

Into sharp relief: inequality and the pandemic

August 2020

During the pandemic, our chances of dying, losing jobs or falling behind in education have in part been determined by our age, race, gender, disability, income and where we live. The virus and the response to it is widening existing inequalities, by reducing the incomes and increasing risks disproportionately for some groups of people.

We know that:

- Poverty has been a key determinant in the pandemic, from mortality rates to the risk of losing work or income, and educational attainment to overcrowded housing. People from certain ethnic groups, children, disabled people, carers, those living in private rented housing or working in certain sectors are all more likely to experience poverty. 44% of single parents, 90% of whom are women, live in poverty in Wales;
- Men, older people, people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, people with existing health conditions, disabled people and people living in deprived areas have higher coronavirus mortality rates;
- Low earners, young people, women, and people of Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Pakistani ethnicity are more likely to work in 'shutdown' sectors. When these groups intersect the risk is compounded - for example 39% of all female employees under 25 work in shut-down sectors in Wales;
- Almost half of the lowest earners in Wales are employed in 'shut down' sectors, and they are ten times as likely as the highest earners to work in these sectors.



- Women make up the majority of health and care staff, and have taken on the majority of unpaid care of children and relatives;
- There are fears that children with the lowest educational attainment before the pandemic will have fallen further behind their peers, such as boys, children of certain ethnicities, and those with SEN/ALN;
- Disabled people are particularly affected by social distancing and the changes to our built environment;
- As well as being most at risk of the virus, older people have experienced additional distress due to fears about access to treatment and care, isolation due to shielding, and abuse;
- Migrants are at particular risk of destitution due to being more likely to work in shut down sectors but also their restricted access to benefits and other public funds.

The recovery must be targeted at those who have lost the most, and this opportunity must be used to rectify existing inequalities. As the Secretary General of the United Nations said, Covid-19 has revealed the fractures in the skeleton of societies across the world and exposed the myth that we are all in the same boat "because while we are all floating on the same sea, it's clear that some are in superyachts while others are clinging to drifting debris."¹

Since March the Welsh Government has taken a number of measures to address the specific or unequal effects on certain groups of people. For example, providing an additional £10million of funding to help get rough sleepers into temporary accommodation; providing a sign language interpreter at daily press briefings and making £3 million available to make sure children have access to laptops while schools were closed.

The evidence we have gathered demonstrates that this commitment to equality and human rights must now move beyond the immediate situation and begin to plan for a fairer Wales. Alongside the Black Lives Matter movement too, this period has shone an uncomfortable light on inequalities that already existed in our society.

Many respondents to our inquiry stressed the need for immediate action, rather than the production of more strategies. The Welsh Government has an excellent

¹ [United Nations Secretary General's Nelson Mandela Lecture, 18 July 2020](#)

framework in its new **strategic equality plan and objectives for 2020-24** and its aim in the **recovery plan** for measures to have a ‘high equality impact’.

What is clear is that one size doesn’t fit all. Policies, interventions, funding and legislation have to be targeted and tailored for different needs and experiences. It cannot be assumed that blanket approaches will reach everyone equally, as specific barriers prevent people from equally benefitting, from discrimination to accessibility.

In drawing up policies and actions that address these issues, there must be real and meaningful engagement with those most affected. The value of such engagement has been a theme throughout this work and our work predating the pandemic. But now more than ever, it is even more important, with such far reaching decisions being made quickly, and having such a significant impact on individuals.

The recommendations in this report are practical, short to medium term actions that will contribute to making a post-COVID Wales a fairer country. We have drawn on the excellent, practical recommendations made by Professor Ogbonna and the BAME Advisory Group, and we endorse all of the recommendations in his report.

As well as preparing for the recovery phase, it is important that lessons are learnt in case there is a second wave of infection. We must avoid repeating mistakes. We hope that the evidence we have collected and the recommendations made in this report will also help inform any such decisions.

This report is not comprehensive, and does not intend to describe every unequal impact of the virus and the response, but we will continue to build on the evidence we have collected in the autumn term as the pandemic and our recovery from it continues.

The Welsh Government must assess the impact of its decisions on equality and human rights

1. The Welsh Government is committed to equality and human rights. But it must be able to demonstrate in a transparent way how major decisions about legislation, policy and money are being designed not only to avoid increasing inequality but to increase equality.

Impact assessments

- 2.** At the start of the pandemic, decisions had to be made quickly. This meant that the usual decision making processes of government were necessarily short-circuited.
- 3.** The purpose of assessing decisions from an equality perspective is to ensure that people are not disproportionately affected by decisions, whether directly or inadvertently. The public health restrictions made by the Welsh Government, such as limiting people to exercising once a day, had a big impact on many people, but particularly those with disabilities. These restrictions were subsequently amended to allow some disabled people or people with particular health conditions to leave their homes more than once a day to exercise.
- 4.** In usual circumstances, an issue like this would have been identified through impact assessments and consultation, and the policy would not have to be changed after introduction. As the EHRC noted in their written evidence, “[t]he lack of published Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) breaches [the legal obligations of the public sector equality duties]”.²
- 5.** Reducing inequality must be a priority for Wales’s recovery. As the pandemic moves into a new stage and the implications of major decisions can be considered more fully, the Welsh Government must set an example to the rest of the public sector and ensure that the decisions it makes are fully impact assessed. These assessments, and the decisions made as a result, must be transparent and accessible.
- 6.** We welcome the impact assessments published by the Welsh Government from 29 June relating to the easing of some lockdown restrictions (including the opening of non-essential retail, schools, the removal of the ‘stay local’ rule and allowing extended households). But the impact assessments have not addressed the impact of the previous restrictions and easements that were not changed - for example, the ongoing relaxation of social care and mental health duties (which are addressed in more detail in the next chapter).
- 7.** On 14 May 2020, the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip told us that she is ensuring that “all policies, not just policies relating to my portfolio, but across the Welsh Government, are rigorously scrutinised in terms of equality impacts.” She also noted that the strategic integrated impact assessment tool has been

² [ELGC COV.30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

‘strengthened’, and a ‘revised aide-mémoire’ on the tool “has to be considered against every policy document and ministerial advice”.³

8. We have previously made recommendations in relation to Welsh Government draft budgets (along with the Children, Young People and Education Committee and Finance Committee) about the importance of publishing all impact assessments to demonstrate transparency and accountability.⁴

9. In response, the Welsh Government stated that “while it would be possible [to publish impact assessments] further consideration needs to be given as to whether this would aid accessibility, understanding and transparency”.⁵

10. The Welsh Government’s Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Advisory Group published rapid research on addressing socio-economic inequalities in June 2020. Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna’s recommendations also emphasise the importance of systematic, published equality impact assessments.⁶

11. We understand that the purpose of an impact assessment is to embed considerations about equality into the decision-making process, which may not result in a specific document. Aside from the **impact assessments** on the easing of lockdown restrictions, there has been no indication of how equality issues are being considered when the Welsh Government is making major legislative, policy and financial decisions for the recovery. This means that there can be no assessment of the fairness or comprehensiveness of such decisions. For example, what equality assessment has been made in relation to additional funding provided to specific businesses or sectors?

12. While we welcome that the Welsh Government’s plan for leading Wales out of the pandemic includes an assessment of whether measures will have “a high positive equality impact”,⁷ without information about how equality is being considered during decision-making, and what data is being used to measure

³ ELGC Committee, 14 May 2020, RoP [6-8]

⁴ [Children, Young People and Education Committee; Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee; and Finance Committee, Assessing the impact of budget decisions, March 2019.](#)

⁵ [Welsh Government, Response to Assessing the impact on budget decisions, March 2019.](#)

⁶ [First Minister’s BAME Covid-19 Advisory Group Report Of The Socioeconomic Subgroup Chair: Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna, June 2020](#)

⁷ [Welsh Government, Leading Wales out of the coronavirus pandemic: a framework for recovery, 24 April 2020](#)

actual outcomes, it will be very difficult to demonstrate what a “high equality impact” means in practice.

13. We note in their latest correspondence to us, the Welsh Government have stated that “further impact assessments relating to coronavirus legislation and guidance will be published on the government website in due course.”⁸ While this is welcomed, we would like to see further clarity that impact assessments will be published for all major policy and legislative decisions.

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should ensure that each major policy or legislative decision is accompanied by an effective equality impact assessment, and an analysis of the impact on human rights. Both should be published online and copies sent to this Committee for review.

Citizen engagement

14. Closely linked to robust equality impact assessment processes is meaningful citizen engagement. Our own work has been enriched by engagement with those with lived experience. For example, discussions with people with lived experience led us to consider the support for rough sleepers with substance misuse and mental health disorders.⁹

15. Both the EHRC and Professor Ogbonna’s report emphasised the importance of meaningful citizen engagement in planning for recovery. The EHRC said the impact of full and proper engagement and inclusion with people most affected by new laws “cannot be underestimated.”¹⁰ And the Professor Ogbonna highlighted the importance of improving BAME representation in decision making to “effect better socio-economic outcomes.”¹¹

16. Such engagement leads to better policy making, and reduces the risks of unintended consequences or having to reverse policy decisions. As we have already stated, we are very mindful that at the start of the pandemic decisions had to be made quickly and in unprecedented circumstances. As we move into a recovery period, it is important the Welsh Government and other public bodies do

⁸ [Letter from Minister for Health and Social Services, and Deputy Minister and Chief Whip to ELGC Committee Chair, 3 August 2020](#)

⁹ [ELGC Committee, Rough Sleeping follow up: Mental health and substance misuse services, December 2019](#)

¹⁰ [ELGC COV 30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

¹¹ [First Minister’s BAME Covid-19 Advisory Group Report Of The Socioeconomic Subgroup Chair: Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna, June 2020](#)

meaningful engagement so decisions are informed by lived experience to make sure that existing equalities are not entrenched, but addressed.

