and people

are not able to access services as quickly as needed. Many jobs are low paid, zero hours.”

“Managing debt remains a constant problem, however, this is definitely exacerbated when there are health issues.”

“Zero hour contracts and Universal Credit do not work well together. Low wages and welfare benefit changes have led to an increase in debt.”

“Universal Credit is having a huge impact. Anything which triggers a change in means tested benefit causes a problem. Money is stopped for the five weeks, rent payment is affected. People turned down for PIP having to claim Universal Credit then lose the severe disability element and enhanced disability element normally paid because it doesn't exist in Universal Credit.”

“Benefits also just about cover living, but if there are expenses outside of daily living, then this is difficult for the family, for example, school trips, providing cooking ingredients for school exams and replacing school uniform. Hence a lot of families are in debt to try and provide the items that benefits won't cover, for example, Christmas and birthdays.”

“Benefits issues discouraging parents of children with additional needs from entering employment, or lack of understanding of benefit entitlement due to poor educational attainment.”

A [report](#) published by the National Audit Office in June 2018 strongly criticised the UK Government's roll out of Universal Credit. The report stated that “...Throughout the introduction of Universal Credit local and national organisations that represent and support claimants have raised a number of issues about the way it works in practice.” The report found that although increased satisfaction with one of the Department of Work and Pension's success measures, claimant satisfaction with Universal Credit was no higher than with previous benefits. It also underestimated and failed to measure the impact Universal Credit had on claimants or the level of hardship they suffered. In areas where it has been rolled out, rent arrears had increased, food bank use had increased and local authorities were struggling to fund the administration of Universal Credit at a local level. There were also serious issues with the online application process.

A [Briefing](#) released by the National Assembly for Wales in October 2017 identified a number of problems with Universal Credit. These included waiting time, sanctions, direct payments, family dynamics and entitlement to housing costs for young people. The Welsh Government has estimated that changes to the Work Allowance in 2015 will affect up to 160,000 families in Wales, when the roll out is complete.

[Advice Trends in Wales](#), published by Citizens Advice Cymru, reported that benefits and debt made up 72% of the problems presented by 114,282 people who sought advice in 2016/17.

Food poverty

“Impact of benefits and low wages lead people into debt and food poverty. Cost of living goes up and wages do not reflect this.”

“Low wages and the rising costs of living is impacting on living standards, making it harder for families to either afford to purchase food, once all utility bills are paid, or purchase nutrition-rich foods. This means that families are more reliant on processed foods which, in turn, are increasing the likelihood of them incurring health problems which is placing a strain on our NHS system.”

“Food poverty can impact on every aspect of a family’s life, including family relationships, education, child development and mental health and well-being.”

“If we were on basic wage something would of had to give, food or fuel. I have no idea how families in low incomes manage round here.”

“Our food bank is seeing its highest amount of clients for years, due to the lack of employment and the cost of living, together with the ongoing changes in the benefits system over the last few years.”

“Food banks are increasing – they should not become the ‘norm’.”

“The mum died in one of my families resulting in a change of benefits. Dad had to wait four weeks and the family were only able to eat due to voluntary agencies stepping in by providing food vouchers and food. If no agencies were involved, what would he have done?”

The Trussell Trust identified that almost half of their clients reported their incomes were unsteady from week-to-week, and 78% had skipped meals and gone without eating in the past 12 months. Lone parents and children make up the largest population of people using food banks. A report published in June 2017, [Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability: The profile of people receiving emergency food assistance from The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in Britain, June 2017](#) stated “Many foodbanks’ operations were stretched due to increased demand, with volunteers acting either as welfare advisers, or too busy giving out food to offer a listening ear or signposting.

Fuel Poverty

It has long been acknowledged that fuel poverty is more prevalent in rural parts of Wales, due to the lack of mains gas supply and other sources of fuel being more expensive.

“Pretty much a cycle. Less income through benefits or low wages cause food poverty, fuel poverty and debt. Once in that cycle it is almost impossible to get out of it.”

“This relates to what I see on a regular basis within my work role - many are also interlinked. The problem with benefits is the delay/sanction...get into debt, can't afford fuel or heating...”

“To heat our ex-Council house, which we rent privately, costs us £40 a week as it has no insulation. If we were on basic wage something would of had to give - food or fuel.”

“Fuel is a problem because benefit rates are not enough to cover fuel bills, as well as everything else (food etc).”

In December 2017, the Welsh Government announced a further five years funding for its [Warm Homes – Nest scheme](#). In early 2018, National Energy Action Cymru launched a new toolkit - the [Off-Gas Advice Pack](#) - for those working with fuel poor households in rural Wales.

Rural poverty/transport costs and availability

It is known that issues with transport are largely associated with rural areas, so these two categories have been grouped together:

“Rural areas of Wales particularly see families struggling with transport costs to access services and get food.”

“Powys is a very rural county with limited public transport. This greatly reduces access to jobs and support services.”

“The lack of public transport in rural areas is a problem. I live in a village where a car is essential, as the buses run every two hours up until 5.40pm. No Sunday or Bank Holiday services. I have spent hours waiting for connections in town. My car broke down in December last year and I can categorically say it is cheaper to own/run a car than it is using public transport with a family. The stress of not getting out as much as I did when I had a car has impacted on my health and finances.”

In 2016 the Public Policy Institute for Wales published a [report](#) looking at existing research and evidence gaps in rural poverty. The report found that rural poverty can be masked by different factors, such as pockets of affluence and by a culture of self-reliance in rural communities; the scale and causes of rural poverty are very different from poverty in urban areas. There is also the problem of the ‘rural premium’ on goods and services, such as food, fuel, energy and transport. There is a lack of understanding of the experiences of people in rural poverty.

According to a [Briefing](#) published by the National Assembly for Wales in March 2018, wages in rural areas fall significantly below those in more urban areas. In five rural Welsh local authorities, 30% of workers are paid less than the voluntary living wage, compared with 20%

in less rural areas. When access to services is included, this again raises levels of deprivation in rural areas.

Children in Wales published a report on [Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Wales](#) which cites much research on the impact that rural poverty has on children, in terms of social exclusion, participation and children's rights.

Housing Barriers

"Shortage of Council housing forces many to rent from private sector where rents are very high."

