



## How do Children's Rights feature in the Political Party Manifestos ahead of the UK General Election on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017?

It is almost 1 year since the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child issued their Concluding Observations to the UK and devolved governments, following their inquiry into the progress being made to implement the UNCRC across the UK. Part of the state party examination process involved giving consideration to oral and written evidence provided by civil society organisations as well as children and young people. The UNCRC Monitoring Group published their [report](#) with recommendations into the progress being made in Wales to help inform the Committee's inquiry.

With the release of the party manifestos ahead of the UK General Election on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017, we take a look at how children's rights and the issues reflected in the Concluding Observations have been taken into consideration by the political parties in Wales

Each of the manifestos, whilst not explicitly making reference to the Concluding Observations, do feature a number of proposals which will have implications for the human rights of children in Wales, with several positive commitments included.

The following presents a short summary of some of the key commitments, principally though not exclusively, which relate to powers that rest with Westminster. The manifestos of the four political parties who returned MPs from constituencies in Wales during the last parliamentary term have been reviewed and are listed alphabetically. The headings are not taken from the manifestos.

### Conservative Party

There are two main documents of relevance and interest to us in Wales.

Welsh Conservatives: 'Forward, Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Wales, a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future'

[https://www.welshconservatives.com/sites/www.welshconservatives.com/files/2017-05/Forward\\_Together\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.welshconservatives.com/sites/www.welshconservatives.com/files/2017-05/Forward_Together_Eng.pdf)

Conservative (UK): 'Forward, Together: Our Plan a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future''

<https://www.conservatives.com/manifesto>

### Human Rights Legislation

The previous proposal outlined in the 2015 Manifesto to repeal the Human Rights Act with a British Bill of Rights has been put on hold for now. The Manifesto commits to **not** repealing or replacing the Human Rights Act whilst the Brexit process is underway. However, once the UK have left the European Union, the party, if in Government, will examine the UK's human rights legal framework.

The party will **not** bring the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights into UK law. They **have** committed to remaining signatories to the European Convention on Human Rights for the duration of the next Parliament.

### Equality

There are commitments to

- Strengthen the enforcement of equalities law

- Commitment to legislate if there is no reduction in the disproportionate use of force against BAME people in institutions
- Reduce the gender pay gap
- Improve flexible work practices and focus on shared parental leave

## **Brexit**

The Manifesto reiterates plans to bring all current EU legislation into UK domestic law with the option to amend, repeal or improve laws. There are plans to

- Deliver a UK Shared Prosperity Fund from European Structural Fund money returning to the UK to reduce inequalities between communities across the nations
- Enact a Great Repeal Bill and bring forward additional bills
- Reform of immigration policy post Brexit

Reference is made to the detail provided in a number of previously released documents, including the **Great Repeal Bill White Paper**.

## **Poverty**

The party commit to

- A new independent review into energy costs
- End extreme poverty
- No plans for further radical welfare reform in this parliament
- Continue the roll out Universal Credit
- A 12 month break on employers National Insurance Contributions for care leavers, person with chronic mental health problems, disabled people etc.
- Target of 1m more disabled people into employment over next 10 years

## **Employment Rights**

The manifesto states that the party will guarantee and enhance the rights of workers and their protection. Employment rights will be protected through existing EU legislation but post Brexit, may be subject to amendment.

- National Living Wage will continue to increase to 60% of median earnings by 2020
- New rights and protections in the workplace
- Interests of employees, including self-employed, are properly protected
- Improve take up of shared parental leave

There is also reference to helping parents and carers to return to work

## **Asylum/Refugees**

The party commits to helping local authorities to 'deal with people as they arrive' and to establish schemes to help civil society organisations to provide housing and support for refugees. The manifesto references 'reforming asylum', and to

- Ensure that Britain remains a sanctuary for refugees and asylum seekers
- Work to reduce the number of asylum claims in Britain
- Offer asylum/refuge to people in areas of conflict/oppression.