17. One of the positive elements of the response so far has been the Welsh Government's willingness to engage with stakeholders and partners. There have been regular meetings between organisations, officials and Ministers, with examples of policy being directly informed by these discussions.¹² We very much welcome this, and hope this sort of partnership working can be built upon in the future. But while engaging with these groups and professionals working in the relevant field or sector is important, it must also be complimented by meaningful and purposeful citizen engagement.

18. We believe implementing recommendation 1 would help evidence and provide assurances to us, that meaningful engagement is happening. Impact assessments are a "key tool" to show engagement has informed decisions, and has not merely ticked a box.¹³

Data

19. During the pandemic it has become clear that the data available is not of sufficient quality in terms of public sector employment, or health outcomes. This was noted by Professor Ogbonna's research in relation to ethnicity:

"Data on ethnicity across all health and social care services and many other public services is poor. The NHS Electronic Staff Record (ESR) holds ethnicity data on 85% of employees, but only 63% of medical and dental staff. Many healthcare records also do not record the ethnicity of the patient. This deficit interferes with the accuracy of most analyses relating to health outcomes or to NHS staff by ethnic group.

For other analyses of ethnicity data, comparisons with 2011 census data are widely made but this is known to be out of date with demographic changes since 2011. Initial reporting of Covid-19 deaths in confirmed hospitalised cases through the Welsh Clinical Portal (WCP) surveillance e-Form in Wales did not record ethnicity."¹⁴

¹² ELGC Committee, 30 June 2020, RoP [52]

¹³ [ELGC COV 30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

¹⁴ [First Minister's BAME Covid-19 Advisory Group Report Of The Socioeconomic Subgroup Chair: Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna](#), June 2020

20. We welcome the publication of the BAME Advisory Group’s **workplace risk assessment for health and social care staff**, but without knowing key equality data about high exposure workforces, such measures may be undermined.

21. Respondents to our inquiry also noted the lack of equality data in relation to disability. For instance, the National Autistic Society highlighted that while **evidence** from England shows a 134% increase in the number of deaths of those with a learning disability and/or autism in older people, there is no comparable data for Wales.¹⁵

22. On 14 May, the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip acknowledged the gaps in data collection in relation to health, saying that “mortality data often—it informs decisions, contributing to a body of evidence, but we don’t necessarily have the full data that we need.”¹⁶ We welcome her letter to the Home Secretary urging the UK Government to include ethnicity on death certificates, and her request to the Office for National Statistics (“ONS”) to extend the data they publish on deaths by occupation to include key data for Wales.¹⁷

23. In her letter to us on 30 June, the Deputy Minister stated that “[s]ince 6 May, Public Health Wales (PHW) has included ethnicity and key worker status as a field in their Covid-19 rapid mortality surveillance enhanced reporting system”, although “[a]round 30% of the deaths notified via the PHW surveillance system did not have ethnicity recorded”.¹⁸ However this data does not appear to be available on the **PHW Rapid COVID-19 Surveillance dashboard**.

24. The public sector equality duties place obligations on the majority of Welsh public bodies to do things like produce equality objectives, undertake impact assessments, engage with affected groups and collect equality data (among others).

25. In 2018 we recommended that the Welsh Government review the effectiveness of the public sector equality duties, particularly in relation to the collection and publication of equality employment data.¹⁹

¹⁵ [ELGC COV.25 National Autistic Society Cymru - written evidence](#)

¹⁶ ELGC Committee, 14 May 2020, RoP [24]

¹⁷ [Letter from Deputy Minister and Chief Whip to Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, 12 May 2020](#)

¹⁸ [Letter from Deputy Minister and Chief Whip to ELGC Committee Chair, 30 June 2020](#)

¹⁹ [ELGC Committee, Work it out: Parenting and Employment in Wales, July 2018](#)

26. In response to our recommendations about the public sector equality duties in 2018, the Welsh Government stated that it was:

“actively considering the recommendations, several of which relate directly or indirectly to the need to review the Welsh Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) regulations and reporting arrangements in Wales.

The Leader of the House and Chief Whip, Julie James AM, in her capacity as Minister with responsibility for equalities has oversight of the review [...] Officials will continue working closely with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the regulator of the PSED, to consider the outcomes and monitoring arrangements of the review.

This will ensure that future reporting arrangements are robust and ensure that the way listed bodies publish their data is transparent, user-friendly and accessible. This will be in line with our desire to promote the principles of open data across Welsh public bodies.”²⁰

27. Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna’s report also recommends the immediate improvement in the quality of recording ethnicity data in the NHS and across health and social care services. He also recommends improvements to data gathering and linkage on different types of mortality, disaggregated by different protected characteristics, including ethnicity.²¹

28. The lack of quality equality data, particularly in the NHS, is particularly concerning. Without being able to identify people at higher risk of coronavirus due to their ethnicity, disability or health conditions, workplace risk assessments are likely to be less effective. Similarly, data on coronavirus cases and deaths is critical for decision-making and planning.

29. As noted by a number of respondents, the public sector equality duties lack enforcement powers, which will be all the more important in a time when inequalities are stark and widening.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should take immediate action to improve the quality of recording of ethnicity and disability employment data across health and social care services.

²⁰ Welsh Government, *Response to Work it Out: Parenting and Employment in Wales, September 2018*

²¹ First Minister’s BAME Covid-19 Advisory Group Report Of The Socioeconomic Subgroup Chair: Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna, June 2020

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should improve data gathering and publication on coronavirus cases and health outcomes disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, disability and key worker status. This should include where necessary, identifying alternative methods of collection and new data sources.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should accelerate the review of the Welsh public sector equality duties, focusing on strengthening enforcement and the collection of employment data.

Human rights

30. During the emergency phase of the pandemic, the Welsh Government had to make many decisions that restricted human rights to liberty, family life and a fair hearing, among others, to protect the right to life. The measures taken to protect the UK population from coronavirus were called “the most wide ranging restrictions on civil liberties for at least 75 years”.²²

31. Under international human rights law, public health is as an acceptable reason to curtail these rights, as long as it is necessary and proportionate. The Welsh **public health regulations** require Welsh Ministers to keep the proportionality of, and the need for, the restrictions and requirements under review every 21 days. However it is not clear from the human rights analyses in the impact assessments how proportionality is being assessed in relation to the ongoing measures such as social care and mental health easements.

32. As decisions are beginning to be made in relation to the recovery phase, it is essential that human rights are a core consideration. The UN and **WHO** are clear that human rights are key to the coronavirus response and the recovery, as they “focus our attention on who is suffering most, why, and what can be done about it.”²³

33. The Welsh Government’s plan for leading Wales out of the pandemic sets out principles that will be used to examine ways to ease the current restrictions. The final of these seven principles is an assessment of whether the measure will have “a high positive equality impact”, but doesn’t mention human rights.²⁴ The equivalent plan for Scotland commits to “protect those most at risk and

²² [Joint Committee on Human Rights, Chair’s Briefing Paper, The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(England\) Regulations 2020 & The Lockdown Restrictions, 8 April 2020](#)

²³ [United Nations, COVID-19 and Human Rights, April 2020](#)

²⁴ [Welsh Government, Leading Wales out of the coronavirus pandemic: a framework for recovery, April 2020](#)

protect human rights”. The Scottish four-part assessment framework includes consideration of both human rights implications and equality impacts.²⁵

34. We know that the Welsh Government has committed to human rights instruments through domestic legislation, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is looking to incorporate more. The Deputy Minister noted that “this very key question about human rights underpinning the way we move out of the COVID-19 pandemic was at the forefront”.²⁶

35. While we welcome the Welsh Government’s **assessments** of the human rights implications of the easing of lockdown restrictions published from 29 June onwards, we reiterate our earlier concern that the assessment does not address the existing measures that remained unchanged. For example, the continuation of the relaxation of duties on the Mental Health Tribunal for Wales have a significant impact on the right to a fair hearing, but the Welsh Government has not published an assessment of why this measure is still a proportionate restriction. This issue is explored in further detail in the next chapter.

36. As the public health emergency phase becomes less acute, the Welsh Government must articulate why some of the continuing restrictions are still proportionate.

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should articulate the necessity and proportionality of all existing restrictions in its human rights analysis published alongside each 21 day review.

Older people

37. On 21 May the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales called for the Welsh Government to be investigated by the EHRC over concerns that older people’s human rights may have been breached, both in care homes and more widely.²⁷ Subsequently, on 21 July the Commissioner and the EHRC issued a statement saying they are working together to “consider whether the Welsh Government and public bodies in Wales have met their responsibilities to uphold the human rights of older people.”²⁸ We welcome this work and await the findings.