"Housing is a massive strain on people and Councils make it harder for people to get housed. People are then forced into homes that are not suitable."

"When evicted due to rent arrears and general debt, families are forced to move from Local Authority housing into private sector rental. Housing conditions are often worse with private landlords, which brings another layer of stress for the principal carer - the impact of a carer with long-term stress adversely affects relationships, bonding and attachment and increases emotional neglect by default in children, due to decreased capacity and coping skills. The children have more frequent minor illnesses and



additional respiratory conditions, due to food and fuel poverty. Moving out of communities where they 'fit' results in social isolation for the principal parent and the children. The negative effects of diminished capacity of the parent due to the five factors combined with social exclusion heightens the risk of safeguarding. These factors adversely affect and have impact on all the dimensions of a child's health and development. Additionally,

Flying Start families then reside in the private tenure of often more affluent areas and by policy, sit outside the postcode areas for any support services, this in turn provides a cocktail of problems when taken collectively."

"Families are often living in unsuitable accommodation which can have a severe impact on the mental health and well-being of the whole family."

"Almost all families I work with struggle with housing."

"Affordable housing is always an issue, families on low income often do not have the finances to pay private rental bonds. There appears to be fewer Local Authority housing available for families."

Respondents also mentioned the lack of move-on accommodation for women with children who are survivors of domestic abuse; suitable accommodation for families with a disabled child and home ownership being out of reach for those on zero hour contracts.

In April 2018, three Welsh Councils were heavily criticised for handing back £77,000 in Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to the UK Government. DHP is intended for people receiving housing benefit or Universal Credit who need extra help with housing costs [BBC Wales News, 3rd April 2018](#)

A [report](#) by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, published in association with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, around living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK 2018, established a number of key findings related to housing:

- Between 2011/12 and 2016/17 changes in housing costs, not covered by housing benefit, are much higher for low income children than for middle income children
- Marked increases in private renting amongst low income households with children have pushed up their average housing costs
- Changes to housing costs have caused poverty rates measured before and after housing costs to diverge in the last 15 years, especially for children

A [survey](#) undertaken by CPAG and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health found that damp homes caused respiratory problems, and parents were unable to feed their children healthy food or could afford to buy toothpaste. For families with a child with a disability or chronic health condition, poor housing had a significant impact on their ability to provide the care their child needed.

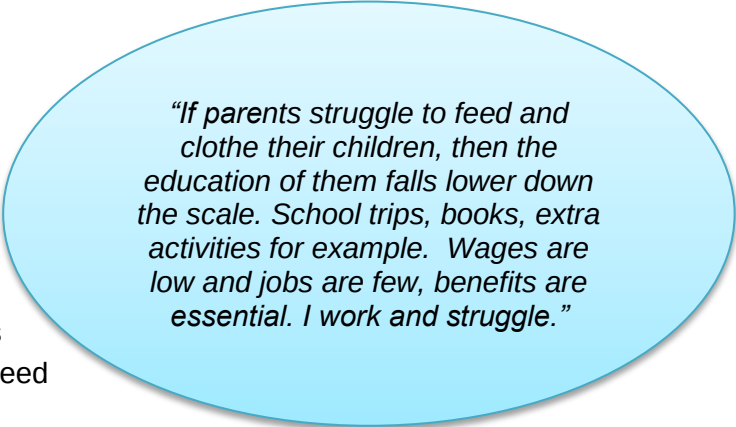
In relation to housing supply, [Welsh Government statistics](#) reports in June 2018 that there was a 12% drop in house building in 2017/18 compared to the previous year, when 1,198 new social sector dwellings were completed. Two Local Authorities - Flintshire and the Vale of Glamorgan - built 81 dwellings and the rest were by residential social landlords.

Additional costs of education/Access to further education

"Low wages, insecure income and the loss of services could impact on health, education and welfare of the most vulnerable."

"Food poverty impacts on education, if a child is hungry they cannot concentrate on their education."

"In relation to children and young people's mental health and well-being, there is a significant and increasing need



"If parents struggle to feed and clothe their children, then the education of them falls lower down the scale. School trips, books, extra activities for example. Wages are low and jobs are few, benefits are essential. I work and struggle."

for trained school counsellors and accredited youth workers."

"Affording the extra provisions your child needs when they have additional learning needs, whether that's software, a laptop, coloured paper or access to a printer is a struggle. Sometimes it's a tutor that's needed because, in all honesty, in this County there is no adequate provision made available to pupils through either high school or FE. Parents have to pay privately or their children do without and struggle."

"Working parents are unable to afford schools meals, especially if they have more than one child at school."

"Access to (further) education affects the future and the choices they may have, preventing the opportunity to break the cycle."

"Poor educational levels cause people to be unsure of which benefit they are entitled to and lack of confidence in applying for the benefits."

A recently published [survey](#) of the experiences of its members, undertaken jointly by the National Education Union and Child Poverty Action Group in early years, primary and secondary schools across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, reported some disturbing findings. 87% of respondents to their survey believe that living in poverty or on a low income significantly affects children's learning. Schools are providing services to families living in poverty such as low cost food clubs, food banks, clothing banks, funding school trips and extra-curricular activities, PE kits, book and stationery. Sometimes teachers are personally providing support for pupils and students from low income families.

In June 2018 a report from the National Assembly for Wales considered how targeted funding could improve educational outcomes for children and young people in Wales. ¹ [National Assembly for Wales, 'On the Money? Targeted funding to improve educational outcomes'](#) p6. The report contains 31 recommendations that the Welsh Government should consider, "... the majority of which are aimed at making the most of the investment in the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) and building on Schools Challenge Cymru. In June 2018, the Education Secretary announced that she had set up a new £1.7 million Access fund, as part of the PDG funding, to help cover the cost of school uniforms, sports kit and activities such as sports, Scouts and Guides.

The Welsh Government is currently undertaking a [consultation](#) on the eligibility criteria for free school meals, following the roll out of Universal Credit. At present all families that receive Universal Credit are entitled to claim free school meals for their children, including those who would have previously not been entitled under the previous system. When the roll out is fully complete across Wales, the current policy would significantly increase the number of children eligible for free school meals. The Welsh Government is proposing to introduce an income threshold of £7,400 for Universal Credit recipients claiming free school meals for their children. The consultation runs until 14 September 2018.

