



Children in Wales

A Wales Fit for Children and Young People

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Head Office:

25 Windsor Place, Cardiff CF10 3BZ

Tel: 029 2034 2434

Fax: 029 2034 3134

North Wales Office:

24-26 High Street, Caernarfon LL55 1RH

Tel: 01286 677570

Fax: 01286 676095

email: info@childreninwales.org.uk

website: www.childreninwales.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 1020313



Children in Wales challenges politicians to address the overarching issues that our members believe require attention, in order to improve the lives of children and young people living in Wales. These issues have emerged over the past four years from our members. It is not possible to list here all the deficits in services that have been identified such as child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) or services for disabled children. What is possible, however, is to promote a strong direction within which better outcomes for all children and young people can be achieved. The Children Act 2004 provides a key opportunity to work towards a vision and to deliver through a single Children’s Plan, but clarity and consistency is required from the Welsh Assembly Government in order for the policy aspirations to be translated into reality at local level.



Dr Mike Shooter, CBE
Chair
Children in Wales



Catriona Williams
Chief Executive
Children in Wales

Children in Wales is the national umbrella children’s organisation in Wales. We bring organisations and individuals together to:

- Make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child a reality in Wales
- Fight for sustainable quality services and fair shares for all children and young people
- Ensure special attention and treatment for children in need and those who are marginalized
- Give children and young people a voice

Children in Wales has a partnership relationship with The National Children’s Bureau and Children in Scotland. We also work with Children in Northern Ireland and we are an active member of both Eurochild and The International Forum for Child Welfare.

Introduction

We in Children in Wales have been reflecting on the past eight years and the impact of the Assembly and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) on the lives of children and young people. We are also looking to the next four year term. There is no doubt that as a young parliamentary institution the National Assembly for Wales has taken children and young people's issues seriously and our members have appreciated the access to politicians and the dialogue that has been possible as a result. The willingness of WAG to act on previous Children in Wales recommendations such as the Children's Commissioner for Wales, a Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales and a Minister for Children, as well as a commitment to investing in young children through Flying Start and focusing on ways of addressing issues such as child poverty, has also been much appreciated.

However, it is our job to reflect the current issues identified by our members who work with and for children and young people, from a variety of disciplines and sectors in Wales today. Several of our voluntary sector members have produced material in the form of specific issue manifestos or briefing papers that contain detailed recommendations for a future WAG regarding discrete areas of policy. For example Voices from Care Cymru have made recommendations to improve the lives of children and young people who are 'looked after' and a collaboration of Barnardo's Cymru, NCH Cymru, Tros Gynnal, NSPCC and Save the Children has produced a comprehensive series of briefing papers on 14 different themes. Similarly statutory sector members have raised many issues with us, particularly in relation of implementation at local level.

It is clearly impossible to represent in detail the plethora of areas for improvement that have been raised with us by members in this short paper, but 'A Wales Fit for Children and Young People' represents our best advice to the nation's political parties and policy makers. It is aimed at both the future WAG and at Assembly Members from all political parties.

Over 600,000 children and young people in Wales do not have the right to vote. Many advocates and children and young people themselves believe that lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 would be the right thing to do, especially as 16 to 18 year olds can get married, pay taxes or join the armed forces! Politicians would find their issues harder to ignore if the under 18's had the vote. It is therefore up to the adult population who have an interest in the young to influence and monitor what political parties say and do for children and young people in Wales. Groups including parents, grandparents and carers, those who work with children and young people, the media and, finally, politicians themselves and their political advisers all have the potential to make a significant difference.

We will monitoring the progress WAG makes in delivering all its pledges for children and young people and accordingly will organise a mid way review in May 2009 to assess progress. It is also important that Wales is able to compare itself to other countries, because the true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children's well-being – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialisation and their sense of being loved, valued and included.

Children and young people in Wales deserve more than rhetoric. Child well-being indicators should be developed to measure progress in Wales and to compare child well-being in Wales with other developed countries. Implementation must be given sufficient weight to ensure that policy aspirations are turned into reality. A vision without action is merely an illusion!