²⁵ [Scottish Government, Coronavirus: framework for decision making, April 2020](#)

²⁶ ELGC Committee, 14 May 2020, RoP [75]

²⁷ [Older People’s Commissioner for Wales statement, 21 May 2020](#)

²⁸ [Joint Statement by the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales and Equality and Human Rights Commission in Wales, 21 July 2020](#)

38. At the start of the pandemic there were concerning incidents where older and vulnerable people felt pressured into signing Do Not Attempt Resuscitation / CPR notices. This led to people feeling that their lives “weren’t worth anything.”²⁹ This is a sign of how decisions (including those explored in the next section) can cause people to feel that their lives are worth less than others in society. We are pleased that mitigations have now been put in place so that such blanket communications will not be issued, but it is an example of how lessons from the early days of the pandemic must be learnt, so such distressing events do not happen again.

The emergency relaxations of social care and mental health duties must be reversed

39. The UK Coronavirus Act 2020 gave the Welsh Government powers to relax certain duties (among other things), which means that:

- local authorities do not currently have to carry out needs assessments for adults and adult carers, and no longer have a duty to meet adults’ eligible care and support needs, nor adult carers needs for support;
- local authorities also currently do not have a duty to carry out a financial impact assessment, in which usually a means test would be applied to determine how much they had to contribute to their care; and
- the Mental Health Tribunal for Wales is not currently required to have at least three members to constitute a tribunal, and in specified circumstances cases may be determined without a hearing where this may be impractical, or where it would be detrimental to the health of the patient.

40. Many respondents to our inquiry, including the Older People’s Commissioner³⁰ and EHRC³¹ expressed serious concern that these ‘easements’ were still ‘switched on’ in Wales. The aim of the easements was to reduce the pressure on NHS and local authority resources, but it is unclear as to why they are still necessary.

²⁹ ELGC Committee, 16 June 2020, RoP [120]

³⁰ ELGC Committee, 16 June 2020, RoP [196]

³¹ ELGC Committee, 16 June 2020, RoP [9]

41. The WLGA stated that “if we get past the winter without a second wave” this element of the legislation could be repealed.³² They also said they were not “aware of any local authority that actually needed to use those powers”, partly because authorities had worked closely with the voluntary sector and community groups to “develop workarounds”.³³

42. The EHRC told us that ‘very few’ local authorities have formal stops to services, but “anecdotal evidence suggests that people are getting a reduced or diminished service”.³⁴ The Welsh Government told the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee that they understand 460 care packages, out of 23,000 had been reduced or withdrawn.³⁵

43. The easements in social care disproportionately affect older and disabled people. The fact they are still in place sends a powerful message to those groups of people that the fulfilment of their care needs is seen as non-essential. We also note that similar requirements have not been relaxed for children and young people’s support. Alongside the distressing issues around access to treatment, the DNACPR notices, and the experiences of shielding during this period, older and disabled people feel that their lives and needs are ‘at the bottom of the list’ in terms of public services.

44. In terms of the Mental Health Review Tribunal, the EHRC’s legal advice highlights that the Welsh practice directions go further than the English equivalent. While both English and Welsh versions allow for proceedings to take place without a hearing in some circumstances, the Welsh tribunal can do so without the consent of the parties, unlike in England.

45. The EHRC notes that:

“These provisions may have been necessary and proportionate during the immediate response to the Coronavirus pandemic, however they potentially breach the Human Rights Act 1998 and Articles 5 and 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

We are particularly concerned that some mental health lawyers have told Mind that hospitals are not introducing processes quickly enough to facilitate electronic disclosure of notes or even telephone contact

³² ELGC Committee, 16 July 2020, RoP [48]

³³ ELGC Committee, 16 July 2020, RoP [67]

³⁴ [ELGC COV 30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

³⁵ Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, 16 July 2020, RoP [165]

with lawyers. Access to legal representation is an essential element of Article 6 for individuals detained under the Mental Health Act 1983.”³⁶

46. These hearings are usually held in hospitals which already have infection control protocols. It is possible for arrangements to be made for face to face hearings which allow for 2 metre social distancing and/or for hybrid hearings where the Panel have a video link to the individual, their legal representative and nurse who are at the hospital. This possibility is likely to show that interference with human rights is neither proportionate nor necessary.”³⁷

47. The EHRC also note that the changes to the Tribunal put disabled people at a greater disadvantage. Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales (EYST) note that BAME groups are also likely to be disproportionately affected.³⁸ We are aware of reports of people being discharged from mental health units in Wales and told to seek re-referral after the pandemic.³⁹ Alongside the additional relaxations on mental health duties, people could be detained unnecessarily or released without the right support, which has implications for people’s human right to liberty, and even their right to protection of their life.

48. During the passage of the Coronavirus Act, the EHRC recommended that the relaxation of safeguards on detention must only extend as far as absolutely required, both in time and scope, and should be regularly monitored and adjusted.⁴⁰

49. It is clear that these easements have a disproportionate and unnecessarily negative effect on equality and human rights in Wales, and should be reversed. We do not believe the easements should be kept in place in case of a second spike over the winter, and believe the Welsh Government should ensure that local authorities have all the necessary support and resources to ensure that no care packages are removed or reduced.

³⁶ [ELGC COV 30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

³⁷ [ELGC COV 30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

³⁸ [ELGC COV 17.EYST written evidence](#)

³⁹ [BBC News. Mental health patients discharged ‘against guidance’. 20 May 2020.](#)

⁴⁰ [EHRC. Letter to Prime Minister on human rights and equality considerations in responding to the coronavirus pandemic. 19 March 2020](#)

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should:

- immediately 'switch off' the measures in the Coronavirus Act 2020 which relax social care and mental health duties; and
- publish data on the number of people affected by these measures, disaggregated by protected characteristics.

Public services should be targeted at those who need them the most

50. Nearly a quarter of people in Wales live in poverty. People from certain ethnic groups, children, disabled people, carers, those living in private rented housing or working in certain sectors are all **more likely to experience poverty**. **44% of single parents** live in poverty in Wales.

51. ONS data has shown that people in the most deprived areas of Wales are twice as likely to die with coronavirus than those in the least deprived areas. Lower paid workers are also more likely to work in sectors that are shut down, and less likely to be able to work at home.

52. People living in poorer areas are also more likely to have health conditions that put them at higher risk of complications from coronavirus, such as lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease.

53. Some of these can be influenced through behavioural changes (like smoking), but others are linked to pollution. The Royal College of Physicians highlighted that both indoor and outdoor air quality alongside overcrowding has an impact on the spread of the virus.⁴¹ These are factors where poverty plays a part.

54. The prevalence and impact of poverty in Wales has been an area of significant concern both for us, and our predecessor Committee. We have repeatedly made the case for the need for a cross cutting, comprehensive tackling poverty strategy with clear targets, deliverables and milestones which progress can be assessed against. The Welsh Government has rejected this recommendation on two separate occasions.⁴²

55. The devastating impact of the pandemic on the most deprived communities in Wales makes the case even stronger for such a strategy, which is based on an

⁴¹ [ELGC COV 28.Royal College of Physicians written evidence](#)

⁴² [Welsh Government response to Communities First, lessons learnt report, October 2017](#); and [Welsh Government to response Making the economy work for people on low incomes, July 2018](#)

outcomes-based delivery model, enabling communities and citizens to build on individual and community assets to help tackle inequality. Decisions should be based on real and meaningful citizen engagement.

56. Accompanying such a strategy must be clear accountability and leadership. Without this there will continue to be drift in this area, with no clear leadership to drive forward the necessary changes. The inequalities that have been laid starkly bare by this pandemic have to be addressed, and such a strategy is an essential tool.

57. We would also echo the EHRC's views that in moving to recovery, the Welsh Government needs to support any new approaches to tackling inequality with "robust cross government accountability structure and resources for delivery..."⁴³ A strategy alone though is not enough; it must be supported with sufficient resources, and be effective as a tool in holding the Welsh Government and delivery partners to account.

58. The EHRC recommended that the commencement of the socio-economic duty should be "part of a broad strategic approach" to tackling poverty.⁴⁴ The Deputy Minister told us that, although the commencement of the socio-economic duty has been delayed, it was a 'top priority' for the recovery process.⁴⁵ On 16 July 2020, the Deputy Minister committed to commencing the duty on 31 March 2021,⁴⁶ which we welcome. We believe the commencement of the duty will play an important role in addressing inequalities in the future. However, until it has been commenced we call on the Welsh Government to adhere to the spirit of the socio-economic duty. We would hope that the Welsh Government supports and encourages other public bodies to do the same, and starts to develop arrangements to monitor this ahead of the commencement of the duty.

59. The provision of free school meals is an important tool to mitigate some of the most immediate impacts of poverty. We welcome the Welsh Government's clear commitment to continue to support the provision of free school meals throughout the summer holidays. However, we are aware of concerns about the different methods of delivering this policy across Wales.⁴⁷ The Welsh Government

⁴³ [ELGC COV 30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

⁴⁴ [ELGC COV 30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

⁴⁵ ELGC Committee, 14 May 2020, RoP [40]

⁴⁶ Welsh Government, [Written Statement: A more Equal Wales - commencing the socio-economic duty, 16 July 2020](#)

⁴⁷ [ELGC COV 09 Bevan Foundation](#); and ELGC Committee, 16 June 2020 RoP [219]

has a role in monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of different methods. This will be particularly important if there are further local or national lockdowns in the coming months.