Research by the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) found that since 2010, children from low-income families have been catching up with children from more affluent backgrounds on educational attainment, but are still much less likely to leave school with good qualifications.

Childcare

“The changes to benefits has been reported to us as a Local Authority, which has an impact on paying for childcare.”

“Childcare costs are also an issue. For a lot of families where both parents could and want to be in employment, if they don't have relatives to help out with childcare, they are faced with a choice of having most of their earned income taken with creche fees, or stop work altogether and rely on the benefit system to replace it, sometimes at a financial detriment.”

“Families are often unable to seek employment due to the childcare costs and the minimum wages.”

“Low wages for childcare workers should be addressed. It is not enough for the responsibility.”



“Childcare affordability for both parents starting work as well as those in work.”

In September 2017, the Welsh Government launched its [Childcare Offer](#), offering 30 hours a week early education and childcare for 48 weeks of the year, free for all working parents for three and four year old children, in five pilot areas in North Wales and the Valleys and for selected areas in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Swansea. This is being extended from September 2018 to include the whole of Rhondda Cynon Taf, Torfaen and Ceredigion, along with selected areas in Cardiff, Newport, Neath Port Talbot, Conwy, Wrexham and Swansea.

There has been some criticism of the programme, the main one being, as reflected in the survey, that it is only open to working parents which excludes a large swathe of parents would want to work, but for whom childcare costs are prohibitive. This opinion is endorsed by the Children's Commissioner for Wales in her [response](#) to the CYPE Committee's consultation on the Childcare Funding (Wales) Bill. She told the Committee:

“Such a large-scale investment by the state in early years’ provision should not exclude the children of non-working parents completely from the benefits. This is likely to reinforce inequalities in outcomes for different social groups and therefore requires rigorous analysis from the outset to mitigate any adverse consequences.”

“We pay childcare two days a week, by the time childcare, petrol for commute and parking comes out my wages are almost gone.”

There are also concerns that by restricting the free childcare to three and four year olds, the programme will not work for those with more than one child who do not meet the criteria. Unintended consequences of the scheme have been identified by various reports; a lack of childcare places or poor take up of the offer in some Local Authorities running the pilots ([Evidence submitted](#) to Children, Young People and Education Committee consultation on the Childcare Funding (Wales) Bill).

Save the Children recently published [‘Making Childcare Work – Fixing upfront childcare costs for families on Universal Credit’](#) and although this report only looks at England, who have a similar scheme for childcare to Wales, as Universal Credit is rolled out more and more across Wales, childcare costs will become an increasing issue for working parents claiming Universal Credit.

Loss of Services

“Families know what they need to change their situation, but are unable to access these due to service closures in recent months. This has a knock on effect on all the other issues, as well as health and well-being.”

“Services are being put under pressure and budget cuts are also a factor where some services are no longer able to provide as much support as they would like.”

“Many families benefited from local services to help with debt advice, counselling and parenting etc and are now struggling with very few services”

“The loss of (funding for) services, both educational and social, negatively impacts families and schools. For example, in relation to children and young people's mental health and well-being, there is significant and increasing need for trained school counsellors and accredited youth workers.”

“I find there are continual loss of services for families in need. These diminishing local resources have such an impact on deprived areas, and on children and families living within these communities. The predicted closure of local schools will have added to financial pressures, including school uniform and transport costs.”

“We work closely with primary mental health and third sector services locally, but there are massive gaps and people are not able to access services as quickly as needed.”

Following the Autumn budget in 2017, when Wales’ block grant from Westminster was increased, the [Welsh Government](#) responded by pointing out that even with the additional funding, the Welsh Government’s budget would remain 5% lower in real terms in 2019-2020 than it was in 2010-11, equivalent to £900m less to spend on public services. Both Welsh Government and Local Authorities face difficult decisions on budgetary trade-offs in the coming year.

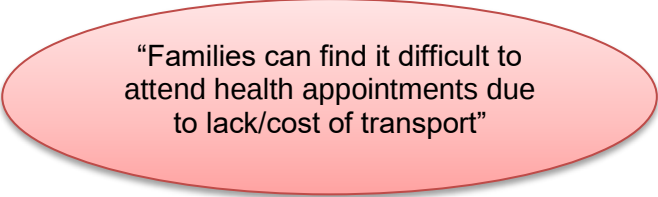
In February 2018 the Welsh Government announced a further round of the Communities First Legacy Fund from April 2018, to allow eligible Local Authorities to maintain the most effective aspects of the former Communities First projects to support the development of resilient communities.

Health Barriers

“Although primarily associated with income, the issues affect the health and well-being of children and families.”

“Insecurity of benefits/low income can impact on more debt which then impacts on poor mental health and well-being, which affects the future generation children.”

“Loss of GP surgeries in the area and specialists in mental health care. GPs unwilling to support patients in their claim for benefits or if they are, they are charging for one lined letters that do not help the claimant.”



“Families can find it difficult to attend health appointments due to lack/cost of transport”

“I am working with a family where the male in the family had to leave because of behaviour issues, leaving a spare bedroom which the householder has to pay for. It is difficult for her to move as her house has been adjusted for her health needs.”

“In relation to children and young people's mental health and well-being, there is significant and increasing need for trained school counsellors and accredited youth workers.”

“Mental health is one of the biggest issues we see. We work closely with primary mental health and third sector services locally, but there are massive gaps and people are not able to access services as quickly as needed.”

“Mental health, I feel it can result in poverty issues and whether it is the child or family that is affected, it is not given as much attention as really needed.”

It is evident from the responses that health and, particularly mental health, are a large concern, both the impact that poverty has on mental health and poor mental health leading people into poverty. There is also the impact that poverty has on a family with a disabled child or parent. A [report](#) by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, published in March 2018, found that the poverty rate for disabled people in Wales is the highest in the UK.

