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Welsh Assembly Government Draft Budget Action for Children – Gweithredu dros Blant Response

November 2010

About Action for Children - Gweithredu dros Blant

Action for Children- Gweithredu dros Blant provides services to over 14,000 vulnerable children and young people in Wales. We manage 130 services from over 50 project bases across Wales. Our principle service areas include disability, family support, working with children in foster and residential care and working with young people living in difficult circumstances e.g. those who are homeless, those with mental health problems and those on the edge of care. We manage a number of Flying Start programmes and early years services. As well as running a residential school for young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and those on the autistic spectrum we also operate school counselling services and home/school support services in mainstream schools.

The Welsh Assembly Budget 2011-12

The Welsh Assembly Government's Draft Budget for 2011-12 sets out the spending plans for the next three years from 2011-12 to 2013-14. These plans are based on the settlement announced by the UK Government in October's Spending Review and we fully understand the challenges that that settlement poses for Wales. This submission sets out Action for Children's response to the Draft Budget. At the time of writing local government is considering its allocations and how they will be spent.

Action for Children – Gweithredu dros Blant response

We welcome the commitment by the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that the basic principle of protecting services for the most vulnerable runs throughout this budget. All children and young people are vulnerable to some extent because of their dependence but some are particularly vulnerable as a result of poverty, neglect, disability and/or other factors. Therefore the prioritisation of both universal services (eg free school breakfasts and free school milk) and targeted services (eg Flying Start) is important.

In particular we welcome:-

The Assembly Government's focus on addressing poverty and inequality among children and young people

the protection of early years and Foundation Phase services

the protection of health and social services

the requirement from April 2011 that NHS bodies explicitly address child poverty

the protection of the domestic violence budget as we know the impact violence in the home has on children

the protection of services for post 16 students with Special Educational Needs who will face greater challenges than ever before in finding and maintaining employment

the protection of front line services in general

the focus on achieving efficiencies, savings and more joined up services by greater collaboration and cross boundary working although we are not sure that 'encouragement' has yet secured the necessary step changes

National and local government must make rational choices going forward to ensure that early intervention services are retained and prioritised as these are particularly effective in terms of identifying and meeting emerging needs before they escalate and become acute.

Early Intervention

Early intervention services have the potential to deliver huge efficiencies to the economy and society and would ensure that the best use is made of resources in the long term. We are particularly concerned about the long term cost of losing vital services for vulnerable children and families at a time of deep public spending cuts and would urge the Welsh Assembly Government to recognise explicitly the importance of early intervention services in delivering better outcomes for children and young people. Proactive and preventative services that deliver positive outcomes and support vulnerable children young people and their families offer a real social return on investment as our research with nef (new economics foundation) 'Backing The Future' <http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/uploads/media/36/7857.pdf>

demonstrated.

Where we are seeking further clarity

We will need to see more detail about how specific programmes will be affected and would like a clear steer from WAG on the importance of retaining crucial services and infrastructure for the remainder of 2010/11 when revenue funding will be reduced by 1.3% before increasing in the subsequent 2 years. We are seeking further clarity about:

the nature of the changes to the budget for Flying Start and Cymorth in 2011/12 and the protection of Cymorth services from premature closure by local authorities

the allocation and prioritisation of child adolescent mental health services within the continued prioritised spending on mental health services

the allocation and prioritisation of children's social care within the health and social services budget given that some groups of children who receive these services, eg those who are neglected or abused or those who need to come into care, represent the most vulnerable of all Wales' citizens. We recognise the relatively small population that children constitute demographically and their needs and 'voice' must not be lost amongst the significant adult population of health and social care users.

In conclusion, we welcome the strong emphasis on protecting the most vulnerable children and young people in the context of the Assembly Government having to make deep cuts to public services in Wales. Inevitably the detail of this will be important as will individual local authorities' responses as most of their allocations are not ring fenced.