60. Given the devastating and life-threatening impact that the virus has had on the poorest in our society, now is the time to dramatically re-think how they are supported by public services. While refocusing public services efforts will take time, we recommend some immediate actions, which we believe will help start this work in the short term.

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should publish a cross-government poverty reduction strategy with targets and performance indicators.

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government should adhere to the spirit and intent of the socio-economic duty in all of its decision-making until it is commenced in March 2021, and develop interim arrangements to monitor how it is meeting the spirit of the duty ahead of full commencement.

Recommendation 9. The Welsh Government should monitor and review how local authorities are providing free school meals over the summer holidays.

People need to know their rights and entitlements

61. The pandemic is having, and will continue to have, a severe impact on the Welsh economy, with workers losing income through furloughing, reductions in hours or pay, job losses and many businesses in shut down sectors losing significant amounts of income. These impacts will be felt differently by different groups of people, different industries and different geographic locations.

Employment

62. Many sectors have been completely shut down, while others have been critical to the response. Some groups of people are much more likely to work in those sectors.

63. Wales Fiscal Analysis at Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre estimates that there are 228,000 people employed in Wales's 'shutdown sectors', which is around 16% of the working age population. The research found that:

- almost half of the lowest-earning decile of Welsh workers worked in shut down sectors of the economy. This made them ten times more likely to have been affected by the shutdown compared with the highest-earning decile;

- shutdown measures have hit the youngest workers the hardest, with employees under the age of 25 almost three times as likely to have been working in shutdown sectors;
- the impact also varied by gender, with 18% of female employees working in shutdown sectors compared to 14% of male employees, and
- workers of Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Pakistani ethnicity were significantly more likely to be working in shutdown sectors in Wales.⁴⁸

64. The Welsh Government has also published data on employment and protected characteristics, which found that:

- Workers of Bangladeshi, and Black Caribbean/African/British ethnicity were most likely to be working in critical sectors in Wales.
- Women and workers from ethnic minorities are most likely to be employed in occupations with the highest potential exposure to coronavirus.
- Disabled workers were slightly more likely to be employed in a 'shut down' sector than those without a disability.
- Men are more likely to be self-employed.⁴⁹

65. As the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme starts to require employer contributions from August, and finishes in October, it appears likely that many 'furloughed' workers will be made redundant. It is critical that these people can access support and advice on their rights and entitlements in relation to employment and benefits.

66. Thousands of people will be accessing the benefits system for the first time during this period, and may be seeking advice on help with redundancy rights, help with paying bills and other costs.

67. In the period between 16 March and 6 May, the Citizens Advice website **had a total of 13 million page views**, an increase of 29% on last year. The pages most visited included topics such as benefits, sick pay, furlough and workers' rights.

⁴⁸ Cardiff University, Wales Fiscal Analysis [COVID-19 and the Welsh economy: shutdown sectors and key workers 25 June 2020](#)

⁴⁹ Welsh Government, [Coronavirus and employment: analysis of protected characteristics](#)

Citizens Advice Cymru told us that they have helped more than 20,000 people in Wales since the lockdown began.⁵⁰

68. Advice services are a critical preventative way of ensuring that people can access all the benefits, discounts and schemes to which they are entitled. With many people at risk of redundancy, and with some groups more likely to be at risk than others, it's also essential that workers know their employment rights.

Benefits take up and employment rights

69. In our 2019 report on benefits delivery in Wales, we recommended that the Welsh Government takes action to improve take up of all benefits in Wales, both devolved and non-devolved. The pandemic and its impact on people's incomes has made such a campaign even more important. At the very least this should take the form of a wide ranging and extensive public awareness campaign.

70. We also recommended that there should be a statutory duty placed on local authorities to provide benefits advice which aims to ensure people are claiming all benefits to which they are entitled.⁵¹

71. In May 2020, the Welsh Government responded to this recommendation, stating:

“The coronavirus crisis has demonstrated clearly the importance of the welfare benefit safety net. It is important that we continue working in partnership with the DWP in order to deliver the appropriate advice and support to communities in Wales to ensure that no-one falls through any gaps.

Many more people are likely to be in need of help not during the current crisis but also beyond. Partnership work is critical in raising awareness of the financial support available from the welfare benefit system. The Working Group continue to meet during this time maintaining to convey the message on the take-up of Pension Credits and other benefits to help those most in need.

⁵⁰ [ELGC COV 20 Citizens Advice Cymru written evidence](#)

⁵¹ ELGC Committee [Benefits in Wales: options for better delivery](#), October 2019

We are now looking to broaden out the work of this group to look at all welfare benefit take-up, both UK Government and Welsh Government to maximise the financial support on offer to vulnerable groups.”⁵²

72. In March 2019, the Fair Work Commission also recommended that the Welsh Government “assist workers to enforce their rights by facilitating the availability of, and access to, advice and support, for example through funding support for advisory and support services.”⁵³

73. Knowing where to go to find out employment rights is even more important when people’s lives are at risk. For example, while employers have legal duties to make workplaces safe for pregnant women, it has been **reported** that many employers are still requiring pregnant women to work in front line roles, even in the NHS. A **study** of 427 pregnant women and their babies during the pandemic found that 55% of pregnant women admitted to hospital with coronavirus were from a BAME background.

74. Advice services are also key to helping people when they have been discriminated against, in work, by public authorities, or by businesses. Professor Ogbonna recommended the establishment of a “BAME support helpline and a confidentiality framework in workplace guidance, so employees can challenge safely and raise concerns” which “would allow workers to report PPE and other concerns with confidence and could provide a model for use in wider employment contexts”.⁵⁴ An existing advice service in Wales could provide such a helpline.

75. We heard evidence of dangerous, unfair and discriminatory employment practices. For example, EYST told us about widespread concerns that EU nationals are “being demanded to work in unsafe conditions by their employers”⁵⁵ and that they know of “many, many” examples of people making complaints about racism at work which have either “gone nowhere” or “ended up backfiring on the individual...”⁵⁶ As jobs become more scarce, it is essential that people know their rights and how to challenge employers without risk of losing their jobs. The

⁵² [Welsh Government response to ‘Benefits in Wales: options for better delivery](#), May 2020

⁵³ [Fair Work Wales, Report of the Fair Work Commission, March 2019](#)

⁵⁴ [First Minister’s BAME Covid-19 Advisory Group Report Of The Socioeconomic Subgroup Chair: Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna](#), June 2020

⁵⁵ [ELGC COV.17 EYST written evidence](#)

⁵⁶ ELGC Committee, 16 June 2020, RoP [262]

evidence we've heard also highlights the importance of prioritising fair work in the Welsh Government's work on economic recovery,

76. We note that, in its response to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee's report, *The Impact of COVID-19: Summary of initial findings*, the Welsh Government committed to "a values led recovery where the guiding principles are social justice, fair work and environmental sustainability".⁵⁷

77. We welcome the Welsh Government's £24 million Third Sector Response Fund, and the information from the Deputy Minister that they have "support[ed] [Citizens Advice] with more IT support for them in order to be able to deliver [...] advice".⁵⁸

78. But the Welsh Government needs to go much further to prevent people falling into crisis as we move into the next phase of the pandemic. It is not enough to "[look] to broaden out the work of this group to look at all welfare benefit takeup",⁵⁹ bold and immediate action is needed to ensure people's incomes are maximised at a critical time, and that people know their rights at work and in redundancy situations.

Recommendation 10. The Welsh Government should set out what additional fair work measures it is considering implementing to secure a "values-led recovery where the guiding principles are social justice, fair work and environmental sustainability".

Recommendation 11. The Welsh Government should accelerate the implementation of the Fair Work Commission's recommendations that do not require legislation, including improving knowledge of employment rights and ensuring public money is only provided to organisations meeting the fair work standard.

Recommendation 12. The Welsh Government should significantly increase funding to advice services that have expertise in employment, benefits and discrimination, including the creation of a helpline specifically for BAME and disabled employees to report concerns about safety and discrimination.

⁵⁷ [Welsh Government response to the Economy, Infrastructure & Skills Committee's report: The Impact of COVID-19: Summary of initial findings](#)

⁵⁸ ELGC Committee, 14 May 2020, RoP [84]

⁵⁹ [Welsh Government response to 'Benefits in Wales: options for better delivery](#), May 2020

Recommendation 13. The Welsh Government should undertake a largescale, comprehensive benefits take up campaign to ensure people are accessing the benefits they are entitled to both throughout the current pandemic, and more generally when we move out of the current crisis.

Devolved benefits and schemes

79. Benefits that are in control of the Welsh Government need to be more accessible than ever.

Council tax reduction and enforcement

80. Citizens Advice note that council tax is the biggest debt problem on which they provide support to people.⁶⁰ Their research shows that many people are unaware of Council Tax Reduction or discount schemes, and that people who fall behind in their payments are usually unable, rather than unwilling, to pay.