The Child Poverty Action Group and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, [Poverty and Child Health – Views from the frontline, May 2017](#), surveying 250 paediatricians, found that two thirds believe that poverty and low income contribute 'very much' to the ill health among the children they work with. Many issues associated with poverty were identified including:

- Parents being unable to afford to visit their children in hospital
- Doctors being unable to discharge children from hospital due to concerns about poor housing or food poverty

- The severe consequences on children's mental health and well-being of financial insecurity
- The impact of poverty on families with a disability or chronic health condition

Digital Inclusion

"I have had clients going to the local library to start a claim for Universal Credit, but the library is too busy and they have to go away. It is apparently getting difficult to book appointments to use a computer. This is because not only do people need to claim Universal Credit, but it has to be managed online as well.

People either can't use or can't afford to have internet access at home."



A [report](#), compiled by the Wales Co-operative Centre on Digital Inclusion in Wales, stated that nearly one in five of the population is digitally excluded, particularly in rural and agricultural communities. Many others have to put up with poor performance in terms of speed and reliability, even in less rural areas.

The Welsh Government has published a [Progress Report](#) based on its Strategic Framework and Delivery Plan for Digital Inclusion. The report focuses on improving people's lives through digital technologies and covers barriers to engagement; those most likely to be digitally excluded and partnerships promoting digital inclusion. It says little about improving coverage, which is highlighted in the Wales Co-operative's report.

Rhodri Williams, Ofcom's Director in Wales, is quoted as saying:

"Our findings show that plans to improve mobile coverage in Wales needs to gather pace. It's important everyone who has a part to play in the process of improving mobile coverage work together so that consumers in Wales get the mobile services they expect and that are comparable to the rest of the UK. Given Wales' topography and population distribution, there are unique requirements for network infrastructure that must be met for Wales to keep pace with the rest of the UK." [Ofcom website accessed 29/6/2018](#)

What should Local Authorities do to tackle child poverty?

We asked respondents what they thought Local Authorities should be doing to reduce child and family poverty, and what three key actions they should take to reduce child poverty in their area:



The responses to this question were very varied. In total we received 186 key actions, which we have grouped into five main categories. Some suggestions were not within the remit of Local Authorities.

Services

31% of respondents mentioned Services. Concerns about loss of services and support agencies were highlighted and the desire to see them reinstated. Services such as mental health support and family

support were of particular concern. There was a

suggestion that more support services could be located in schools or community centres. A significant number spoke about the need for better access to services. There was a call for better communication between support services and Local Authorities. One respondent suggested

raising Council Tax to preserve services.

"Preventative work with families who are at risk of living in poverty - there is a lot of provision in Torfaen for this, but the scope for identifying "at risk" families should be widened to include more families who are able to access this sort of support."

"The provision of community support services would be helpful in RCT - there isn't any anymore."

Other comments from our respondents on Services included:

"Improved services (for example, mental health support, transport links)"

"Better access to support services"

"Support existing services rather than reinventing the wheel"

"Provide emergency gas and electricity through Children's services"

"Help with budgeting for people on low incomes"

“Better information on benefit entitlements”

“Localised support for families on benefits - perhaps in schools or community centre setting”

“Free activities to engage families”

Housing

29% of respondents mentioned Housing. Comments related to a number of housing related issues, including more accessibility to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), more affordable housing and improving the existing housing stock.

Comments from our respondents on Housing included:

“Automatically provide DHPs to all families with children if on a low income”

“Suitable housing for large families so we're not crammed in small properties like myself”

“Build more quality, well insulated social housing”

“A robust strategy to improve housing stock, both the amount of homes available and the quality of existing properties”

Adult Education/Training

26% of respondents thought Local Authorities should do more to provide/promote different aspects of adult education. These included increased funding for education and training in preparation for work, including accessible training for parents with childcare responsibilities (providing crèche facilities). A number of respondents mentioned training for adults, improve skills in money management, cooking and healthy eating/lifestyles.



“Family support to gain employment/educational changes to delivery in hard to reach areas”

Comments from our respondents on Adult Education included:

“Adult education regarding benefits and cooking skills”

“More adult education at lower cost”

“Subsidising transport and meals for further education to make it accessible to everyone who wishes to study”

“Help back to work with education courses”

“Family support to gain employment/educational changes to deliver in hard to reach areas”

Cost of Education

24% identified what Local Authorities need to do in relation to the cost of education. Top of the list was free school meals. Suggestions included free school meals for all

children of parents receiving Universal Credit, for all primary school children and those on low income, and 365 day access to free meals for those living in poverty. Other suggestions include increasing the availability/access to after school activities, subsidised swimming lessons, bringing health professionals into schools, for example, nurses and dentists and providing more family support services in schools.

Comments from our respondents on the Cost of Education included:

“School meals made available for low earning families”

“Increased funding in education to reduce inequality”

“Nurses back in all schools, for example, a nit nurse and dentist etc”

“Stop cutting school budgets”

“Helping identify families who need help with school costs, there's requests for money every week for something or other”

“365 day access to school meals”

Childcare

21% of respondents mentioned Childcare in the responses to this question. The main theme of these responses was the need for low cost childcare or better subsidies for parents who want or need to work.

Comments from our respondents on Childcare included:

“Better childcare subsidies for parents to access work”

“Support for working families with childcare”

“Early intervention for children and access to education through childcare”

“Provide free childcare to help parents get into training and work”

What should Welsh Government do to tackle child poverty?

We asked respondents what they thought Welsh Government should be doing to reduce child and family poverty and what three key actions they should take to reduce child poverty in Wales. Again, there were a wide variety of responses on a range of different topics.

Many of the responses mirrored those in the previous question about Local Authorities and were mainly concerned with affordable childcare, supporting services that work with families living in poverty, improved housing provision, improving education, training and skills, better paid work and access to employment. Some related to non-devolved matters such as Universal Credit and the bedroom tax.

Here is a selection of comments:

“Invest in local communities - engage with local people and work with bottom up approaches to regeneration programmes”

“More affordable or subsidised childcare available in Wales for both working and non-working parents”

“A more equitable distribution of wealth through anti-wealth strategies”

“Using tax raising powers to incentivise inward investment and to provide practical support for young people to develop real entrepreneurship”

“Include budgeting and bill paying into the school curriculum, to give young people the skills to manage their finances and avoid future debt”

“National campaign about benefits that families might not know about or aren't as well known - perhaps encouraging them to go to their local Citizens Advice or other relevant organisation to check they're getting everything they are entitled to”

“More support for those who may be classified as having experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences and not just those living in Flying Start/Community First areas”

“Looking at a setting a Council Tax band specifically for those on means tested benefits and with children in the household”

“Challenging the issues raised by Universal Credit”

What good practice can you highlight in your area? Is there anything specific your organisation is doing to tackle child poverty?

