

Election 2015: The Final Countdown

With less than 48 hours until we go to the polls, WEN Wales asked the six main parties what their policies were on three of the issues which matter most to women in Wales. We've collated their responses below to help you decide which box you'll be marking with an X this Thursday.

Question 1

Research shows unpaid caring has a more profound impact on women's lives than any other factor, adversely affecting women's employment opportunities, income and health. How will your party reduce the burden of unpaid caring on women in Wales?



The Green Party of Wales

We would provide a further £0.5 billion for free social care for adults aged 18–65 who have a proven care need. We would increase the Carer's Allowance by 50%, costing £1.2 billion a year (6.5 million carers save the state £119 billion), and provide carers with a legal right to 5–10 days paid annual leave.

Bringing social care together with physical care and mental healthcare under the NHS umbrella would bring a holistic approach to the needs of the individual, making life for the carer, and the cared for, free of many of the hurdles they face in daily life.

With a non means-tested Citizens Income of £80 a week, carers would no longer have to worry about the basic costs of living. Low hours paid work would be possible, and the burden of caring could be much more easily shared.



The Welsh Labour Government has enshrined greater protections for carers in law, including an assessment of the levels of support carers require and a duty to address it. Our Welsh Carers Strategy aims to help ensure carers are able to have a life outside of their caring role. Welfare payments are not devolved but the Welsh Government recognises the impact that changes are having on people across Wales, including carers. We are committed to supporting carers and ensuring they are aware of benefits they are entitled to.

It is clear however that the Tories have plans for £12 billion of welfare cuts after this election that will hit carers hard.



Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru will work towards improving facilities and qualifications for childcare and older persons' care, including social enterprises and co-operatives, recognising that caring duties fall predominantly upon women. When in government, we strongly supported the Carers' Measure that provides support for carers in Wales.

We will aim to provide flexible and affordable childcare, particularly in deprived areas and in Welsh and for children with disabilities.

We will provide an additional year of early-years education for three to four year olds that will allow parents to choose to work if they wish to, and will provide additional support to young women to enter the job market at an appropriate level through our new JobCentre Wales proposals.



Welsh Liberal Democrats

For far too long, unpaid carers in Wales haven't received the recognition they deserve. The Welsh Lib Dems have unveiled a package to help support carers which includes: a £250 bonus to ease the cost of looking after family members who require support for 35 hours or more each week over a 12 month period; an additional five days paid 'care leave' a year; and the ability to do more work without losing your Carers' Allowance by extending the 'earnings limit' from £110 per week to £150 per week. These three reforms will go a long way to reducing the burden on unpaid carers.



Welsh Conservative Party

No response.



UKIP

No response.

Question 2

Women are at greater risk of poverty than men, and poverty in Wales is rising; currently at 23% of the population. What plans does your party have to reduce the level of poverty in Wales, and in particular, to provide better economic outcomes for women?



The Green Party of Wales

Greens will make equal pay for men and women a reality by requiring all companies, by law, to publish their pay data.

We would require 40% of all members of public company and public sector boards to be women; we would listen to girls and young women about relationships education and about sexism in the media and make personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) a compulsory part of the school curriculum.

Inequality is not just about wages and work. From an early age, girls are subject to everyday sexism, which subtly clouds the way in which women are seen in society, therefore Greens think it is important to tackle media sexism, starting with working with retailers to stop lad's mags and other pornography from being sold in supermarkets and newsagents.

We would ensure that the laws to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity are properly enforced.

Labour Llafur Welsh Labour

The next Labour Government will require large companies to publish their gender pay gap and strengthen the law against maternity discrimination. Where there is evidence more progress is needed, we will enforce the relevant provisions within the Equality Act.

While our pledge to double early years and childcare provision for working parents of three and four year old children with an extra 10 hours free childcare (in addition to the universal Foundation Phase entitlement) will benefit both fathers and mothers, it will be particularly helpful to mothers since women are currently more likely to be kept out of employment by childcare difficulties and costs. Similarly the 12.5 hours a week of free childcare for 2-3 year olds in Flying Start areas (now set to cover 25% of the age group by 2016) is particularly helpful to mothers looking to continue or resume paid employment.

Our Welsh Labour Government continues to use Equality Impact Assessment to inform our Budget decisions. The Tory-led Coalition abandoned this key policy commitment which means equality does not fully inform their actions.



Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru will ensure that the minimum wage becomes a genuine Living Wage, probably around £9 per hour by the end of this Parliament. This means that everybody will receive a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. It is unfair that poor-paying employers are being subsidised by in-work benefits.