81. We know some local authorities temporarily paused enforcement action for council tax collection during the pandemic (for example, Gwynedd Council paused action between April and June). The WLGA told us that local authorities are trying to be as sympathetic as possible; and that some are taking a “softer approach” to reminder notices. They said it is about taking a flexible approach because what “we don’t want to do is to be chasing people for funds they quite simply haven’t got. Because if we put more people on the brink,.....it could actually cost us more funding.”⁶¹

82. We acknowledge the acute balancing act faced by local authorities in relation to council tax debt. However in the challenging economic climate, and with council tax being a significant debt issue, it is important that steps are taken to minimise undue hardship on households. The Welsh Government could prevent escalating debt problems for the poorest by requiring local authorities to pause council tax enforcement action for 6-12 months when the furlough scheme is wound down and people’s incomes are at the greatest risk.

Recommendation 14. The Welsh Government should pause council tax debt enforcement action for 6-12 months. This should come into force at the earliest opportunity.

⁶⁰ [ELGC COV 20 Citizens Advice Cymru written evidence](#)

⁶¹ ELGC Committee, 16 July 2020, RoP [129-131]

Discretionary Assistance Fund

83. The Welsh Government took the very welcome step of doubling its Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to £22 million to help people in extreme financial hardship, including those waiting for their first Universal Credit payment. Applications have been treated with greater discretion and flexibility, and statistics show that demand has increased significantly, with nearly 40,000 grants distributed between 18 March and 9 July, amounting to £2.3 million.⁶²

84. We note that between 1 May to 31 March 2021, coronavirus applications to the DAF are to be “treated with greater flexibility and discretion”.⁶³ We welcome this. The Welsh Government may wish to consider whether additional funds are needed to support increased applications to the DAF.

85. Awareness of the Fund is still low, and as Oxfam Cymru noted:

“if I was in financial crisis today, I would not put the phrase 'discretionary assistance fund' into Google. There is a real issue with the accessibility of the fund—not enough people know about it, not enough people are able to apply for it”.⁶⁴

86. Issues with awareness of the DAF are long term. Our predecessor Committee highlighted in 2015 that awareness of the Fund was low,⁶⁵ as did a subsequent Welsh Government evaluation of its effectiveness.⁶⁶ Issues around public awareness were also raised by our 2019 report into benefits delivery.⁶⁷

87. Evidence from EYST highlights that problems with awareness of the DAF are more acute for groups that may need it the most during this period, for example people who do not speak English or Welsh as a first language or have problems navigating the benefits system because of a disability.⁶⁸

⁶² Welsh Government, [Summary data about coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and the response to it: 13 July 2020](#)

⁶³ [Welsh Government website: Discretionary Assistance Fund \(DAF\)](#) [accessed 28 July 2020]

⁶⁴ ELGC Committee 30 June 2020, RoP [169]

⁶⁵ Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee, [Poverty and inequality in Wales](#) June 2015

⁶⁶ Welsh Government [Evaluation of the Discretionary Assistance Fund](#), (2015)

⁶⁷ ELGC Committee [Benefits in Wales: options for better delivery](#) October 2019

⁶⁸ [ELGC COV.17 EYST written evidence](#)

88. After five years, now is the time to re-think the DAF: rebrand it, make the eligibility criteria clearer and the application easier, and advertise it to the people who are most likely to need it.

Recommendation 15. The Welsh Government should rebrand the Discretionary Assistance Fund and run an awareness campaign (separate to the take up campaign), on TV and radio, social media, and in print.

Discretionary housing payments

89. As the temporary suspension of evictions ends, along with the furlough and other support schemes, renters in Wales (who are more likely to be younger) are likely to face difficulties paying rent. Discretionary housing payments (DHPs) provide short term support to people receiving Housing Benefit or Universal Credit and are struggling with housing costs.

90. The general rules are set by the UK Government, but local authorities administer them with significant direction. Funding is provided by the UK Government, but local authorities can ‘top up’ payments in their areas to a certain amount.

91. In our 2019 benefits report we recommended that the Welsh Government should seek full devolution of DHPs, but this was rejected.⁶⁹

92. Given that home owners have received assistance in the pandemic through mortgage holidays, it is unfair that renters have not had additional help too, given that they are more likely to be on lower incomes. There is a strong case for the Welsh Government to top up local authorities’ DHP allocations, or provide a central pot for local authorities to use, to help people on the lowest incomes pay their rent and potentially avoid problem debt, or even homelessness.

Recommendation 16. The Welsh Government should ensure that local authorities have sufficient funds to make DHP payments to anyone who is eligible to help prevent evictions.

Accessibility

93. Benefits such as council tax reduction, free school meals, the DAF and DHPs are crucial tools to help prevent people falling into extreme poverty, over which the Welsh Government has some or total control. A continuing theme in the

⁶⁹ [Welsh Government response to ‘Benefits in Wales: options for better delivery’](#), May 2020

evidence provided to us in our 2019 benefits report and this inquiry is the low level of awareness of these benefits and difficulty accessing them.

94. The Welsh Government should use this opportunity to explore mechanisms for allowing automatic entitlement from one benefit to another. This could be as simple as issuing a letter to people in receipt of Universal Credit to provide information about council tax reduction and other discretionary benefits. Or it could be more sophisticated by, for example, linking DWP Universal Credit systems with local authorities to ensure that council tax reduction is automatically provided without the need for another application.

Recommendation 17. The Welsh Government should explore options for allowing automatic entitlement to devolved benefits such as council tax reduction.

Caring for carers

95. Carers, both paid and unpaid, have been essential to everyone during the pandemic. Health workers, social carers, parents and unpaid carers of partners, relatives and friends have taken on additional responsibilities to help Wales respond to the pandemic.

Health and social care workforce

96. In 2017, nearly three quarters of the NHS workforce in Wales were women,⁷⁰ and 80% of domiciliary care workers in Wales were women, half of whom were over the age of 50.⁷¹

97. Those of Black, Indian, and Bangladeshi ethnicity in Wales are significantly more likely to be key workers, with BAME workers twice as likely to be employed in the health and social care sectors than those of white British ethnicity.⁷² Professor Ogbonna's research notes that over a third of medical and dental staff in Wales are from BAME groups.⁷³

⁷⁰ EHRC, [Who runs Wales? 2017](#)

⁷¹ Chwarae Teg and Oxfam Cymru, [Decent Work for Women in Wales: A Sectoral Study](#), 2017

⁷² Wales Fiscal Analysis (2020), [COVID-19 and the Welsh economy: shutdown sectors and key workers](#)

⁷³ [First Minister's BAME Covid-19 Advisory Group Report Of The Socioeconomic Subgroup Chair: Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna](#), June 2020

98. The BAME Advisory Group’s risk assessment tool is welcomed, and as Professor Ogbonna’s report notes, its success depends on wide dissemination beyond just health and social care, alongside commitments to ensuring that people will not experience losses in income for being redeployed.

99. In January 2020, the Welsh Government told us that a fair work forum for social care would be established to address “recruitment and retention issues through a social partnership approach”.⁷⁴ This will be an important forum for establishing practical ways of improving pay and conditions in the sector, and the Welsh Government should commit to completing this work by the end of the year.

100. We welcome the Welsh Government’s **£500 bonus for the social care workforce**, but nearly two months after the announcement, it has still not been paid due to negotiations with the UK Government about taxation – this must be immediately resolved. In keeping with the spirit of the payment, and the public gratitude for this work, the UK Government should waive taxation on this payment. The bonus scheme must also be followed by a long term prioritisation and investment in the sector.

Recommendation 18. The Welsh Government should undertake a rapid review of the effectiveness of the BAME Advisory Group’s risk assessment tool and ensure it is rolled out to all sectors, but targeted at those most at risk.

Recommendation 19. The Welsh Government should accelerate the fair work forum for social care with a clear view to improving pay and working conditions in the sector. Quick wins should be identified, such as paying domiciliary care workers for all time worked, including travel time, improving opportunities for formal training and ensuring care home workers and domiciliary care workers are treated equally.

Recommendation 20. The Welsh Government should make the case to the UK Government to waive taxation on the £500 bonus for social care workers.

Childcare

101. The closure of schools and childcare, alongside the need to care for older relatives who are shielding is likely to have had a disproportionate impact on women. Single parents, of whom 90% are women, are most likely to have been affected and 44% of single parents were already living in poverty before the

⁷⁴ ELGC Committee, 9 January 2020, RoP [78]

pandemic. **Research** by Carers Wales that 77% of unpaid carers are having to spend more money during the outbreak.

