

CYPE(5)-08-21 - Paper to note 3

Roundtable meeting with Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, 14 January 2021 – summary of discussions

Background

The Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services hosted a roundtable meeting with senior figures in the children's sector. The purpose of the roundtable was to update attendees on progress with Children's Rights in Wales and to listen to ideas, concerns and thoughts from key stakeholders. A full list of attendees is available in Annex A.

The Deputy Minister stressed the importance of working collaboratively with stakeholders and partners. The Deputy Minister posed the following questions and the responses to the questions are included below:

1 What has gone well in terms of the Welsh Government response to the Covid-19 pandemic?

- The focus of the Deputy Minister and Welsh Government on children's rights during the pandemic - it is the responsibility of the whole government.
- Positive steps taken by the Ministerial Advisory Group for improving outcomes for children.
- Increased policy focus on addressing equality issues and disadvantage – support for the decision by the Welsh Government to provide free schools meals throughout the year.
- The focus on listening to children during the pandemic and the work of the Welsh Government in terms of participation, including conversations that have taken place between the First Minister and children and young people. These conversations should continue. The 1,000 Voices from Care project was seen as an example of effective participation.
- Increased time that foster parents were able to spend with their children which has led to improved relationships.
- UNICEF often looks to Wales for good practice in term of children rights.
- Improvements in the quality and depth of the CRIAs around the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The number of meaningful opportunities for stakeholders in the children's sector to share their views directly with Ministers and Welsh Government officials. As a result a number of positive actions have emerged from the various working groups.
- A recognition of the resilience of young people and how well they have responded to the crisis.

2 How could we improve our response to the Covid-19 pandemic?

- The need to understand how every child can be supported to learn with significant disruption to conventional learning.
- Focus on the educational attainment of children in care and the importance of continuity of contacts to ensure effective progression in learning was stressed.
- Certain public services have not understood children's rights and have applied an 'adult based approach' to parts of their provision. For example, some children in custody were unable to leave their cell except for a very limited period at the height of the pandemic. Some children's homes are applying isolation periods beyond 10 days depending on the local interpretation of public health guidance.
- A lack of focus on corporate parenting (which the Deputy Minister confirmed would have progressed in normal circumstances).
- The importance of considering the long term impact of the pandemic on children and young people. Although short term impacts are considered, there will be long term impact on:-
 - children being pushed into poverty;
 - worsening mental health;
 - education inequalities, and;
 - increased risk of abuse.
- The exceptional amount of pressure on children during the pandemic was noted, and the pressure on parents to become 'teachers'.
- The importance of refreshing and revisiting CRIAs and Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) to reflect policy changes.
- Lack of connectivity in rural areas and the low morale and fatigue resulting from continued use of online learning, for both children and parents.

3 Future considerations

- Welsh Government should establish a national mechanism to consider, and implement, the UN Treaties/conventions as recommended in the EHRC's report *Children's Rights in Great Britain*.
- The UNCRC Monitoring group report, published in December, recommends relooking at the legislation and expectations placed on public bodies around children rights. A number of services are delivered by public bodies but without a legal requirement to give due regard to children rights.
- Children in Wales will soon be contacting their members for their views/concerns/opportunities for the future. It is expected that digital exclusion will emerge as a key issue.
- Consider the recent Youth Justice report and response to Covid-19 which made a number of suggestions.

4 Views on the proposed arrangements as set out in the 2021 Children Rights Scheme (CRS)

- Welcome the 'excellent' CRS and the young person's version.
- The importance of communicating policy documents in the language of young people was stressed. The young person's version of the CRS was an exemplar for other policy areas.
- Next month the UN Committee will provide initial views to the Welsh Government as part of its next periodic review. Welsh Government should use this report to feed into the CRS consultation.
- There is an opportunity to use the CRS to embed children's rights in other pieces of legislation – for example the new curriculum. This could be a good opportunity to have a 'quick win'.
- The importance of training in supporting the children's rights. Reference was made to the key findings from the evaluation into the external training contract with University of Wales Trinity St David which emphasised the value of sector specific training and the importance of contextualising rights to the roles of those who attend.
- Include a reference to the National Participation Standards within the draft CRS and the development of a national framework to bring article 12 of the UNCRC to life.
- The importance of quality Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) in helping stakeholders understand how children rights are considered in the policy making process. It was stated that Wales is a world leader in this area.
- Welcome the emphasis in the new curriculum on creating ethically, informed citizens. However the challenge will be how this is delivered effectively in practice. There is a need to engage with the teaching profession and children and young people to emphasise the importance of meaningful participation which is not always consistent.

5 Future considerations for the CRS

- Audit current UNCRC training to ensure it is targeted effectively.
- Welsh Government to consider introducing the CRIA as a statutory instrument. This could be one of the recommendations from the UN Committee's report.
- The Welsh Government response to the Children, Young Person and Education (CYPE) Committee inquiry into Children Rights was welcomed. Attendees will monitor how the recommendations are implemented and how these will link into the revised CRS.

6 Nominations for the raising awareness external reference group

Attendees were asked to indicate whether they were happy to be a part of the raising awareness external reference group.

Annex A - Attendees present:

- Dr Caroline Lohmann-Hancock, Senior Lecturer, University of Wales Trinity St David
- Catherine Davies, Lifelong Learning Policy Officer (Children), Welsh Local Government Association
- David Melding, Member of the Senedd
- Dragan Nastic, Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor, UNICEF
- Helen Mary Jones, Member of the Senedd
- Professor Jane Williams, Professor of Law, Swansea University
- Dr. Nichola Welton, Senior Lecturer, University of Wales Trinity St David
- Owen Evans, Chief Executive Officer, Children in Wales
- Rachel Thomas, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales
- Ruth Coombes, Head of Wales, Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Professor Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales
- Sean O'Neill, Policy Director, Children in Wales
- Siân Thomas, Senedd Research Service – observer (on behalf of the Children, Young People and Education Committee)
- Professor Simon Hoffman, Professor of Law, Swansea University

Welsh Government Officials

- Amy Hope, Children and Families Division
- Jonathan Scourfield, Special Advisor
- Karen Cornish, Children and Families Division
- Karyn Pittick, Children and Families Division
- Rhys Davies, Children and Families Division
- Sarah Melkevik, Children and Families Division