

Equality of Opportunity Committee

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Service Provision for Disabled Young People Progress Report from the Welsh Assembly Government

Assembly Government Written Statement

Title: The Welsh Assembly Government's progress report on meeting the recommendations of the Equality Opportunity Committee's report on Service Provision for Disabled Young People (January 2007).

Date: 22 May 2008

By: Jane Hutt, Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

In November 2007 I reported on progress in meeting the recommendations of the Equality Opportunity Committee's report on Service Provision for Disabled Young People (January 2007). The second progress report, which is attached, is again set in the context of the Welsh Assembly Government's ongoing commitment to the provision of equal opportunities for all the people of Wales by ensuring policy making and service delivery is firmly focused on the needs of individuals.

I would also refer you to the published written statement of 16 May 2008, on the progress made in addressing the issues raised by the Disabled Children Matter Wales Campaign. These issues are about improving the life chances and equal opportunities of our disabled children and young people. I have set up a Task Group made up of representatives of the campaign and senior Welsh Assembly Government officials to advise Ministers on priorities for funding and delivery of services for disabled children, young people and their families. As well as helping us address the issues raised by the Disabled Children Matter Wales Campaign, it should be noted that the Task group will also have an important role in providing advice on the delivery of other objectives such as the key actions around disabled children and young people from the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services and in implementing the recommendations of the Equality Opportunity Committee's report on Service Provision for Disabled Young People.

General Recommendations

This year the Welsh Assembly Government will be producing a Single Equality Scheme, which will encompass the existing schemes for disability, gender and race and build on these by also addressing age, religion and belief and sexual orientation. We are currently in the midst of consultation on the framework and priorities and I am very keen to obtain views to ensure that we shape our scheme and action plans to tackle those issues which are of concern to the people of Wales, particularly focusing on areas of work that we must join up to get the best outcomes for disabled young people.

We continue to make progress in meeting the recommendations of this policy review. In relation to the important issue of the meaningful participation of young people we have now published guidance for internal use on involving children and young people in the development of our own policies which affect their lives. Divisional link officers across policy areas have been asked to coordinate and support effective practice in involving children and young people in decision making on these issues. As you are already aware, guidance is available for officials on the Intranet and training courses will be available by autumn 2008. In addition, the Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales recently published a series of "Blast off guides" on effective practice for working participatively.

The Participation Consortium and the Participation Unit within Save the Children Cymru have developed a set of National Standards of Participation. These are quality standards that can be used to determine bench marks and provide a means for inspecting and assessing participatory practice. The National Standards are currently being piloted with different groups of children and young people in order to explore how to measure, collect evidence and to implement the standards successfully throughout Wales. Areas within the Youth and Adult Learning Opportunities Division have recently been inspected by young people against these standards in order to achieve the kitemark. It is our intention to roll out this process with the assistance of the Divisional Link Officers so that all relevant policy areas can achieve the minimum standard requirement for involving children and young people in decisions that affect their lives.

Local Participation Strategy guidance was issued in August 2007 and is also available on CD and in versions suitable for children and young people.

This Guidance has been developed by the Welsh Assembly Government working collaboratively with a range of national and local partner organisations and with children and young people, in direct response to concerns expressed by young people from Funky Dragon. It is a key piece of the infrastructure designed to support and drive forward children and young people's participation in Wales.

The guidance which came into force in April 2008, aims to ensure that all children and young people aged 0-25 have opportunities to contribute to and have their voices heard in decision making on issues which impact on them at a local level. It supports guidance on statutory Children and Young People's Plans (CYPPs) "Shared Planning for Better Outcomes", issued in September 2007. Local

authorities are currently consulting on draft CYPPs that cover 2008-2011 and are due to be approved by local authorities by 31 July 2008, and published by 30 September 2008.

CYPPs are powerful plans and as the single strategic plans for all children and young people locally they have to be taken into account by all other plans. Guidance requires local authorities and their partners to focus a greater degree of attention on those who need it if they are to reach their full potential, that is to children and young people who are marginalised, who have particular needs or find it hard to reach services. This provides an important opportunity to ensure that service providers share responsibility, direct their resources effectively towards meeting need and give due priority to the vulnerable.