102. The Office for National Statistics has found that parents were nearly twice as likely to be furloughed as those without children,⁷⁵ It also found that during the initial weeks of lockdown women with children under 18 were carrying out more than 3 hours of childcare per day compared to 2 hours undertaken by men, and that the gap was largest in households with children under five.⁷⁶ Women also spent more time on unpaid work than men, and men spent more time on paid work than women.⁷⁷

103. Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) research also shows that mothers are one-and-a-half times more likely than fathers to have quit or lost their job, since the start of the lockdown.⁷⁸

104. The Wales Governance Centre research found that key workers, 68% of whom are women, face significant childcare challenges – half have school-aged children, while they were also more likely to have younger children below the age of 4 than non-key workers.⁷⁹

105. Chwarae Teg recommend that “for those with caring responsibilities in the workforce, employers should be flexible on working with individual employees to find a balance that allows them to work around their caring responsibilities at home; this may mean facilitating working outside of traditional hours and patterns.” However they caution that this should go alongside the incentivisation of shared caring responsibilities.⁸⁰

106. In 2018 we made a range of recommendations to increase gender equality in the workplace, including a commitment to advertise all public sector jobs as ‘flexible by default’, improving advice services for employment rights, and

⁷⁵ Office for National Statistics, [Personal and economic well-being in Great Britain: June 2020](#)

⁷⁶ Office for National Statistics, [Parenting in lockdown: Coronavirus and the effects on work-life balance](#)

⁷⁷ Office for National Statistics, [Parenting in lockdown: Coronavirus and the effects on work-life balance](#)

⁷⁸ Institute for Fiscal Studies, [How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown?](#) May 2020

⁷⁹ Wales Fiscal Analysis (2020) [COVID-19 and the Welsh economy: shutdown sectors and key workers](#)

⁸⁰ Chwarae Teg, [Women and Covid-19, March 2020](#)

strengthening the obligations on businesses and organisations in receipt of public funding to eradicate discrimination.⁸¹

Recommendation 21. The Welsh Government should actively encourage all public authorities to advertise jobs as flexible by default.

Recommendation 22. The Welsh Government should provide information about how to implement fair and effective flexible working to all employers in receipt of Welsh Government support and make support conditional on employers implementing these approaches.

Unpaid carers

107. There are an **estimated** 370,230 unpaid carers in Wales, providing care worth £8.1 billion per year. A **recent survey** found that 79% of these unpaid carers are providing more care for their loved ones during the coronavirus outbreak, and more than three quarters of unpaid carers are having to spend more money during the pandemic.

108. While the main way of financially supporting unpaid carers is by increasing Carer's Allowance, the Welsh Government should explore ways of maximising their income through other means. For example, while social care easements are in place, and some families may not be getting the full package of care they are entitled to, council tax discounts could be applied to carers who care for their spouse, partner or child (who are currently **excluded** from discounts).

Recommendation 23. The Welsh Government should explore ways of maximising the income of unpaid carers, including through council tax discounts.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

109. Issues about the design and fit of PPE were raised in evidence to this committee's inquiry, and have been addressed by the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's first report on the pandemic.⁸²

110. That committee notes that PPE is only effective when properly fitted, and despite the high number of females in the health and social care workforce, masks are largely designed for male frames. Opaque masks also present problems

⁸¹ ELGC Committee, [Work it out: parenting and employment in Wales. July 2018](#)

⁸² HSCS Committee [Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak: Report 1, July 2020](#)

for patients, carers and healthcare workers who are deaf or suffering with hearing loss.

111. We support the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee’s recommendation for the Welsh Government to “keep under review the PPE it has stockpiled to ensure that it remains of adequate quality and is fit for purpose, including that the design and fit is appropriate for all wearers and suitable for staff, patients or carers who are deaf or hearing impaired”.

Recommendation 24. The Welsh Government should keep under review the PPE it has stockpiled to ensure that it remains of adequate quality and is fit for purpose, including that the design and fit is appropriate for all wearers and suitable for staff, patients or carers who are deaf or hearing impaired [recommendation from the HSCS Committee].

The reduction of health inequalities needs to be prioritised

112. In *Is Wales Fairer 2018*, the EHRC stated:

“disabled people those with learning disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, transgender people, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and homeless people, experience the most significant barriers to accessing healthcare and have worse physical and mental health outcomes compared with the general population.”⁸³

113. Yet again, coronavirus has laid bare some of these stark inequalities. Men, older people, people from BAME groups, disabled people, people with long-term health conditions, and people living in deprived areas are at higher risk of serious illness and death as a result of the virus.

114. The reasons behind the disproportionate mortality rates are complex, but include: working in higher exposure jobs (like healthcare) or higher risk jobs (such as taxi drivers), living in overcrowded accommodation, existing conditions like lung disease and obesity, behaviours like smoking, and discrimination.

115. Professor Ogbonna’s report was clear that a factor in the unequal impact of the pandemic was “health and social care messages had not been effectively disseminated to BAME communities”.⁸⁴ We support the recommendations made

⁸³ [EHRC. *Is Wales Fairer 2018?*](#)

⁸⁴ [First Minister’s BAME Covid-19 Advisory Group Report Of The Socioeconomic Subgroup Chair: Professor Emmanuel Ogbonna](#), June 2020

by his report calling for clear multi-channel communications strategy for health and social care which is done in partnership and targets the BAME communities.

116. We believe that further work is also needed to improve and expand on the public health messaging to other groups disproportionately affected by the health impacts of the virus.

117. As well as tackling the immediate health inequalities arising from the virus itself, the indirect impacts need to be addressed. Many services and treatments have been cancelled and delayed, something which will have a “substantial impact on disabled people”.⁸⁵

118. There are also significant concerns regarding the risk of a “second” pandemic of mental health issues.⁸⁶ This could have a significant impact on middle aged men from lower income groups, who are the most at risk from suicide and the least likely to access support. Other groups, such as young people and LGBT people are also at increased risk.⁸⁷ We are concerned that there could be a perfect storm of increased demand for support coupled with reduced availability of timely and accessible services. This is before we consider the potential impact of any forthcoming recession, and the additional risks this may pose to mental health.

119. These issues lead us back to the importance of our earlier recommendations on impact assessments, data and meaningful citizen engagement to help inform policy decisions. These are all issues that need careful consideration so that decisions in the recovery phase or any further wave of the pandemic do not risk widening already existing inequalities.

Recommendation 25. The Welsh Government should build upon the implementation of the public health communications recommendations in the BAME Advisory Group report to ensure that targeted messaging is developed for other groups who have been disproportionately affected by coronavirus, such as older people, those from the most deprived areas; disabled people and those with long term health conditions.

⁸⁵ [ELGC COV 30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

⁸⁶ ELGC Committee, 30 June 2020, RoP [284]

⁸⁷ [ELGC COV 30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

Recommendation 26. The Welsh Government should review the accessibility and availability of mental health support services, in particular for men from lower socio-economic groups.

Gaps in educational attainment must be addressed

120. Boys, children from low income families, and those with special educational needs (SEN) generally have **lower educational attainment** than their peers. Gypsy/Roma/Traveller and Black children are also more likely to have lower attainment. The closure of schools is likely to widen these inequalities and the Welsh Government must take targeted action to help those who have experienced the most severe loss in learning.

Digital exclusion

121. Children living in low income homes with no laptops or tablets, or those who are sharing devices with homeworking parents and siblings, were put at a big disadvantage when schools moved to online learning.

122. We welcome the Welsh Government's additional £3 million for pupils without access to laptops and tablets. But evidence to our inquiry indicated that this funding wasn't reaching children that need devices quickly enough.⁸⁸ Respondents also noted that many online teaching resources were not fully accessible to disabled children.⁸⁹

123. It is essential that this funding reaches children who need it, especially if because of either local or national lockdowns, there is a return to blended learning. The Welsh Government should also take steps to ensure that materials are fully accessible.

Recommendation 27. The Welsh Government should publish data on the £3 million school digital inclusion funding, how many pupils it has benefited, and set out whether it has identified any specific gaps in provision that were not addressed sufficiently by the fund.

'Calculated' grades

124. Many respondents to our inquiry raised concerns about the use of calculated grades in place of summer assessments, highlighting that they could deepen the

⁸⁸ ELGC Committee, 16 June 2020, RoP [220]

⁸⁹ [ELGC COV.16 NDCS written evidence](#)

existing inequality in education and put the future of disadvantaged young people at risk if not correctly implemented.⁹⁰

125. The EHRC drew attention to evidence that there may be patterns of conscious or unconscious bias when teachers calculate grades, with particular implications for ethnic minority pupils, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, and children with SEN/ALN.⁹¹

126. We welcome the action taken by Qualifications Wales as a result of these concerns, such as guidance to teachers on unconscious bias, and the provision of information about the obligations of the public sector equality duties to heads of exam centres.

127. We note the findings of the House of Commons Education Committee about the use of calculated grades in England. It raised concerns that the appeals process may only be accessible to the “well-heeled and sharp-elbowed⁹²” and that the onus would be on pupils to provide evidence of bias or discrimination to raise a complaint about their grades.

128. Qualifications Wales has published clear information about the appeals process for calculated grades, but does not explicitly say that pupils can appeal on the basis of suspected discrimination or bias. We endorse the following EHRC’s recommendations.

Recommendation 28. Qualifications Wales should conduct an evaluation of the exceptional arrangements for awarding grades once the process has concluded. If the evaluation reveals higher than average disparities for pupils sharing particular protected characteristics, or from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, these should be investigated by Qualifications Wales.

Recommendation 29. Qualifications Wales should publish information in easy to understand and accessible formats about the routes available for pupils to challenge the grades that they are awarded through this year’s exceptional arrangements, including on grounds of suspected unlawful discrimination.

