

Children and Young people Committee

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Inquiry into Children's Budgeting Submission from Disability Wales

Key issues: Failure of the policy making process to influence budgetary decisions

The Welsh Assembly Government should make clear reference to how previous policies and Assembly Committee recommendations are reflected in budgetary decisions.

Lack of transparency in the budgetary process.

The Welsh Assembly Government should have a more transparent pre-budgetary process, including a clear means by which the voluntary sector can contribute.

Inadequate systems to provide a detailed breakdown of funding.

There need to be effective mechanisms in place at a local and national level to provide distinct and accurate figures for spending on disabled children and young people.

Chronic need to identify spending on disabled children

Accepting that the systems to track children's budgeting are inadequate, there is a clear need to track spending in a more detailed way on disabled children and young people.

Consultation questions

To what extent do you think that budget setting and allocating resources for children and young people is transparent at national and/or local level?

Failure of the policy making process to influence budgetary decisions. Young disabled people across Wales will look at this draft budget and wonder what will this mean for us. Those who have been involved in giving evidence to various WAG committees in recent years will be thinking where is the investment to back the promises made. When we ask for the services we need, we are always told that there is not enough funding, this was a chance for WAG to make a difference and they have let us down. " Lee (Swansea)

This quote reflects the frustration felt by many young disabled people who have taken part in the numerous WAG policy consultations, Assembly committees and events over the years. Their frustration lies in the sense that there seems to be little or no transparency in WAG budget setting and allocation of resources for disabled children and young people. In many ways, it could be argued that the budget process seems to be strangely dissociated from WAG and Assembly policy making procedures. There has been a considerable amount of evidence gathering and policy development over the years with clear evidence that outcomes for disabled children and young people remain extremely poor, yet this did not seem to be reflected or even considered in the budget making process.

The Welsh Assembly Government should make clear reference to how previous policies and Assembly Committee recommendations are reflected or not in budgetary decisions.

Lack of transparency in the budgetary process.

The experience of the DCMW campaign would suggest that part of the miss match between the development of policy and allocating resources at a national level lies in the lack of transparency in the pre-budgetary process. Both in the summer of 2007 and 2008 the DCMW campaign sought to influence spending on disabled children and young people. On both occasions it was far from clear how the pre-budget process worked and how the voluntary sector could feed relevant information into it. The current structure of sub expenditure groups reporting up to Ministers and onto Cabinet is something of a closed book to the voluntary sector with little explanation given as to timescales, procedures etc.

Whilst budget decisions are clearly for WAG to take with scrutiny by the Assembly there might be a more transparent allocation of spending on children and young people if the pre-budget stages were more open with a clear means by which the voluntary sector can contribute.

To what extent do you think that departments within national and local government are joined-up in terms of what they spend on children and young people? Do you have examples where this is or isn't happening?

Do you think there is enough forward planning about how funding is allocated to deliver policies and programmes for children and young people? Please give examples.

Poor co-ordination of spending on disabled children and young people.

"At the moment I spend most of my free time watching telly or playing on my play station. I have lots of friends in school but they live

too far away for me to meet them outside school. Some of my friends go to VIVA but there is a waiting list to join." Cassie (RCT)

"Support workers are our only way of getting out and about without our parents or being stuck at home with no where to go! As young people it is important that we have an active social life in order for us to build essential life skills. We are unable to fit our entire social life into 3 hours a week with a support worker." Aaron (Gwynedd)

More things to do and places to go are the main priorities for disabled children and young people and there are a number of funding streams aimed at supporting projects which provide play and leisure activities for disabled children. But many projects operate on a shoestring with fragile funding year to year. The additional resources announced by WAG for short breaks and inclusive play in response to the DCMW campaign are now starting to deliver some extra opportunities for disabled children and young people across Wales but there are a number of lessons to be learned in regards to the allocation and co-ordination of spending.