Planning guidance places considerable emphasis on the importance of Children and Young People's Partnerships involving children and young people and their families in planning thorough effective participation, in the development, monitoring and review of services that affect them. This is supported in the reporting process - paragraph 8.6 of guidance states that "A list of the issues raised by children and young people and families in developing the CYPP and the way the Plan addresses them should be published electronically as supporting documentation."

Education, Training and Employment

As you will recall a Transition External Strategic Reference Group (which comprises representatives of Young People with learning difficulties, Education, Health, Social Services, Further and Higher education, employers organisations as well as Careers Wales and Skills Wales) was established in October 2007 to consider how we might best take forward the recommendations of this review and the Part 3 review of SEN conducted by the former ELLS Committee into transition. The group is making steady progress and meets on a six weekly basis. Four sub-groups of the main Group have now been formed which are considering key aspects around:

Employment and Skills,

Education and Training (including data transfer and funding),

Transition Planning

Key working

Draft action plans are in place for each group which, specifically address both Committees recommendations. The action plans include key outcomes to improve service delivery and will be considered in detail at the forth coming meeting of the main group to be held in June 2008.

Transition Planning Guidance for use by schools, LEAs and other agencies is under consideration by the transition planning sub group who are currently focusing on ensuring young people are given every opportunity to express their views as part of this process and more importantly ensure their views are listened to and acted upon. This has meant a delay in the publication of any consultation report. However, I strongly believe that this work is vital if we are providing guidance to service providers which is fit for purpose and which carries the broadest possible ownership. It is likely that a draft consultation document will issue by the end of the year.

In November 2008, I announced initial funding of £500,000 to provide additional key transition workers to operate across Wales. I can confirm that this funding will continue on an annual basis for the next three years to 2011/2012. In addition I have provided funding of £201,000 over the next three years to Care Co-ordination Network UK who will co-ordinate this work at a National level to ensure consistency of approach and share best practice.

Differentiated information for users with learning difficulties is now ready to be included in the Careers Wales re-launch of the website in August 2008. This will be situated in a separate section of the site entitled 'My Future'. Content will include:

Self awareness

Post 16 options

Independent living issues

Looking for work

People that can provide support

Decision making and transition planning

In addition to the differentiated information there are a range of interactive activities addressing independent living skills, decision making and transition planning.

Having accessed information, users will be able to record their own details and plans in "My Site", an e-portfolio that can be published as a document or website. Users will be able to upload text, photos and video. It is anticipated that this will help users to contribute more fully to the transition planning process and enable them to present information to future providers in their chosen format. All information and activities within this section will be available bilingually.

The revised Personal and Social Education Framework has now been published and will be implemented from September 2008. It is supported by a dedicated website which has also now been launched.

A number of recommendations within the Work Based Learning Improvement Plan (WBLIP) are to be piloted and evaluated prior to national roll out in 2010. As part of these pilots employability learning networks are to be established by January 2008 across two geographical areas in Wales. One pilot will be carried out in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire (the rural pilot) and the second in Swansea, Neath and Port Talbot (the urban pilot). The aim of these networks is to improve the quality and responsiveness of provision to meet labour market demand.

These pilot networks will include representation from local providers and local referral and support agencies. The anticipated outcome of the networks is the improved engagement of disadvantaged groups through the enhancement of the referral process. It is also hoped that through partnership working these networks will be better able to engage with and support the needs of all learners entering the entry level Work Based Learning programme. Improved linkages will also be made with other local programmes such as New Deal and the Careers Gateway programme to ensure that appropriate provision is available to service local needs.

We have also continued to work closely with Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus who monitor access to training and employment opportunities by disabled young people through their Disability Advisory Service and New Deal programmes, in particular the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP). We have particularly worked closely with them in the development, design and delivery of the "Pathways to Work" programme and the joint Welsh Assembly Government/Jobcentre Plus "Want2Work" programme. Both offer supported training and employment opportunities for disabled young people.

To end of September 2007, Want2Work had helped over 1500 people into work, 50% of whom had declared a disability. 400 of those with a disability were under 25 years of age.

Transport

As I indicated in my response to the Committee, the current legislation governing access to public transport for disabled persons rests with the UK Government. The Assembly Government has continued its dialogue with the UK Government to support the implementation of the Statutory Code. There is a commitment to provide accessible public transport for all members of society. The Statutory Code provides general guidance and good practice to bus and train operators on making vehicles more accessible to disabled people. Compliance is a matter for the operators and not the Welsh Assembly Government.