In order to ensure that WAG policies lead to an improvement to children and young people's well-being in Wales, we recommend the following key actions:

1. Create a National Assembly for Wales cross-cutting Scrutiny Committee for Children and Young People

The Government of Wales Act 2006 provides an opportunity to create a Committee to scrutinise the work of WAG regarding all aspects of policy as it affects children and young people and to hold WAG to account. The impact of all WAG policies whether directly or indirectly impacting on children and young people should also be scrutinised. Importantly, this Committee would consider the progress made on the Annual Reports from the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

2. Create a WAG Committee for Children and Young People with an adequate level of co-ordinated civil service resource to support it across all aspects of WAG Ministerial portfolios

The Children Act 2004 provides the opportunity at local level to work in partnership, to pool budgets and to produce a single plan for children and young people in each local authority area. It is therefore essential that cross-departmental working within WAG reflects this ethos and ensures that policies and guidance, as well as new legislation, is consistent and not contradictory. It should also promote the pooling of budgets at national level in relation to specific initiatives which in turn should simplify delivery at local level. Increased rationalisation of planning and of inspection processes would assist with the improvement of service delivery. All WAG policies should be considered for their impact on children and young people.

3. Strengthen the role of Minister for Children (and young people)

The role of Minister for Children has been important in Wales since its creation, but needs to be reviewed in relation to how it could be made even more effective in terms of ensuring co-ordination and harmonisation of policy development and implementation across Ministerial portfolios. We urge the new WAG to support a strengthened role of Minister for Children at senior cabinet level. The ability to co-ordinate at local level, for instance by pooling budgets, requires demonstrable co-ordination of policies and practice at WAG level.

4. Create a Strategy to promote and implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which should include:

- A WAG dissemination strategy for the UNCRC so that all key stakeholders are informed of its importance and how a rights based agenda works in practice
- Sufficient information and training on the UNCRC for all those who work with children and young people or who are undergoing professional training
- A communications strategy to influence the public and media to give a positive image of children and young people
- Prominence of UNCRC in WAG's overarching strategic plan
- UNCRC policy proofing for all WAG policies
- Key WAG documents to be produced in 'child friendly' formats
- Resources to address some of the capacity issues to enable all children and young people to participate effectively
- A WAG Annual Report on the state of UNCRC implementation including how recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have been addressed

5. Fill in the important gaps in legislation and policy to include:

- Wales' devolved government continuing to demonstrate why greater control within Wales leads to better lives for children and young people. The Government of Wales Act 2006 offers the opportunity to fill important legislative gaps, some of which were impossible to achieve through Westminster, others are new
- Compliance with the UNCRC should be incorporated into all pieces of legislation that are either directly related to children and young people or that impact on them indirectly. The Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales should be secured legislatively as should national and local participation structures. Specific examples include extending the full duty of care to the age of 21 regardless of whether young people 'looked after' go on to education, so they are not left without their basic needs being met

- Wales based legislation for children and young people coming together in a coherent form, possibly a Children and Young People’s Act for Wales. This will of course require systematic and detailed consideration and should not be rushed
- A Wales approach to new risks, such as dangers from technology
- Improve co-ordination between Welsh Assembly, UK and European Parliaments, including:
 - Ensuring child impact assessments are made part of the policy development process at all levels of government
 - A robust legislative and policy framework that guides co-operation amongst the three institutions

6. Develop Child Well-Being Indicators and a Research Strategy to support evidence-based policies

To date there has been relatively little Wales based research regarding children and young people. Major research projects have generally emanated from England and the context has therefore not always been relevant. Similarly, whilst there have been moves towards disaggregating data across the UK since devolution, this is not always the case, so eight years into devolution, Children in Wales recommends that WAG seriously considers a research strategy for children and young people.

A broad based longitudinal study would also form the baseline for developing child well-being indicators and from which the impact of policies could start to be measured. The indicators should comprise the following areas: material well-being; health and safety; educational well-being; family and peer relationships; behaviours and risks; subjective well-being. In this way a picture of the lives of Welsh children can be ascertained. This would also form the basis of comparison with other countries. Importantly, the subjective dimension reports from children and young people about their lives would inform effectiveness of policies such as anti-bullying strategies.

We hope that the new Welsh Assembly Government will rise to the CHALLENGE of IMPLEMENTATION and

7. Review the overall balance of investment in children

It is critical that the balance of WAG investment in children and young people is regularly reviewed and updated, particularly in a society that is ageing and where today’s children and young people will have considerable demands on them in the future. We have seen the start of a process of ‘children’s budgeting’ and this is welcome, but it is in its early stages and needs to be developed and incorporated within the regular WAG budgeting processes.

8. Support Partnership Working

Partnerships are the key structures through which the major policies for children and young people are currently being delivered and the Children Act 2004 will strengthen this. It is therefore essential that WAG ensures that Partnerships work well and that they are sufficiently supported to be effective. The huge contribution of the voluntary sector must be recognised and sufficiently well incorporated into the assessment of need, planning and delivery at local level.