The lack of a clear announcement on funding over a three year period has made it difficult for local authorities to plan services and build capacity. Initially the money for short breaks and inclusive play appeared to be one off pots of money which did not encourage long term planning. Similarly the additional money announced is at a flat rate rather than an incremental increase over three years, so in reality there will be less money for local authorities each year, making capacity building difficult.

Delays in funding announcements and difficulties with the tendering process have also led to monies only becoming available months into the financial year, which again has made responsible spending difficult for some local authorities and projects.

The relatively small amounts of money allocated by WAG for short breaks and inclusive play, once spread over 22 counties also presents problems for many counties as the sums allocated are so small it is hard to make positive use of them.

One possible solution to this dilemma could also explain WAG's increasing use of pilot projects for a variety of different initiatives. For disabled children and young people these include pilots for transition keyworking and as part of the autism strategy. Such pilots provide much needed resources for innovative work in a number of counties but they also give a misleading impression of the resources allocated to develop this work both locally and nationally. Pilot schemes also obscure and delay discussion of the significant resources needed to fund services properly and beg the question how many pilot schemes end up being rolled out across Wales.

One forthcoming issue will be how WAG will fund any additional duties on Local Authorities to provide short breaks and support disabled children placed out of county under the Children and Young People's Act 2008.

What would you like to see change to make it easier to monitor spend on children and young people?

Difficulties getting accurate figures for spending on disabled children and young people.

In many cases agencies provide services for the whole population, adults and children. In our experience it can often be difficult obtaining separate figures for spending on disabled children and young people. For example spending on Disabled Facilities Grants for families with disabled children/young people or spending on wheelchairs for disabled children and young people under the age of eighteen.

This is not because the figures are not there but more that they are not recorded in a way which makes them easily extrapolated at a later date. It should be possible for the Welsh Assembly Government to require statutory agencies to return data on spending which separates out budgets between adults and children.

Similarly, it would currently be very difficult to provide accurate figures for spending on disabled children and young people in Wales. The Rights Into Action Task Group for Disabled Children and Young People set off with this as one of its first tasks in January 07 but has not yet been able to provide details of budget allocation over three years in areas relevant to disabled children.

This partly reflects the complexity of services supporting disabled children and young people but also the lack of relevant mechanisms for obtaining accurate figures on public expenditure in this area. If services are going to be improved there need to be effective mechanisms in place at a local and national level to provide distinct and accurate figures for spending on disabled children and young people.

To what extent do you think children and young people are taken into account in budget setting and allocation decisions in policy areas not obviously related to them, e.g. transport, housing, planning?

"Young disabled people are continually asked what can be done to make a difference to our lives. We have always said that transport is a huge issue and we have requested that front line staff get disability awareness training. When are the Welsh Assembly Government going to act on this information we provide and make the training mandatory for those front line staff?" Sian (Gwynedd)

Many of the recommendations from the Equality of Opportunity Committee Report "Why is it that disabled young people are always left until last?" 2006 related to wider issues of social exclusion such as transport and housing. However, as mentioned earlier, few of the recommendations accepted by WAG have been reflected in budget setting and allocation decisions since.

One positive example from housing though does highlight what can be achieved if policy and financial planning come together. Partly in response to the Homes Fit For Children campaign, the then Minister for Housing commissioned a review into Disabled Facilities Grants in 2005. One of key recommendations from that review was that the parental means test on DFGs be abolished in Wales with additional resources allocated to meet any additional costs. The Minister accepted these recommendations and the means test was abolished in Sept 2005 with additional resources allocated. Recent research by Shelter Cymru and Contact a Family Wales (2007) has shown how successful and cost effective this policy has been.

Recommendations

Welsh Assembly Government to require statutory agencies to provide separate financial data on spending between adults and children

Welsh Assembly Government to require statutory agencies to provide specific data on spending on disabled children

Welsh Assembly Government to cross reference policies and recommendations to budgetary decisions

Welsh Assembly Government to have a more transparent pre-budgetary process, including a clear means by which the voluntary sector can contribute.