There were a number of good practice models highlighted in response to this question.

There were a number of references to the work of Flying Start, although there were reservations in relation to the ‘postcode lottery’ nature of the service and funding cuts.

Case Study

“At our local office we have built strong and effective relationships with other organisations and agencies in the area. We have a clear referral process which works well and enables us to work together, across the area, to help families.

Clearly our clients are the adults and parents of children in poverty and we help them with a wide range of issues, targeted at income maximisation and debt management. We help clients deal with any crises, can distribute food vouchers and can offer families budgeting advice and other ways to save their money, for example energy efficiency advice.

By helping our clients to improve their overall financial position, we hope that this will increase their financial resilience to falling into, or living in, poverty and help them find ways out of it. Best practice must involve seeing the bigger picture and not taking any financial issue in isolation, as well as a connected and inclusive local network that works well in partnership.

A holistic view of the family's situation will help identify the best possible ways to help them and involving other relevant agencies with the client's permission to maximize the support available”

Case Worker, Citizens' Advice

A number of specific organisations and projects were mentioned. These included:

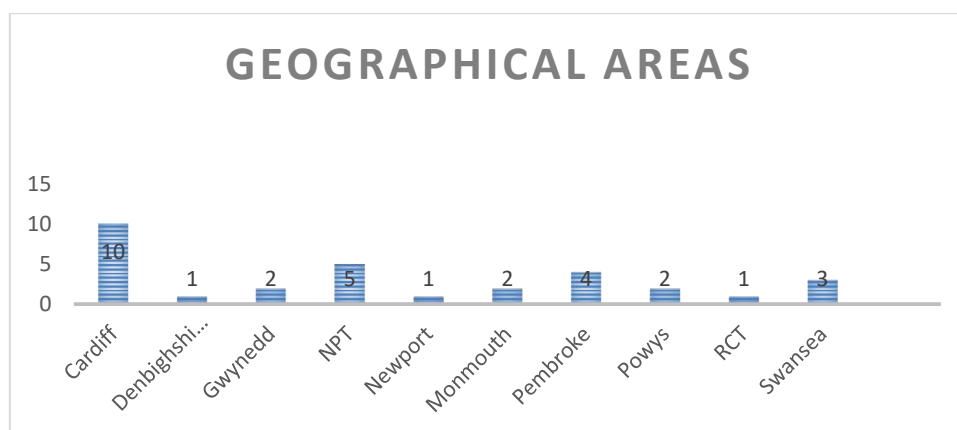
- The University of Wales Trinity St David, through their work with communities in widening access to higher education
- The Fit and Fed project run by StreetGames
- The RASCAL project in Newport
- NYAS' participation programme for vulnerable CYP
- NSPCC in North Wales
- Children First
- Food banks and work with young carers and young parents

Young People's Survey

The statements to which young people responded in this Survey were developed by a task group made up of End Child Poverty Network Steering Group members and Development Officers from Young Wales. The surveys were completed either online or manually.

The first section was 'About You' and collected demographic information. There was a wide variety of geographical areas covered, the most being from Cardiff.

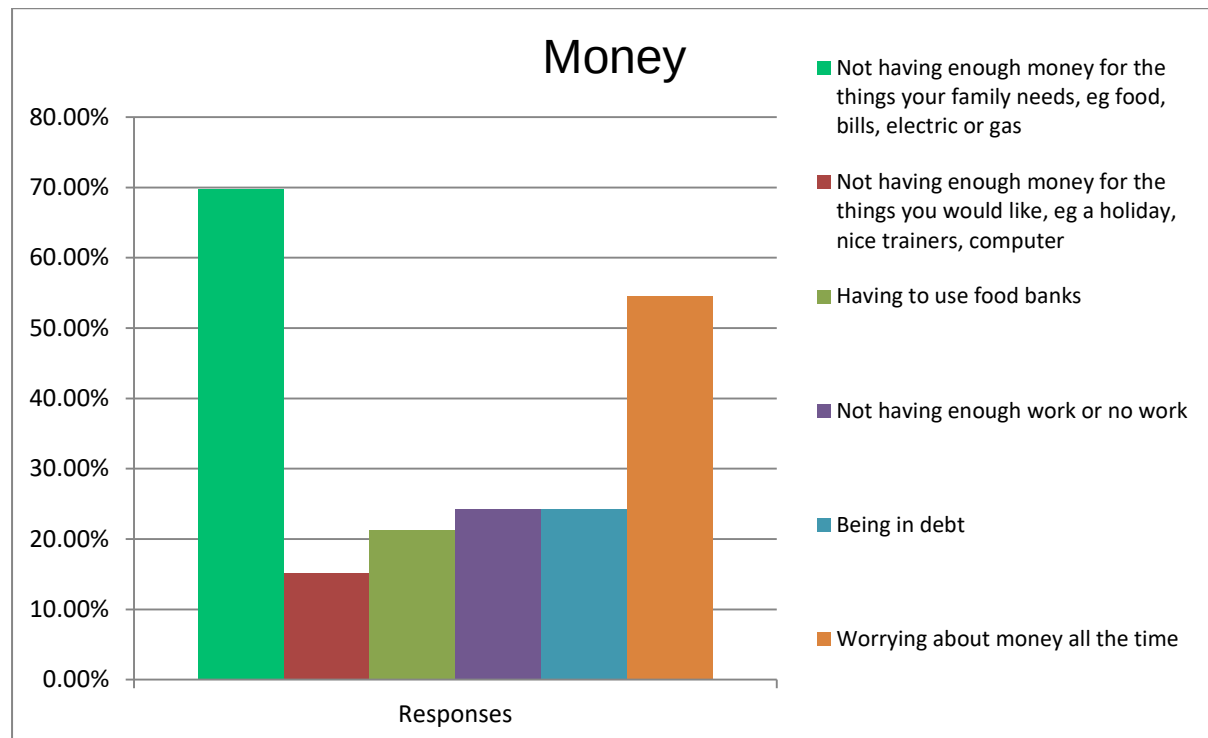
Chart 1



The ages of respondents varied, the youngest being 11 and the eldest aged 26, with the majority being between the ages of 13 and 16.