9. Improve Procurement Processes

In order to provide the highest quality services, there is an urgent need to review the procurement processes to ensure that they are fit for purpose. We strongly recommend a detailed piece of work to transform the current procurement thinking which is primarily based on material goods and not on services for people, and certainly not on services for children and young people. It is entirely possible, even within European legislation, to develop models of services with advice from partners who have well evaluated models from elsewhere. It is also important to consider these issues at this point in time when recommendations in the Beecham Review are being implemented. The Social Services Improvement Agency's "National Trends for Children in Need Services" paper provides a useful analysis of the need for effective strategic commissioning for children's services.

A mixed economy of provision from all sectors and cross border services is essential, especially for developing services for the most disadvantaged children and young people and there should be a level playing field for the voluntary sector.

10. Adequately Support New Policies and Strategies

The last four years in particular has seen the introduction of an array of key policies affecting children and young people. These include major initiatives such as the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services; the Parenting Action Plan; the Foundation Phase; Flying Start; Learning Pathways; the Child Poverty Action Plan; the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy and the Youth Services Strategy to name but a few. Whilst important in terms of progressing policies in Wales, many of these have been introduced without sufficient additional resource attached, making them laudable in terms of aspiration, but weak in terms of delivery, monitoring and evaluation. We hope that in future, WAG will adequately address the resource issue across all of its programmes for children and young people. In other words, it is essential that WAG ensures that key policies are effectively implemented.

Good communication between WAG and local agencies (including local politicians) as well as clarity and co-ordination of guidance to all relevant agencies expected to deliver cross agency policies and strategies are urgently required. For instance, there are aspects of the NSF for Children, Young People and Maternity Services which unless flagged or in Service and Financial Frameworks targets are not a priority for budgets in Local Health Boards and Trusts. Similarly the engagement of education bodies in the Parenting Action Plan has been an issue.

11. Support Core Services

- **Training and Workforce**

WAG must have regard to the importance of retaining a workforce that is able to effectively fulfil the core duties as well as those required by new initiatives and:

- Implement a workforce development strategy that will ensure training for all of the children's workforce
- Co-ordinate training and qualifications and ensure effective links with the UK training agenda to support recruitment of staff
- Support and respect the professions working with children and young people

- **Clear Guidance**

There is a need for clear guidance regarding what is and what is not a core service. Whilst there are duties enshrined in legislation, the plethora of new initiatives has made it increasingly difficult for core services where recruitment and retention as well as operational budgets have been affected.

12. Ensure services are delivered according to need

- Urgent attention should be paid to developing a comprehensive Strategy for Vulnerable Children. WAG should ensure that there is not a postcode lottery regarding services for marginalised groups such as disabled children, children from BME communities or asylum seeking families
- We are concerned about the vulnerability of funding originally designated for children in need such as 'Children First' and 'Cymorth', because these funds need protection from the numerous funding pressures that statutory agencies face from all the areas of their activity, not just those relating to children and young people. This is particularly important in times of demographic change and an ageing population
- The impact of WAG's policies on vulnerable and marginalised children and young people should be monitored to seek to understand how the barriers these children face can be tackled

13. Learn from Previous Reports/Reviews/Investigations

A considerable amount of time and money has already been spent on Reports, Reviews and Investigations commissioned by WAG into issues affecting children and young people. In addition the Annual Reports from the Office of the Children's Commissioner have highlighted the priority issues that concern children and young people themselves.

The process of debate, discussion and a final WAG response to all these recommendations is a useful activity in raising awareness of the issues at a particular point in time. What appears to be lacking however is a procedure for monitoring progress against the recommendations that have been accepted. This process is essential if children's lives are to be improved. Lessons from the past must translate into concrete action so that the same mistakes are not repeated. This particularly applies to safeguarding practice where it is essential to act quickly to protect children from abuse.

14. Promote Early Intervention

Continued investment in universal early years services and early intervention programmes is essential as the benefits in terms of reduced suffering, increased well-being of children and financial savings to the government are significant. This could mean temporarily drawing resources from other budgets outside of children's services to manage a change of focus. WAG must also actively support strategies that intervene sufficiently early in the lives of older children who are or are likely to become 'in need'.