## **Voting**

- Retain the current franchise to vote in parliamentary elections at 18

Commitments to tackle **modern slavery** (including of children) and to review the application of exploitation in the Modern Slavery Act are also referenced. There are also calls for greater devolution of **criminal justice** responsibility and budgets to police and crime commissioners, a national community sentencing framework and a new prison in Port Talbot. A **Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill** will be introduced to include a 'new aggravated offence if behaviour is directed at a child'. There are also plans to undertake an independent review of **S4C**

There are also a number of commitments in respect of **health and social care, education, transport, housing** and the **Welsh Language**, powers which are devolved to the NAW. These include

- Free schools from local authority control and fund directly
- Enhance foreign language learning in primary schools
- Improve standards and choice in the education system
- Reducing disabled people's barrier to access services
- Extend the Right to Buy to all tenants of RSL
- Increase the availability of the free childcare allowance for parents of 3-4 year olds, and increase entitlement from 10 hrs to 30 hrs per week

There are also commitments in respect of **Young Carers** and **Looked after Children**, and to ways to improve the family justice system.

## Labour Party

There are two main documents of relevance and interest to us in Wales.

Welsh Labour: 'Standing up for Wales' <http://www.welshlabour.wales/>

Labour (UK): 'For the many, not the few' <http://www.labour.org.uk/page/-/Images/manifesto-2017/Labour%20Manifesto%202017.pdf>

## Human Rights Legislation

The party stress that the Human Rights Act is working and is committed to retain and protect the legislation. There is also a commitment to enshrine the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law in the UK document, although this is listed as 'the European Convention on the Rights of the Child'

## Equality

The manifesto commits to

- Retaining existing EU equality legislation alongside directives aimed at protecting certain groups (disabled, LGBT etc.)
- Incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into UK law.
- Enhance the Equality Act 2010 to enable discrimination at work to be challenged
- Give full recognition to British Sign Language as a recognised language
- Enhance the powers and function of the Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Ensure that forthcoming WG guidance on Healthy Relationships is LGBT inclusive
- Delivering LGBT training for teachers, health and social care professionals

## Brexit

The manifesto pledges to

- Ensure that there is no rolling back of existing key rights and protections
- Abandon the Great Repeal Bill and introduce an EU Rights and Protection Bill.
- Ensure that Britain remains part of the Erasmus scheme
- Guarantee the rights of all UK citizens living in the EU and EU citizens living in the UK
- Ensure there is no drop in EU Structural Funds until 2020

The party are also committed to ensuring that there is a meaningful role given to the Welsh Government in the negotiations and will introduce a 'presumption of devolution' as powers are transferred from the EU to the nations. The Welsh Labour document also makes reference to the published **White Paper released** earlier this year in Wales.

## Poverty

Labour are committed to transforming the social security system and would

- Scrap the sanctions regime
- Scrap the 'Bedroom Tax'
- Reinstate Housing Benefit for 18-21 yr. olds
- Reform and redesign Universal Credit, ending the 6wk delay in payments
- Introduce a Social Security Bill
- Review legal aid entitlement
- Commit to repeal recent cuts to benefits for disabled people
- Develop a cross government strategy for ensuring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eradicate poverty are implemented with a requirement to report annually to Parliament

### Employment Rights

The Manifesto sets out a series of pledges to

- Improve the rights of all employees, including self-employed and agency workers.
- Increase the minimum wage by 2020
- Bring equity for all workers entitlements to sick and maternity pay, and extend the right of all employees to shared parental pay
- Legislate to end zero-hours contracts
- Bring to an end unpaid internships
- Establish a new commission to modernise the law around employment status

### Asylum/Refugees

There are commitments to

- Introduce a cross-departmental strategy to meet obligations on the refugee crisis
- End indefinite detention
- Review current housing and dispersal arrangements
- Commit to take a 'fair share' of refugees

### Voting

- Reduce the voting age to 16

Commitments to tackle **modern slavery** and to support the work of the **Forced Marriage Unit** are also referenced. The party would also re-establish early advice entitlements in the **Family Courts**

There are also a number of commitments in respect of **health and social care, education, transport, housing** and the **Welsh Language**, powers which are devolved to the NAW, and which feature in the current Welsh Government's **Programme for Government** and related documents (*see Welsh Government website*)

## Liberal Democrat Party

There are two main documents of relevance and interest to us in Wales.