Independent Living

The Guidance for Preparing Local Housing Strategies 2007 states that local authorities should assess the housing requirements of disabled people as part of the development of their local housing strategy. Local housing strategies have now been completed and an initial review has been undertaken by the Assembly Government's Housing Directorate. Initial findings suggest that there are many that do not meet all of the requirements highlighted in the guidance and revisions are still being undertaken prior to being adopted by authorities. Our Housing Directorate will then be in the position to draw Wales wide conclusions on specific aspects of the local housing strategies, including local authorities' planning and provision of housing services for disabled people.

All properties built by Registered Social Landlords (RSL) in Wales are developed to 'Lifetime Home' standards. These provide appropriate access and wide doors, as well as all switches/plugs etc being at a height for wheelchair users to reach with ease. They are also easier to adapt for specific disabilities and the funding for this adaptation comes from the Assembly Government. The funding for adaptations has increased substantially over the last few years, with support for RSL adaptations having doubled to approximately £4m per annum. All bids by local authorities for social housing grant funding to support the development of specific new build accommodation for families with a disabled member were met in full in the recent allocations announced for 2009/10.

Other Issues

I have already briefly mentioned the Task Group, made up of representatives of the Disabled Children Matter Wales Campaign and senior Welsh Assembly Government officials, but I would like to stress the important role that this group will have in providing advice which will help us to achieve not only the objectives of the Disabled Children Matter Wales Campaign, but also in addressing issues which have arisen as a result of other policies and reports, including those highlighted in the Equality Opportunity Committee's report on Service Provision for Disabled Young People (January 2007).

The Task Group has been established for the life of the current Assembly. Thus far it has met on three occasions and I have agreed to meet with campaign representatives before each Task Group meeting to review progress and agree priorities for future action. I will be giving a full progress report in a paper to the Children and Young People Cabinet Committee in June.

Through the Children's NSF, Children and Young People's Partnerships and responsible organisations have begun, where appropriate, to coordinate and consolidate multi agency priority work around improving the delivery of services for children and young people.

Local Children and Young People's Partnerships are required to take account of the findings of their local NSF self assessment in determining their spending priorities for their Children's Plan which must be published next year. Services for disabled children have been identified as a weakness and I expect the Partnerships to tackle them.

The Welsh Assembly Government's vision is to ensure that every child has access to advocacy services. In March 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government announced its plans to introduce a New Service framework for children and young people's advocacy. The framework will include extending access to advocacy by setting up of a national advocacy and advice line for all children and young people from 2009. In addition, from 2009 the Children and Young People Partnerships will commission specialist integrated advocacy services, across health, social services and education. These will provide a one-stop shop for advocacy support, with a particular focus on

providing statutory advocacy and broader support to assist vulnerable children and young people who wish to raise a concern or to make a complaint. Disabled children and young people will be able to access support from these services.

The Accessible Venues Guidance was launched in July 2006. The Assembly Government has now begun phase two of the accessible venues project. Working in consultation with partners including the Wales Disability Reference Group, Disability Wales, the Disability Rights Commission, RNIB Cymru and Wales Council for the Blind, we will support the delivery of an accessible venues database for Wales during 2008.

We will also develop options for a national reward scheme that will recognise venues that go that extra distance in demonstrating best practice in providing accessible facilities and excellent customer service for disabled people. Future work during 2008 will include linking accessible transport routes to venues and to examining options for a reward scheme that recognises excellence in promoting disability equality.

Furthermore, you will recall I announced in December 2007 funding of £225,000 for 2 mobile changing places for use at large events, and 5 adaptations of major cultural venues across Wales. It is envisaged that these facilities will be available by 2009.

Final guidance on Access Statements was issued in November 2007. In addition, my colleague Jane Davidson, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, has this month issued a consultation document on revisions to planning policy Technical Advice Note 12 :Design which encourages the inclusion of accessible 'Changing Places' toilet facilities in plans for new and public commercial buildings.

Conclusion

The progress made to date, allied to the work we are undertaking via the Task Group with the Disabled Children Matter Wales Campaign, demonstrates our ongoing commitment to improving service provision for disabled young people. I am confident that we can make the necessary changes that will impact directly on improved service delivery for young disabled people. Again, I would like thank the EOC for their work which has enabled us to focus on this important area of activity.