- Flying Start - we hope the new WAG will actively support strategies to invest in young children so they have the best possible start in life. In the case of initiatives that have already attracted some additional national funding such as Flying Start, we would strongly encourage WAG to provide a sustainable funding stream at the appropriate level and for the appropriate length of time. Investment in the early years will have many cost benefits both to children and to society as a whole in the medium to long term. It is also essential that it be rolled out to all those families that need this level of support. Considerable savings will be made when these children are older if they do not require specialist services from health, education, youth justice or social services which are usually costly
- Similarly we would like to see an expansion in the RAISE funding programme that aims to raise the levels of performance amongst disadvantaged pupils and those at risk of leaving school with no qualifications
- There must also be recognition that the benefits to children and to society as a whole are medium to long term and evaluation must therefore be timed realistically

Immediate Action should be taken on the following policy areas to:

1 *Implement the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services*

Implementation of the whole of the Children's NSF is urgent, but especially in the areas of CAMHS and services for disabled and other vulnerable children. Resources must be allocated for CAMHS for children and young people up to the age of 18 and the practice of placing under 18's on adult mental health wards stopped. The whole range of CAMHS services should be resourced including Tiers 3 & 4. Clear guidance should also be given to all agencies involved in the commissioning and delivery of services that actively supports the allocation of funding to this area of activity.

2 *Implement the Child Poverty Strategy and Implementation Plan*

The needs of the poorest families – lone parents, families with disabled children, large families including some ethnic minorities, gypsy travellers and parents who are in and out of seasonal work should be prioritised. Recommendations should be implemented and the effects monitored, taking into account the issues for children living in rural areas or in pockets in more affluent areas. It is important to ensure that schools have initiatives that enable children from poor families to fully participate.

3 *Implement the Parenting Action Plan*

WAG should fund a public education campaign on alternatives to physical punishment and Children and Young People's Partnerships should be encouraged to have a coordinated and strategic approach to family/parenting support. Emphasis should be given to involving parents in their children's education and also to implementing occupational standards for those working with parents and common, practical methods of evaluating effectiveness, including local programmes. Particular issues of rurality and teenage or other vulnerable parents should be addressed.

4 *Implement the Play Strategy*

The Play Strategy should be fully implemented and in particular local authorities should be required to develop home zones and street play opportunities, safe routes to school and maintain challenging local play spaces as well as developing other facilities. Children and young people of all ages need more opportunities to play and pursue leisure activities in their communities and in school where the opportunities have been greatly eroded through reduced facilities and time. Inclusive play opportunities for disabled children should also be monitored as should opportunities for children living in rural areas.

5 *Ensure an Independent Children's Advocacy and Representation Service*

All children and young people should be able to access independent advocacy when they need to, particularly those within the child protection system or those who are particularly vulnerable. Advocacy must however be seen in the wider context of children's rights and participation.

6 *Implement the Childcare Strategy and Ensure a Work-life Balance for Children*

Childcare is a major feature in the whole of Western Europe at the moment as our economies compete with countries like China. Understandably political parties have a major interest in ensuring that as many people are in employment as possible. Childcare is a key feature of this economic strategy. We want WAG to be rigorous in ensuring that children's needs are central to the childcare practice that is developed in line with the ethos of the Childcare Strategy. Without a primary focus on the child, there is a risk that children may not have the high quality experiences in their young lives that are essential for their future well-being.

7 *Support Schools to Promote Children's Well-being*

There should be continued monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies and measures should be rigorously continued and include the sharing of good practice and feedback from children. In order to consider the disengagement from learning of more disadvantaged groups, WAG could consider commissioning an inquiry into the blockages as well as keeping a specific focus on implementing 'Narrowing the Gap' on attainment. The education of children 'looked after' and other marginalised groups must be reinforced and guidance issued for particular groups such as gypsy travellers. It is particularly important that teachers are trained to deliver, or to engage others to deliver: emotional literacy; problem solving; financial literacy; preparation for parenting; appropriate relationships; equality and diversity and children's rights. In addition, guidance should be issued for schools and care settings to promote parental involvement in children's education, particularly those who are disadvantaged parents.

8 *Improve Transitions*

If services are truly child centred, close attention should be paid to the transitional points in children and young people's lives. This is particularly important for those who are more vulnerable or disadvantaged, including disabled children. Within the education system, measures are required to ease the transition from one school to another and from secondary school to further or higher education. Identification of additional support needs and timely provision of services is required to ensure continuity and to avoid unnecessary extra stress. The same applies within social and health services where there are major transitions such as moves between being 'looked after' and independent living or in the case of disabled young people with health needs moving from the holistic care of a Paediatric service to the separate specialities of the structure of health services for adults.