There were three categories of questions which dealt with Money, Housing and School. Each category contained a number of statements and respondents were asked to pick two from each category, which they thought were the worst things about living in poverty. The results are in Charts 2, 3 and 4 below and each chart is accompanied by a selection of comments that children and young people made about that topic:

Chart 2



Comments

"We don't have holidays, or go into the town centre very often. Mum saves up for me to do things in her budget"

"Not having money is very stressing for children and early adults. It gives negative effects to later life and can lead children to do the wrong decisions"

"Lack of opportunities which impacts later life"

"You can't do anything without money"

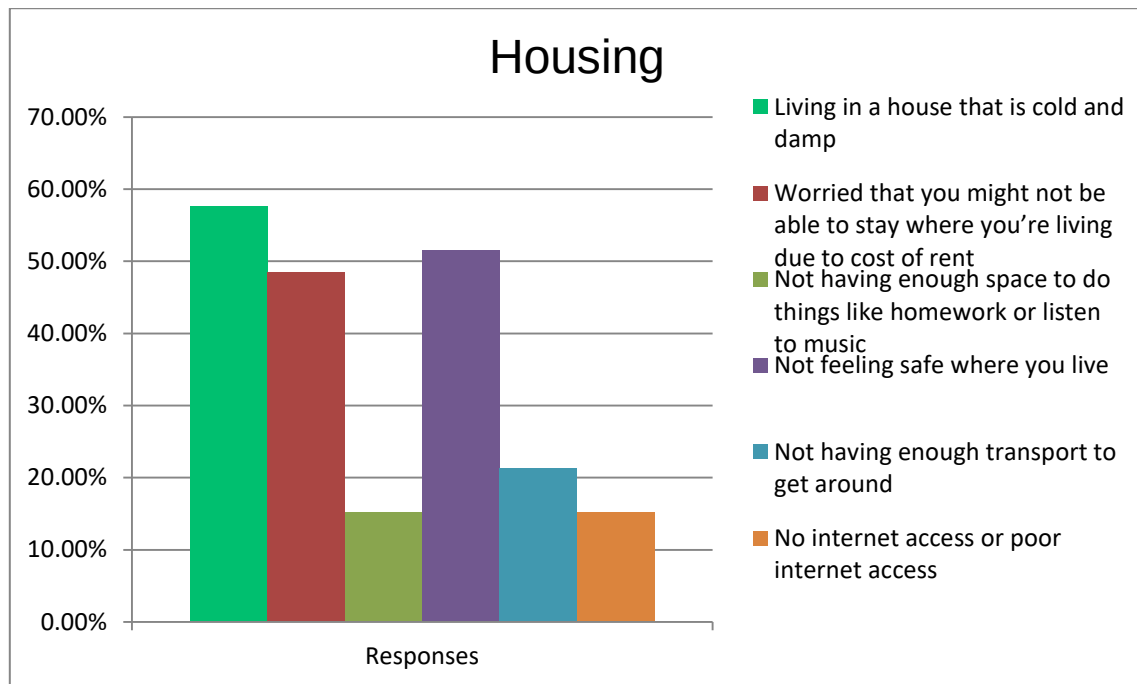
"Not having work and not being able to help pay for things, watching the family struggle is really stressful"

"It can make you sad and depressed"

"Sometimes you feel like you can't ask for things cos you know there isn't enough money. You run out of money and can't get the things you need"

"General family stress ruins living environment"

Chart 3



Comments

"You will be cold and not in very nice living conditions. Your mental well-being will decrease"

"Might move from house to house"

"The idea of homelessness terrifies young people and adults"

"Some of my friends can't have pets because the Landlord doesn't allow it"

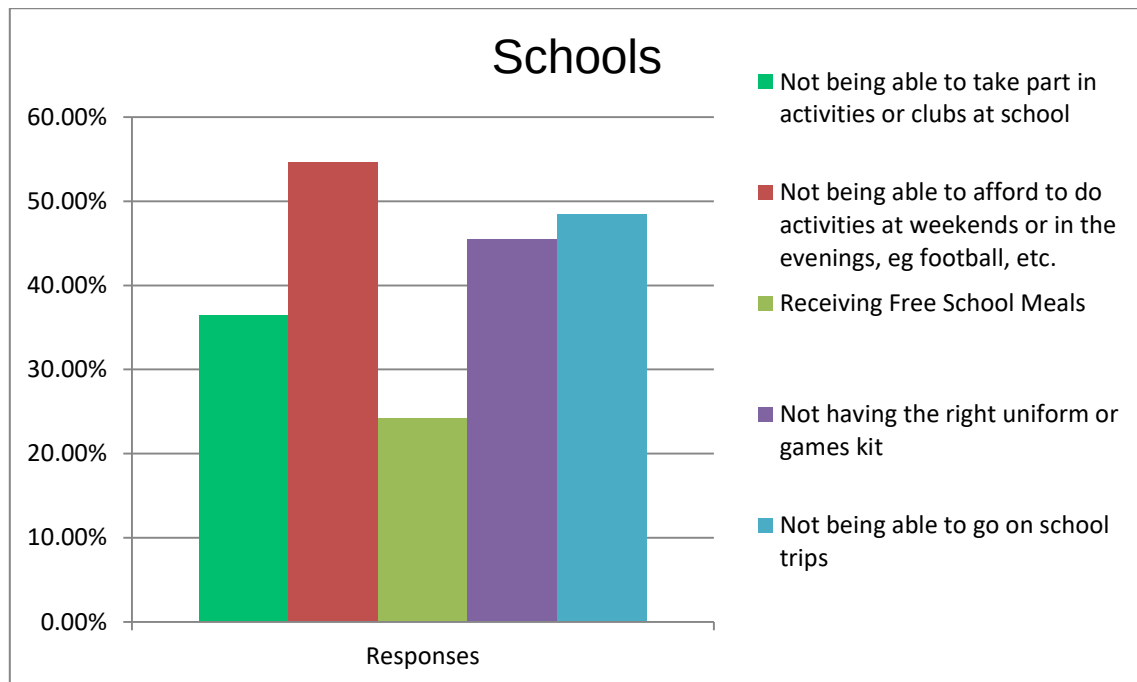
"You should have enough money to pay your bills and have a secure home"