Welsh Liberal Democrats: 'Change Wales' Future' <http://www.welshlibdems.wales/manifesto>

Liberal Democrats (UK) 'Our Manifesto' <http://www.libdems.org.uk/manifesto>

### Human Rights Legislation

The party are committed to the Human Rights Act and will oppose any attempt to withdraw from the European Convention. There is also a commitment to strengthen the UK's commitment to

international human rights law and introduce a Digital Bill of Rights and a Victims Bill of Rights to support victims in the CJS.

There is also a commitment to ensure that the Children's Commissioner for Wales has the power to examine issues that impact on children in Wales yet are not within the control of the Welsh Government.

## **Equality**

The party are committed to undertaking a review of the role and funding of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and are committed to introducing requirements on large companies (250+ employees) to publish data on gender, race and LGBT employment levels and pay. Gender stereotyping and early sexualisation will be challenged. They also pledge to

- Enshrine the UNCRC into UK law
- Within a new curriculum for Wales, include teaching about LGBT+, and challenge gender stereotyping
- Tackle bullying in schools, including on the basis of gender, sexuality, gender identity and gender expression
- Guarantee the freedom to wear religious and cultural dress

## **Brexit**

A second referendum on Brexit has been proposed and the party will seek to ensure that appropriate powers and responsibilities post Brexit are devolved to Wales. They will

- Commit to protect Erasmus+
- Protect other EU-funded schemes which increase opportunities for young people.
- Guarantee the existing rights of all EU citizens living in the UK and simplify the registration process.
- Afford the same opportunities for young people to work, study and travel abroad as their parents enjoyed.
- Campaign against any reduction in investment in UK universities and their current ability to apply for EU funds.

## **Poverty**

A commitment to

- Reinstate the Child Poverty Act targets
- Abandon the 2-child policy on family benefits
- Reverse cuts to Housing benefit for 18-21 yr olds
- Increase the rate of JCA and UC for 18-24 yr olds in line with minimum wages
- Uprate working age benefits at least in line with inflation
- Reverse cuts to ESA (work related activity)
- Scrap the Bedroom Tax
- Scrap the Work Capability Assessment and replace with a new system
- Review the effects of the Legal Aid Act, including funding for social welfare appeals
- Tackle period poverty by providing free sanitary products for young people in schools (*only referenced in UK manifesto*)
- Establish an independent review to consult on a genuine Living Wage for all sectors.
- End the abuse of zero hours contracts, introducing a formal right to request a fixed contract and consult on introducing a right to make regular patterns of work contractual after a period of time.
- Tackle financial exclusion by implementing the recommendations of the House of Lords Select Committee on Financial Exclusion.
- Increase the income threshold for entitlement to Carers Allowance.
- Reverse cuts to the family element of Universal Credit and allow both parents to earn before UC entitlement is reduced.

- Reverse cuts to work allowance in Universal Credit, and expand Access to Work for people with disabilities

### Employment Rights

- Fight to ensure existing protective rights based on EU law, such as maternity leave and annual leave, are not undermined.
- Strengthen enforcement of employment rights
- Expand the right to Shared parental leave and increase by an additional month
- They wish to modernise workers' rights and end the abuse of zero hours contracts

### Asylum/Refugees

- Safe and legal routes to the UK for refugees
- Expand the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme to offer sanctuary to 50,000 over the next Parliament
- Reopen the Dubs scheme and welcome 3,000 unaccompanied refugee children from Europe
- Ensure that that the immigration system is operated fairly and efficiently

### Voting

- Introduce voting from age 16 for all elections and referendums
- Take action to improve the numbers on the elected register, including amongst under-represented groups, and pilot weekend voting.

There are also commitments to devolve responsibility for **Youth Justice**, policing and other justice powers to Wales, alongside other notable constitutional and funding changes listed. There are commitments to maintain cross-border cooperation to tackle **Child Sexual Exploitation**, extend the responsibility of the **Youth Justice Board** to all offenders under 21 and establish a Women's Justice Board and scrap the **Prevent Strategy** and replace it with a new community informed scheme.