9 *Promote Children and Young People as Citizens in their Community*

It is important to promote children and young people as active citizens and local Partnerships across all aspects of the community should be encouraged to involve the young, for instance in work related to community safety or community regeneration. In addition to the play opportunities outlined above, there should be funding available for targeted youth schemes which reduce anti social behaviour and financial support for families on low incomes to enjoy family leisure activities.

10 *Safeguard Children and Young People*

Child protection and safeguarding procedures should be in place in all organisations providing sporting, leisure and cultural activities to children and young people and therapeutic services should be available through a full implementation of the CAMHS strategy. It is also important to consider the findings from the 2003 report of the National Working Group on Child Protection and Disability "It doesn't happen to disabled children", in order to improve the way in which child protection services respond to the needs of disabled children. The recommendations of "Keeping us Safe" – Report of the WAG's Safeguarding Vulnerable Children Review" should be addressed. In addition, there should be a national strategy for children with harmful sexual behaviours and also a strategy to deal with sexual exploitation.

11 *Improve the lives of Disabled Children and Young People*

WAG should adopt the UN Convention for People with Disabilities and also support the Wales version of the 'Every Disabled Child Matters Campaign'. It should also implement the strategic action plan for people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Importantly, progress on the Children's NSF and also data collection should be reviewed and the Assembly's new powers used to create a legal responsibility for Health, Social Services and Education to jointly commission and fund child development services for pre-school disabled children and children with learning disabilities. Legislation should be introduced to increase the level of home support and short breaks services. Action should be taken on workforce planning issues across Wales in relation to psychiatric and psychological services for disabled children with emotional or behavioural problems and WAG should ensure that every disabled child has the appropriate equipment to enable them to participate in education, training, play and leisure. Finally, children should be given the right to representation when excluded from school.

12 *Improve the Lives of Children 'Looked After' and Leaving Care*

Implementation of new legislation increasing the age of the full duty of care to 21 years, plus a systematic implementation of the recommendations from all the previous reports regarding the health, education and placement issues for children and young people 'looked after'.

13 *Improve the lives of Children and Young People in relation to Youth Justice*

Youth Justice Plans should be incorporated into the Children Act 2004 Planning Guidance, especially around the single plan. WAG should work closely with the Youth Justice Board (YJB) to promote and fund strategies that will assist young people who are at risk of involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour by providing them with opportunities that engage them in a purposeful and positive way. It is also important to monitor the implementation of the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy and to include anti social behaviour as part of its agenda and promote links to its principles of "prevention is better than cure" and "children first and offender second". A coherent approach to anti social behaviour involving Youth Offending Teams and other mainstream services across Wales is required and current work on the issues of remands and custodial placements needs to be progressed urgently with the YJB.

14 *Improve the Lives of Children and Young People Seeking Asylum*

Asylum seeking children should be recognised as children under the UNCRC so WAG should influence the UK Government to ensure that the best interest principle in Article 2 of the UNCRC applies to all asylum-seeking children. As a specialist area it requires specialist data collection on both accompanied and unaccompanied children plus a specialist information resource for practitioners. There should also be a review of access to specialist legal representation and other specialist independent advocacy and action taken to address any shortfall. Consideration should also be given to establishing a system of guardianship. It is also essential that there is access to health provision, specialist if necessary to promote equity and entry into mainstream health services. It is important to secure longer-term funding streams for services and ensure the availability of specialist culturally acceptable mental health services for traumatised children.

15 *Reduce Homelessness and Improve Housing for Young People and Families*

An urgent priority is to implement the recommendations of the National Assembly for Wales' Social Justice and Regeneration Committee's report of its review of Youth Homelessness in Wales ("Everybody's business: no-one's responsibility" Feb 2007) as well as working to find enduring solutions for homeless families and young people. This may involve making a greater commitment of public investment to support WAG's strategic developments and provide more affordable and suitable housing in Wales. Particular solutions for rural areas and families who have disabled children will need to be addressed. The issue of poor quality accommodation from the private rented sector will also need to be addressed.

16 *Improve the Lives of Children and Young People in Relation to Substance Misuse*

A children's representative should be on the WAG Panel on Substance Misuse and the cross cutting themes of Hidden Harm and the Framework for Action should be taken forward in a co-ordinated way. WAG should promote the need for children and young peoples' substance misuse services to be available within each local authority and specialist CAMHS funds should be available. WAG should promote services for young carers who care for family members.