Catch up lessons

⁹⁰ [ELGC COV 17 EYST written evidence](#)

⁹¹ [ELGC COV 30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

⁹² House of Commons Education Committee, [Covid-19: the cancellation of exams and ‘calculated’ grades](#), 11 July 2020

129. Research undertaken one month into lockdown found that across the UK 11% of children in receipt of free school meals spent more than four hours on schoolwork, as compared with 19% among those not eligible, and 20% of girls put in four or more hours on schoolwork during lockdown, as compared with 14% of boys.⁹³ Evidence provided to this committee highlighted the particular difficulties that parents of children with disabilities have faced in homeschooling.⁹⁴ Research later in the lockdown found that children from better-off families in England were spending 30% more time on home learning than are those from poorer families.⁹⁵

130. We are also aware that the number of vulnerable children attending educational settings is “suggestive of a large number...not receiving the support they require.”⁹⁶ When schools closed at the start of the pandemic, the Welsh Government stated that schools should continue to offer provision to key workers and to children who are vulnerable. The definition of vulnerable children covered a number of different groups, including those with “safeguarding needs and supported by social care...disabled children and those with Statements of special educational needs.”⁹⁷ Members are aware of individual cases where children who met this definition were denied provision. In the future, any child who meets this definition should have the necessary support to ensure they do not fall even further behind.

131. We welcome the £29 million announced by the Welsh Government for the recruitment of 900 teaching staff to provide support for learners most affected by school closures, with priority given to Years 11, 12, and 13 in secondary schools, and ‘vulnerable learners’.⁹⁸

132. It is not clear who ‘vulnerable learners’ are in the context of this additional money, and how they will be identified as a priority for catch up learning. We support EYST’s call for the Welsh Government reduce attainment gaps between learners through one to one or small group tuition when schools return.⁹⁹

⁹³ Green, F (2020) [Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty](#)

⁹⁴ [ELGC COV.16.NDCS written evidence](#)

⁹⁵ IFS, [Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children’s experiences during home learning](#), May 2020

⁹⁶ [ELGC COV.30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

⁹⁷ Welsh Government, [Written Statement: Eligibility for ongoing provision for children who are vulnerable, or whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response, 20 March 2020](#)

⁹⁸ Welsh Government, [Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term](#), July 2020 (Annex A, p20)

⁹⁹ [ELGC COV.17.EYST written evidence](#)

Recommendation 30. The Welsh Government should provide a ‘catch up’ classes fund for children whose education is most likely to have fallen behind during lockdown.

People at risk of violence and abuse must be protected

133. The pandemic has increased the risk of abuse and violence at home and in public. We must ensure that services to prevent violence and abuse and protect people experiencing it are sustainable in the long term.

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence

134. The UK appears to be following a **global trend** of rising domestic abuse during lockdown. It is **estimated** that there were at least 16 domestic abuse-related killings of women and children in the UK between 23 March and 12 April alone. Calls to domestic abuse helplines have surged, with some **reporting** a 700% increase in a single day.

135. Welsh Women’s Aid told us that they anticipate the highest demand for services as lockdown is eased and survivors have more opportunities to reach out for help. They also noted that at least 90% of services have incurred additional costs due to the pandemic. After initial confusion about what additional funding the Welsh Government had allocated to the sector, on 30 June it announced an extra £1.5 million for services.¹⁰⁰ The Scottish Government allocated additional funding to domestic abuse services on 31 March.¹⁰¹

136. We know that there are enduring problems with funding for violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) services in Wales.

137. In 2016 the Welsh Government committed to developing a sustainable funding model for the VAWDASV sector, and we asked the Government to provide a timescale for this.¹⁰²

138. In 2017, the Welsh Government again told the Committee that “development of a sustainable funding model is a priority to deliver the National Strategy [which]

¹⁰⁰ Welsh Government, [£1.5m new Welsh Government funding will help victims and survivors of domestic abuse to Live Fear Free](#), 30 June

¹⁰¹ Scottish Government, [Support for victims of domestic violence during COVID-19 outbreak](#), 31 March

¹⁰² [ELGC Committee. Is the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Act 2015 working? December 2016](#)

will include a review of existing Welsh Government funding that contributes to VAWDASV to ensure making the best use of the resources available.”¹⁰³

139. In 2019, the Wales Audit Office found that:

- the complexities of VAWDASV funding do not allow public bodies to assess value for money in service provision and transform services, and
- funding of VAWDASV services is generally fragmented, complex and short term.¹⁰⁴

140. In February 2020, the Welsh Government told us that the work of the sustainable funding group had been ongoing for 18 months and had not yet found a way of delivering a sustainable funding model for the sector.¹⁰⁵

141. In her evidence on 14 May, the Deputy Minister stated that the group’s work was ongoing through the pandemic, and said “they are preparing for us proposals as to what they will need, particularly as we come out of this lockdown and we will see that there will be even more need.”¹⁰⁶

142. In her letter to us on 30 June, the Deputy Minister stated that before a model was agreed, there was a “need to conduct a full funding mapping exercise of VAWDASV provision across Wales”, which would be completed by mid-July, and a “new completion deadline will be identified, agreed and set” at the next meeting.¹⁰⁷

143. Four years on from the Welsh Government’s first commitment to a sustainable funding model, it is essential that this issue is resolved. The results of the current mapping exercise should be published and information about the new completion deadline should be announced immediately.

¹⁰³ [Welsh Government, Response to Is the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Act 2015 working? February 2017](#)

¹⁰⁴ [Wales Audit Office, Progress in implementing the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act, November 2019](#)

¹⁰⁵ ELGC Committee, 12 February 2020, RoP [111]

¹⁰⁶ ELGC Committee, 14 May 2020, RoP [53]

¹⁰⁷ [Letter from Deputy Minister and Chief Whip to ELGC Committee Chair, 30 June 2020](#)

Elder abuse

144. We received evidence from Hourglass Cymru (formerly Elder Abuse Cymru) about rises in calls to their helpline, and concerns about older people who are shielding and reliant on abusive partners or relatives during this period.¹⁰⁸

145. Official statistics on domestic abuse only collect data on people up to the age of 74, which Age UK considers to “help[...] to keep domestic abuse in later life well and truly hidden, hindering efforts to get support to older people who desperately need it.”¹⁰⁹

Hate crime

146. While police reports indicate that hate crime reduced during lockdown, our evidence highlights concerning instances of racist hate crime directly linked to the pandemic, particularly online. Race Council Cymru told of us attacks on the Chinese community in particular¹¹⁰, and EYST made us aware of Islamophobic abuse around Ramadan.¹¹¹

147. This is an international phenomenon, and the UN has highlighted that online hate speech during the pandemic has ranged from xenophobia, anti-Muslim sentiment, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, and abuse aimed at older people.¹¹²

148. The shift to online abuse makes it hard for community cohesion coordinators in Wales to respond effectively. The EHRC recommend that these coordinators need clearer strategic direction going forward.¹¹³

149. While the Welsh Government announced a range of investment and initiatives in 2019 to tackle hate crime and racism in Wales, the strategic direction needs updating in the wake of Brexit and the pandemic.

150. We and others have repeatedly recommended that the Welsh Government update its **community cohesion delivery plan**, which it committed to doing

¹⁰⁸ [ELGC COV.15 Hourglass Cymru written evidence](#)

¹⁰⁹ [Age UK, Media release, 27 April 2020](#)

¹¹⁰ [ELGC COV.04 Race Council Cymru written evidence](#)

¹¹¹ [ELGC COV.17 EYST written evidence](#)

¹¹² UN, [Secretary-General Denounces ‘Tsunami’ of Xenophobia Unleashed amid COVID-19. Calling for All-Out Effort against Hate Speech](#), 8 May 2020

¹¹³ [ELGC COV.30 Equality and Human Rights Commission written evidence](#)

twice before (in 2018¹¹⁴ and in 2017¹¹⁵). In December 2019 the Counsel General said the Government was “continuing to consider the most effective and appropriate means of updating our community cohesion plan for the coming years.”¹¹⁶

151. The Welsh Government’s 2014 **Hate Crime Framework for Action** was followed by a **delivery plan** in 2016. The most recent **progress report** was published in 2017, but neither have been updated in recent years.

Recommendation 31. The Welsh Government should agree a sustainable funding model for the VAWDASV sector before the end of this Senedd term. Before this, the results of the mapping exercise should be published.

Recommendation 32. The Welsh Government should work with the Office for National Statistics to find appropriate ways to collect domestic abuse data for older people.

Recommendation 33. The Welsh Government should provide a short term update to the community cohesion delivery plan and hate crime framework for action for the remaining Senedd term.

Accessibility needs to be improved

152. The pandemic has presented complex challenges for disabled people. The changes made to our environment and lives should not lead to a reduction in people’s independence, and the Welsh Government needs to ensure that the views of disabled people are taken into consideration when making decisions about the ‘new normal’.

153. Social distancing is ‘near impossible’ for people with sight loss, meaning that many previously independent people rely on others to get out and about. We received evidence that people are afraid to go out for fear of encroaching on people’s personal space, and guide dogs are not trained to understand social distancing.¹¹⁷ This is leading to isolation and depression.