We will end exploitative zero hours contracts that benefit employers, not employees.

Increasing wages at the lower end of the jobs market and ending exploitative work practices will particularly benefit women as many of the lower paid jobs with worst working practices are in industries with a large number of women workers.

Plaid Cymru will ensure that all genders are paid the same for comparable work. This includes noting the effect of segregated workspaces where different career paths lead to differential wage levels because some work is wrongly described as 'women's work' and paid at a lower rate.

We will aim to raise the status of work carried out by women, particularly care work, and promote women's access to careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and other careers where women are currently under-represented, providing mentoring support and networks to help normalise these career choices.

We will ensure that all substantially government funded organisations include at least 40% membership of both men and women on their management board, and have a gender awareness plan to achieve gender balance.



Welsh Liberal Democrats

One of the major issues facing Wales is in-work poverty – people in full-time employment who still don't earn enough to make ends meet. This is why Liberal Democrats in Government have made cutting the taxes of low-income workers a priority. Thanks to our policy of raising the Income Tax threshold over 1.2m people have had £800 a year more in their pay packets since 2010, and over 150,000 aren't paying a penny of income tax anymore. On the front page of our manifesto is a commitment to keep raising this threshold, so no-one earning the minimum wage pays any income tax at all. This policy disproportionately benefits women, helping them keep more of the money they earn.

The logo for the Welsh Conservatives, featuring a green leaf icon and the text 'Welsh Conservatives' in green.

Welsh Conservative Party

No response.

The logo for UKIP, featuring a yellow square with a purple '£' symbol and the letters 'UKIP' in purple.

UKIP
No response.

Question 3

Current research shows that 74% of the money saved in benefits and tax changes since 2010 have come directly from women's pockets. How will your party redress the balance of the impact of austerity on women in Wales?

The logo for the Green Party of Wales, featuring a green leaf icon and the text 'Green Party' in green.

Green Party of Wales

The Green Party would fund the creation of a nationwide set of pilot 'Women's Centres', and if their early promise turns out to be fulfilled would intend expanding this to a universal nationwide scheme, run in the voluntary sector by women but given secure long-term core funding through local government.

We would also ensure consistent long-term funding for a national network of Rape Crisis Centres, spending up to £100 million on the network over the course of the Parliament

There is no need for austerity at all. It is an ideological position which has failed on its own terms. Greens would re-form the economy, we would build more housing, improve the quality of existing housing, provide free childcare, free education at HE and university level, improve and reduce the cost of public transport and create 1 million jobs in the green economy. Together with making work pay at least a Living Wage and a Citizens Income from 2020, women would in fact disproportionately benefit from Green party proposals, and every item in this list is fully costed in our online manifesto at

https://www.greenparty.org.uk/assets/files/manifesto/Green_Party_2015_General_Election_Manifesto_Searchable.pdf

Welsh Labour

Labour's 'Woman to Woman' campaign was launched specifically to address women's concerns at this General Election. This is backed up by a manifesto for women - setting out how Labour will enable women to fulfil their potential, as part of a plan to raise living standards for working families. Our policies to

- Raise the national Minimum Wage,
- Promote the Living Wage,
- Ban exploitative zero-hours contracts,
- Abolish the bedroom tax

will improve living standards for women in Wales.



Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru does not agree with the austerity measures introduced by the 2010-15 government and likely to be continued by whichever party leads the next UK Government.

We don't support the unfair benefits sanctions or penalties imposed upon the disabled, families and those looking for work, and will oppose most benefits cuts that are being suggested (but that no London-based party will confirm).

Although we will largely oppose any proposed cuts, Plaid Cymru will insist that any further savings proposals include equality impact assessments to prevent disproportionate disadvantage falling upon any particular groups.

As suggested in previous answers, we will do our best to support women as carers and in the workplace.



Welsh Liberal Democrats

The best way to limit the effect of austerity is to not prolong it for longer than is necessary. The Tories have said they'll continue to cut even after the books have been balanced, threatening our public services. But the Labour party haven't said when they will eradicate the deficit, effectively admitting that they'll continue with austerity indefinitely. The Lib Dems' balanced economic plan will borrow less than Labour and cut less than the Tories, balancing the books but doing so in a fair way. Once we've eliminated the deficit by 2017/18, we'll then be able to rebuild our public services with the proceeds of economic growth – bringing public sector pay freezes to an end, pumping more money into our public services and investing in infrastructure to create even more jobs.

 **Welsh Conservative Party**

No response.

 **UKIP**
No response.