"Don't get the chance to invite friend over"

"Not enough affordable homes"

"My brother is constantly being annoying and being loud when I'm doing my homework. Sometimes I'm late for school and the teacher gets mad"

Chart 4



Comments

“You do not get the full range of activities everyone else has”

“You have less friends and have confidence issues”

“Rich children can do lots of activities and have lots of choice, poor children just have to stay at home. If I was rich I could do horse riding and learn the guitar”

“People feel left out and unfairly treated”

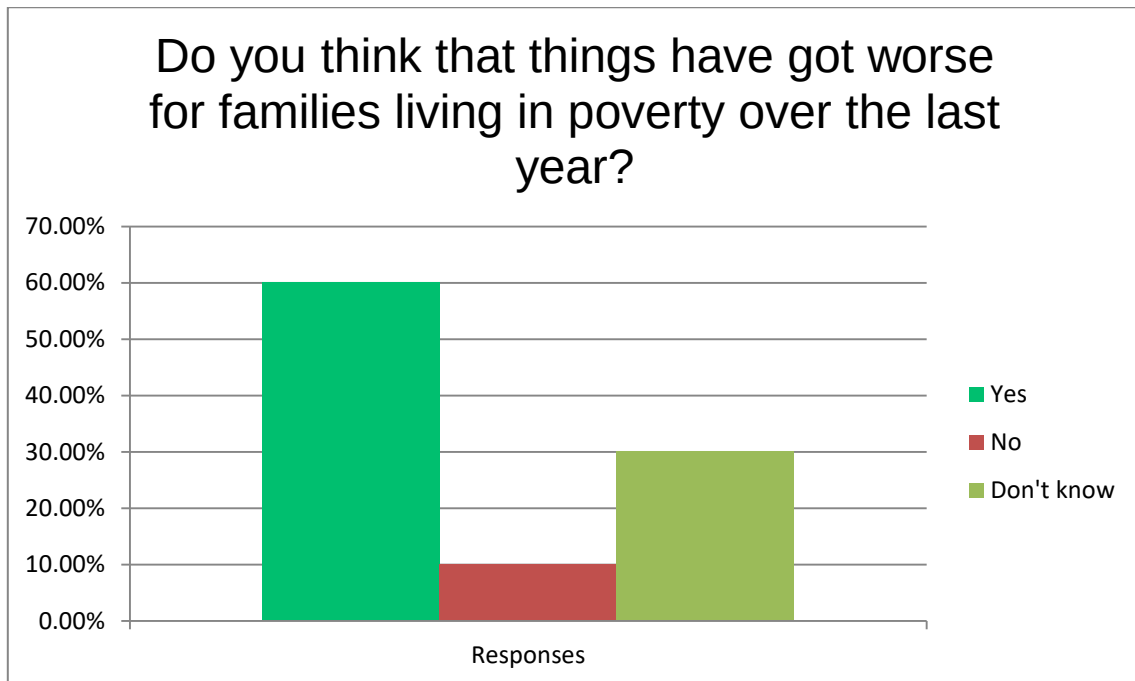
“People might make fun of you and feel excluded”

“Young people need a refuge from negative things in their lives”

“Depriving a child of social and physical activities may lead to an array of negative consequences”

“I’d like to take part in events but we don’t have a lot of money. Sometimes I can’t take part because I don’t have the right kit”

The next question asked young people if they thought things were getting worse for families living in poverty.



Of those who answered this question, there were 18 'Yes', 3 'No' and 9 said 'Don't know.' We asked respondents whether there was anything else they would like to say about how poverty affects children and families and received the following comments:

"Children and young people living in poverty lack opportunities that others have"

"It needs more awareness"

"It damages their ability to do things at the start of their adulthood"

"It leads to poor mental and physical health and associated negative consequences"

"Limited options. Increasing barriers which young people believe are unable to come down"

"Still a stigma attached"

"It makes us worry and sad"

"General wellbeing of those pupils is lower than their peers and academic successes still differ. Is the gap REALLY narrowing in attainment?"

"They don't get the same chances as others and get left out by many people, which can affect their communication skills"

"It limits what activities people can do, and where they can go"

"Limited options. Increasing barriers which young people believe are unable to come down"

We asked young people to tell us what they would do to tackle child poverty in Wales if they were the First Minister and this is what they said:

“Get out into the community, visit inner city schools in Newport and listen to pupils and families and TEACHERS. Heads also. Then assess how to make strategic plans for individual communities”

“I would make council housing. I would make more homeless shelters and increase benefits”

“I would give schools money to be able to help those in poverty”

“Provide more free services, for example, breakfast clubs, community kitchens, community hubs”

“I would make a new consultation to ask people”

“Universal basic income”

“Speaking to families. Arranging network meetings”

“Safe secure housing = affordable. Lowering barriers”

“Find the main issue and tackle it. The opinions of youth could be beneficial”

“Try and put more funding into extra-curricular activities!”

