

Dear Committee Chair,

I am writing to you to propose that the Equality and Social Justice Committee carry out an inquiry into the relationship between poverty and children's social care involvement in Wales. Research has shown that poverty and inequality affect how the child protection system responds to families who are struggling; An inquiry should:

- Look at the levers Welsh Government has to poverty proof the child protection system.
- Consider to what extent families who experience poverty are supported.
- Consider how the system can recognise when it is the context of poverty itself which is causing harm to the family, rather than intentional neglect.
- Consider the role of the forthcoming child poverty strategy in poverty proofing the child protection system.
- Look at cross-departmental policies, training, regulation and data collection and how they can be truly anti-poverty.

While we welcome the work Welsh Government has undertaken so far to tackle child poverty, NSPCC Cymru is concerned about the increased risk to children as families come under increasing pressure from the cost-of-living crisis. This is against a backdrop of austerity and the pandemic.

Recent research from Paul Bywaters¹ and colleagues highlights a 'contributory causal relationship between the economic circumstances of families and child abuse and neglect'. The authors of the research suggest we should not view poverty necessarily as another factor of abuse, but something that is 'intrinsic to' other factors such as domestic abuse and substance misuse. Poverty has been described as 'the wallpaper of the social care system', in that it is too big to tackle and too familiar to notice. Paul Bywater says supporting families to exit poverty must be core business for children's social care.

NSPCC considers poverty to be a preventable, structural harm which negatively impacts children and can put them at increased risk. A lack of resources can prevent families from being able to provide adequately for their children, and the stress of financial insecurity can overload families, affecting relationships. Living in poverty means parents are not having their needs met, in turn, this can impact their capacity to care for their child.

Within this context, NSPCC Cymru is urging the Committee to undertake an inquiry into the relationship between poverty and children's social care involvement. In these times of financial hardship, creating a social safety net around our most vulnerable families has never been more important.

Yours faithfully,

Elinor Puzey,
Senior Policy and Public Affairs Officer, NSPCC Cymru

¹https://research.hud.ac.uk/media/assets/document/hhs/RelationshipBetweenPovertyChildAbuseandNeglect_Report.pdf