There are also a number of commitments in respect of **health and social care, education, transport, housing** and the **Welsh Language**, powers which are devolved to the NAW. These include

- Targets on building 300,000 additional homes; increasing support for homelessness prevention and help to those struggling to afford a deposit in the rental market
- Improve access to broadband and mobile connections, especially in rural Wales.
- Increase funding for health and social services, including public health, mental health and primary care services, improve access to GP practices and therapeutic interventions and develop a public awareness campaign to improve mental resilience.
- Develop a childhood obesity strategy and restrict marketing of junk food to children
- Expand the Pupil Development Grant and EY grant (referenced as the Welsh Pupil premium and the Early Years Pupil Premium) and increase school budgets, and a whole range of other education and curriculum commitments (pp 26)
- Training for teaching staff to help identify mental health issues and that schools provide access to support and counselling
- Quality school meals and activities in the school holidays
- Ensure all children are able to access welsh language education
- Promote the use of schools and community/leisure venues to increase childcare provision
- Childcare: 10 hrs per week of free, quality childcare to all working parents from the end of paid parental leave (9mths) until their child is 2, and for all children aged 2-3 (removing from Flying Start to enable access to all), and a free early education place for 3-4 yr. olds for 15hrs per week,
- Invest £20m to support the Additional Learning Needs Bill

- Improve access to apprenticeships and improve the number of apprentices from underrepresented groups
- Introduce a Young Person's Bus Discount card for those aged 16-21
- Harsher sentences for perpetrators of hate crime

## Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru - the Party of Wales have released an 'Action Plan 2017' setting out a series of policy commitments.

'Defending Wales: 2017 Action Plan' <http://www2.partyof.wales/actionplan17>

### Human Rights Legislation

The party commit to

- Publish a 'human rights charter' to protect Wales from any intent to undermine the Human Rights Act

### Brexit

The party have committed to

- Guaranteeing the rights of all Europeans presently living and working in Wales
- Secure replacement money from the UK Government in respect of current EU funding which will end in 2020.

### Poverty

The Party have made the following pledges

- to introduce a fuel duty regulator to prevent rising fuel costs
- Scrap the bedroom tax
- Greater support for disabled people into employment whilst removing the threat of sanctions
- Reverse cuts to legal aid

### Employment Rights

Plaid Cymru will

- Introduce a 'genuine', independently verified Living Wage

### Asylum/Refugees

There is a

- Commitment to 'fight' the Dubs Amendment and ensure that vulnerable refugee children can enter the UK

### Voting

The Party have pledged to

- Give all 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote
- Reform the voting system

In relation to **Justice**, there are proposal to create a legal jurisdiction to ensure that the justice system reflects the needs of Wales with decisions about crime and justice made in Wales.

There are also a number of commitments in respect of **health and social care, education, transport, housing** and the **Welsh Language**, powers which are devolved to the NAW. These include

- Free Full-Time nursery Places for all 3 year olds
- Guaranteed education, employment or training for any person under 25.

- Creating a new network of specialist National Colleges of Vocational Education, for 14+ young people
- Increasing the availability of Welsh language education from nursery to adult learning

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The following manifestos of political parties who returned MPs to Westminster during the last parliamentary term have also been published in the lead up to the General Election

**Green Party** - 'Green Guarantee' - <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/green-guarantee/all-manifestos-alternative-formats.html>. The Green Party have also published a Youth Manifesto.

**Scottish National Party (SNP)** – 'Stronger for Scotland' - <https://www.snp.org/manifesto>

**UKIP** – 'Britain Together' - <http://www.ukip.org/manifesto2017>

This briefing has been produced by Children in Wales on behalf of the work of the UNCRC Monitoring Group. For further information, please contact Sean O'Neill, Policy Director; Children in Wales at [sean.oneill@childreninwales.org.uk](mailto:sean.oneill@childreninwales.org.uk)

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