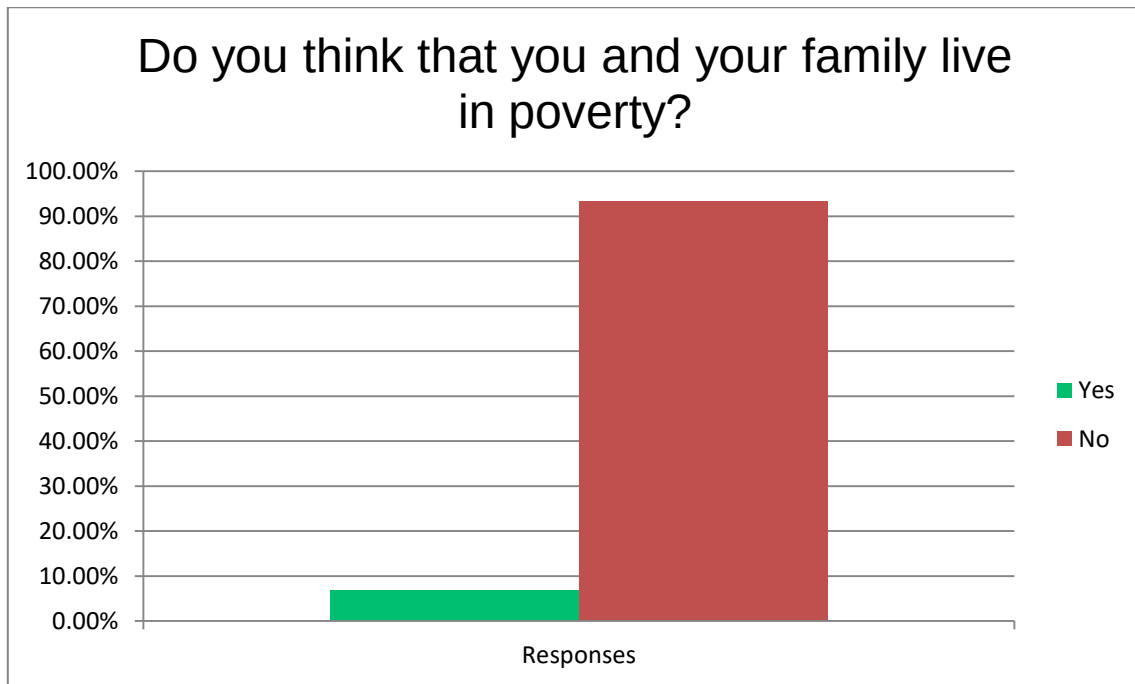
“I would make child bus fares free, and low fares for poor adults. I would make more jobs parents can do from home, in case their children can't go to school”

“Get rid of pen pushers in local councils, stop the perks so many have. Reduce number of AM's, sell Cardiff airport, get rid of free transport to schools out of catchment”

The penultimate question in the Survey asked if they knew of anything good that was happening in their area, to tackle child poverty. Responses mentioned breakfast, holiday and after school clubs, free school meals, youth centres, council house improvements, welfare benefits and community hubs. One respondent said:

“Community links Nurture groups in schools Inclusive schools Fantastic teachers that care”

In acknowledgement that, because of the way the survey was carried out (online and through youth groups/councils), it was likely that the majority of young people completing the survey would not be those worst affected by child poverty, we asked a final question:



Only two young people identified that their family lived in poverty. However, some young people talked about not being able to afford new things or activities and how expensive things are, but did not identify their family as living in poverty. This could be explained by differing perceptions of poverty, by young people, for example, poverty only being a Third World problem.

Summary

In 2017, Children in Wales reported that there had been a slight improvement across the poverty indicators covered in the survey, because there was an increase in people answering 'No' to the question 'Is this an issue?' and indicating that some categories were less of an issue than the previous year, in relation to the different poverty indicators. This year, across the range of child poverty issues we asked whether things had changed over the last year generally, regarding poverty issues, rather than asking about separate categories. 67% of respondents told us that the situation regarding poverty had worsened, 28% said there was no change, 6% thought things were probably worse and no-one reported that the situation has got better.

The impact of benefit changes, insecure employment or income, low wages and debt were the top four poverty issues highlighted in the survey, closely followed by food poverty and the rising cost of living. Concerns about Universal Credit were more prominent than last year. This is a worrying trend, as the roll out of the digital service has only reached around half of people living in Wales so far (for new claimants, including families with less than three children). At the time of writing, twelve Local Authorities in Wales should have now gone live with the Universal Credit full service, with Blaenau Gwent due to commence in July 2018. The last areas to have full service rolled out in December 2018 are those where there are a high proportion of Welsh speakers - Ceredigion, Ynys Mon, most parts of Gwynedd and Carmarthenshire. The roll out to those already claiming existing benefits is not due to start until July 2019, so the next 12-18 months will see many more families suffering financial hardship.

Childcare and loss of services were also prominent. Respondents were concerned about the availability and accessibility of childcare and the fact that the Welsh Government's Childcare



Offer, launched in 2017 in pilot areas, is only open to children aged three to four years, with parents who are working. Concerns about loss of services ranged from libraries, to youth groups to services for families struggling with debt. Rural areas are particularly affected by poor transport links and the sheer cost of transport for families with children over the age of five. Added to this, respondents made reference to a 'rural premium,'

where those living in rural communities typically pay more for fuel and food.

Evidence from respondents focused on mental health as a cause and consequence of families living in poverty; there was concern that there are not enough mental health services and that they are difficult to access. Other health concerns centred around poor housing and the impact of poverty on those with either an adult or child in the family who had a disability.

Responses to the issue of housing barriers largely reflect what we have reported in the last two reports, that there is not enough social housing, often built in the wrong place (not in Flying Start areas), the high cost of private rented accommodation and the poor condition of housing, leading to health problems.

We had reports from parents and practitioners about the additional costs of education, and how children are missing out and the impact this has on their school life. It is hoped that the additional money being made available to parents through the Pupil Development Grant will alleviate some of the issues for children living in poverty across Wales. Access to further education for young people and adults wanting to enter the workplace found barriers in terms of not being able to find or afford suitable childcare, lack of awareness of what is available in further education and how to access it.

As in previous years fuel poverty in rural areas is still a big issue. The cost of oil used to heat homes because there is no mains gas supply causes undue hardship to those who have seen cuts to their benefits and those on low wages. Significant rises in gas prices in 2018 have also caused hardship for families.

Digital inclusion appears to be a growing problem, despite the Welsh Government's drive to ensure that no-one in Wales is digitally excluded. The problem appears to be more to do with access to technology, for example, not enough computers in libraries and poor connectivity in many parts of Wales, both rural and urban. These problems will become more acute in the future when Universal Credit claimants are required to register and maintain their claims online.

Our Young People's survey revealed that they were most concerned about not having enough money for their families' basic needs and worrying about money all the time, living in cold and damp housing and not feeling safe where you live. In relation to school, their comments largely reflected those from the main survey; not being able to afford to do activities outside of school, not being able to go on school trips and not having the right uniform or games kit. Some of the young people who responded to the survey talked about things their family couldn't afford, but did not identify themselves as living in poverty.