¹¹⁴ Letter from First Minister to ELGC and EEAL Committee Chairs, 16 May 2018

¹¹⁵ Welsh Government, Written response to ELGC Committee report “I used to be someone”, May 2017

¹¹⁶ Letter from Counsel General and Brexit Minister to EEAL Committee Chair, 20 December 2019

¹¹⁷ ELGC COV 19 RNIB Written evidence

“There have been incidences of passers-by challenging or shouting at blind and partially sighted people who haven’t been able to keep their distance. Such unsettling and intimidating experiences have a lasting detrimental impact.”¹¹⁸

154. The RNIB suggested a public social distancing campaign to encourage people to understand that people with different needs may not always be able to socially distance for different reasons.¹¹⁹

155. Organisations told us that people with physical and learning disabilities who are not in the shielding group have struggled to get online delivery slots.¹²⁰ As supermarkets have increased capacity, combined with a relaxation of lockdown restrictions, there has been more availability for delivery slots. But many of these people are unable to physically shop for themselves because of changes to store layouts and social distancing.

156. The RNIB repeatedly raised this issue with the Welsh Government, but so far no solution has been found. The UK Government secured online shopping slots from a number of major supermarkets in England for people whose independence has been reduced by the lockdown, including those with sight loss. The scheme is particularly aimed at those who don’t have friends or family nearby who can easily shop for them.¹²¹ We still believe that such a scheme should be introduced in Wales, in the event of further lockdowns, or unexpected spikes in demand for online shopping.

157. Respondents to our inquiry highlighted specific difficulties with new physical environments such as Perspex screens that distort facial movements and opaque masks that make it hard for people with sight loss and hearing loss to communicate.¹²²

158. The swift introduction of changes to public spaces and streets needs to ensure that the needs of disabled people are considered, by painting kerbs when pavements are widened, and colour contrasts and tactile markings, for example. People with mobility requirements may also lose independence if newly

¹¹⁸ [ELGC COV.19 RNIB Written evidence](#)

¹¹⁹ ELGC Committee, 30 June 2020, RoP [94]

¹²⁰ [ELGC COV.19 RNIB Written evidence](#); and [ELGC COV.25 National Autistic Society written evidence](#)

¹²¹ RNIB, [Priority supermarket deliveries announced for blind shoppers amid social distancing concerns](#), June 2020

¹²² [ELGC COV.16 NDCS written evidence](#)

pedestrianised streets do not include accessible parking nearby too. RNIB Cymru highlighted that “All public authorities have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure they meet the needs of disabled people, and actively involve disabled people in the design and delivery of their services such as the provision or improvement of pedestrian routes and cycle routes”.¹²³

159. The closure of accessible public toilets has also had a significant impact on the ability of disabled people to live their lives independently.

160. It is also critical that disabled people are able to access guidance and information. We welcome the introduction of audio description, easy read and British sign language updates, but understand that these were only introduced at the instigation of stakeholders, demonstrating that accessible information is not considered as a matter of course. People have a right to information to help them understand quickly-changing legislation and guidance, especially public health advice.

161. We were told that people with learning disabilities who live independently particularly struggled to understand the new rules, putting themselves at risk of prosecution.¹²⁴ The life-saving information provided in shielding letters was not provided in accessible formats either.

162. We agree with respondents to our inquiry that the Welsh Government should create an ‘accessibility lead’ similar to the UK Government¹²⁵ to oversee the production of essential information in accessible formats.

Recommendation 34. The Welsh Government should run a social distancing public awareness campaign to emphasise the different challenges the ‘new normal’ presents to different people

Recommendation 35. The Welsh Government should provide swift guidance to re-opening businesses on physical and communication accessibility.

Recommendation 36. The Welsh Government should establish a priority grocery delivery scheme for disabled people who are not shielding (similar to Defra/RNIB scheme in England).

¹²³ [ELGC COV.19.RNIB.Written evidence](#)

¹²⁴ [ELGC COV.31.Learning Disability Consortium written evidence](#)

¹²⁵ Government Digital Service, [We're hiring a Head of Accessibility](#), February 2020

Recommendation 37. The Welsh Government should appoint an accessibility lead within the Welsh Government to oversee the production of all key public health and other information in accessible formats,

Migrants shouldn't fall between the gaps in society

163. Migrants have played an important role in our society during the pandemic, with disproportionately high numbers working in health, social care and other roles that we have relied upon. The Royal College of Physicians noted that a fifth of all health and social care staff in the UK were born outside of the UK.¹²⁶

164. The UK Government announced visa extensions for healthcare workers (not social care workers) whose visas were due to expire by October 2020. In addition, NHS and social care staff have also been exempted from paying the Immigration Health Surcharge, which is being raised to £624 a year in October.

165. Migrants in the UK are more likely to be working in industries affected by the crisis, including accommodation and food services. They are also more likely to be self-employed, in temporary work, and less likely to own their own homes, putting them at higher financial risk as a result of the crisis.¹²⁷

166. Most non-EEA national migrants with temporary permission to remain in the UK have 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF). This means that they are prevented from accessing most benefits, tax credits and housing assistance. The restrictions apply to many people, including sponsored skilled workers, family members of British citizens, self-employed people, investors and entrepreneurs, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants. The NRPF rules are made by the UK Government.

167. A broad range of parliamentarians and external stakeholders wanted the UK Government to suspend NRPF conditions in response to the pandemic.¹²⁸ The UK Government has allowed people with NRPF to access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough), and the Self-employment Support Scheme. But when these schemes end, and if people lose their livelihoods, many migrants could be forced into destitution, especially if travel restrictions prevent them from leaving the UK

¹²⁶ [ELGC COV 27. Royal College of Physicians written evidence](#)

¹²⁷ IPPR, [Migrant workers and coronavirus: risks and responses](#), 25 March 2020

¹²⁸ [House of Commons Library. Briefing paper. Coronavirus: Calls to ease No Recourse to Public Funds conditions, 27 April 2020](#)

168. We very much welcomed the Welsh Government's swift action to provide temporary shelter to people with NRPF during the pandemic. But there are serious questions about what will happen to these people after the pandemic as a result of the NRPF policy - if it was possible to work around these rules during an emergency, can it be continued in 'normal' times?

169. Recent research by the Bevan Foundation found that migrants in Wales often live isolated lives, and lack knowledge about their rights and entitlements. Language acts as a barrier to integration, and they often face discrimination when accessing health, education, housing, welfare benefits and employment.¹²⁹ All of these issues are likely to be amplified in the current situation. The lack of a comprehensive integration strategy is a blind spot in Welsh Government policy, demonstrated by the ongoing issues with the community cohesion and hate crime action plans (outlined in the previous chapter).

170. We support the calls by the Bevan Foundation for the Welsh Government to improve awareness among migrants of schemes like the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Discretionary Assistance Fund to avoid financial hardship.

171. It is critical that the awareness raising programmes to help EU citizens apply for settled status by the 30 June 2021 deadline are continued to make sure people don't lose their right to stay in the UK. Frontline public services staff should receive training on the rights and entitlements of migrants to prevent people from being discriminated against or prevented from accessing services.

Recommendation 38. The Welsh Government should lobby the UK Government for the lifting of No Recourse to Public Funds restrictions.

Recommendation 39. The Welsh Government should review the current community cohesion and hate crime plans and networks (in line with recommendation 33) with a view to developing an integration strategy in the long term.

Recommendation 40. The Welsh Government should provide ESOL classes online.

Recommendation 41. The Welsh Government should provide migrant awareness training for frontline public services staff

¹²⁹ Bevan Foundation, [Shared ground: integrating migrants in Wales, April 2020](#)

Recommendation 42. The Welsh Government should ensure that the EU Settlement Scheme awareness programmes are being run in alternative ways which take account of the on-going restrictions on face to face meetings.

Support for businesses and employment should be distributed fairly

172. The Welsh Government has provided over £1.7 billion in support for businesses through grants, business rates relief and loans. This support should be accessible to everyone, particularly those that have lost the most during this period.

173. We heard concerns that that BAME employees and business owners (particularly new businesses) will face barriers and institutional discrimination in accessing support. EYST told us that business owners were “worried their applications will be rejected in the same way that employment applications are (based on “foreign” name).”¹³⁰

174. Our evidence also indicated that some business owners struggled to find out how to apply for support, and while Business Wales has a fund to provide translation on phone calls, this was not available with the huge volume of calls they were receiving.¹³¹

175. The Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee recommended that the Welsh Government regularly publish disaggregated data on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on different sections of society, such as people with protected characteristics.¹³² We welcome the Welsh Government’s response to this, which highlights the analysis published on protected characteristics and employment during the pandemic.¹³³ However, we are also clear that the support provided to businesses during this time must be accessible to all, and distributed in a fair way. The Welsh Government should collect disaggregated data on business owners (and the people they employ) to ensure that this is happening

176. As noted in previous chapters, some groups of people are most at risk of unemployment because of the sectors they work in, or the precarity of their employment. People with additional barriers to work, such as single parents or

¹³⁰ [ELGC COV.17 EYST written evidence](#)

¹³¹ [ELGC COV.17 EYST written evidence](#)

¹³² Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, [The Impact of COVID-19: Summary of initial findings, June 2020](#)

¹³³ [Welsh Government response to the Economy, Infrastructure & Skills Committee’s report: The Impact of COVID-19: Summary of initial findings](#)

disabled people, need targeted support to make sure they are able to access the jobs market. The positive aspects of homeworking and more flexible jobs should be retained and incentivised to allow more people access to the labour market.

Recommendation 43. The Welsh Government should publish data disaggregated by protected characteristics on the support it has provided to businesses as a result of the pandemic.

Recommendation 44. The Welsh Government should target employment programmes at those who are furthest from the labour market.