

Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Hybrid – Committee room 3 Senedd and video conference via Zoom	Naomi Stocks Committee Clerk
Meeting date: 11 January 2024	0300 200 6565
Meeting time: 09.30	SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

Private pre-meeting

(09.15 – 09.30)

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(09.30)

2 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25 – evidence session 1

(09.30 – 11.00)

(Pages 1 – 61)

Eluned Morgan MS, Minister for Health and Social Services

Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services

Lynne Neagle MS, Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Hywel Jones, Director of Finance, Health and Social Services Group, Welsh Government

Amelia John, Interim Director, Communities and Tackling Poverty, Welsh Government

Albert Heaney, Chief Social Care Officer for Wales, Welsh Government

Irfon Rees, Director of Health and Wellbeing, Welsh Government

Alex Slade, Director of Primary Care and Mental Health, Welsh Government

Attached Documents:

Research Brief

Paper 1 – Welsh Government



3 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from items 4 and 8 of this meeting

(11.00)

4 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25 – consideration of the evidence

(11.00 – 11.10)

Break

(11.05 – 11.10)

5 Residential Outdoor (Wales) Bill – evidence session 4

(11.10 – 12.00)

(Pages 62 – 83)

Chris Parry, President, National Secretary Wales, National Association of Head Teachers Union (NAHT) Cymru

Laura Doel, National Secretary Wales, National Association of Head Teachers Union (NAHT) Cymru

Catherine Falcus, Education and Leadership Policy Officer, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) Cymru

Attached Documents:

Research Brief

Paper – National Association of Head Teachers Union (NAHT) Cymru

6 Residential Outdoor (Wales) Bill – evidence session 5

(12.05 – 13.00)

(Pages 84 – 95)

Mary van den Heuvel, Senior Policy Officer Wales, National Education Union (NEU)

Urtha Felda, Policy and Casework Official, NASUWT

Ioan Rhys Jones, General Secretary, Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

Attached Documents:

Paper – Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

Private Paper

7 Papers to note

(13.00 – 13.05)

7.1 Scrutiny of the Children's Commissioner for Wales

(Pages 96 – 97)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee to the Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

7.2 Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners

(Page 98)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

7.3 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 99 – 100)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee to the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

7.4 Information from Stakeholders

(Page 101)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Welsh Youth Parliament

7.5 Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

(Pages 102 – 109)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education
Committee to the Deputy Minister for Social Services

7.6 General scrutiny of the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

(Pages 110 – 113)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education
Committee to the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

7.7 Welsh Government White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales

(Pages 114 – 115)

Attached Documents:

Additional information from Llamau

7.8 P-06-1359 Offer Welsh working parents the same financial support for childcare as England & Petition P-06-1362 Match the new childcare offer in England of 15 hours for 2 year old's from April 2024

(Pages 116 – 117)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Petitions Committee

7.9 Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

(Pages 118 – 119)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education
Committee to the Deputy Minister for Social Services

7.10 Scrutiny session with Social Care Wales

(Pages 120 – 122)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education
Committee to the Chief Executive of Social Care Wales

7.11 Care Inspectorate Wales: Annual Scrutiny

(Pages 123 – 124)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education
Committee to the Chief Inspector of Care Inspectorate Wales

7.12 Scrutiny sessions with Social Care Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales

(Pages 125 – 126)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education
Committee to the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee

7.13 Child Poverty

(Pages 127 – 133)

Attached Documents:

Welsh Government response to the Equality and Social Justice Committee's
report on Child Poverty

7.14 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 134 – 135)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education
Committee to the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

7.15 Mental Health support in Higher Education

(Pages 136 – 139)

Attached Documents:

Joint letter from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

7.16 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?

(Pages 140 – 153)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Minister for Climate Change

7.17 Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

(Pages 154 – 163)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Deputy Minister for Social Services

7.18 Childcare and parental employment

(Pages 164 – 166)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Equality and Social Justice Committee

8 Residential Outdoor (Wales) Bill – consideration of the evidence

(13.00 – 13.15)

Document is Restricted

Information to inform scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2024-25 by Children, Young People and Education Committee

Contents

1. Allocations for children and young people.....	2
2. Impact Assessments.....	5
3. Programme for Government	10
4. Sustainable Social Services Grant Scheme.....	18
5. Care Experienced Children Change Fund	22
6. Children’s Social Care Workforce	23
7. Children’s Health.....	25
8. Cost of living	33
9 . Costs of legislation.....	35

1. Allocations for children and young people

Request 1

Allocations in the Health MEG by Action, and Budget Expenditure Line (as directly relevant to children and young people):

- Draft Budget 2024-25
- Final Budget 2023-24 allocations
- 2023-24 First Supplementary Budget
- Forecast 2023-24 out-turns
- 2025-26 indicative budget (if set)

A description of any changes to baselines used in the Draft Budget 2024-25 from the First Supplementary budget June 2023.

Response

Budget Expenditure Line	2023-24 Final Budget	2023-24 First Supplementary Budget	2023-24 Forecast Outturn P8	2024-25 Draft Budget
	£m	£m	£m	£m
A Healthier Wales – (Early Years) – BEL 0060	7.200	7.200	6.493	6.850
Support for Childcare and Play – BEL 310	100.951	99.727	88.404	82.378*
Support for Children’s Rights – BEL 311	1.020	1.020	0.920	1.020
Supporting Children – BEL 410	3.865	3.865	3.883	3.865
Supporting Families and Children – BEL 1085	11.710	11.710	5.465	5.960*
Children and Communities Grant – BEL 1087	171.045	172.269	171.861	174.583*
CAFCASS Cymru – BEL 1268	15.195	15.195	15.195	15.873
TOTAL	310.986	310.986	292.221	290.529

**Note – elements of budget is moving from BEL 310 and BEL 1085 into BEL 1087 in 24-25 as grants move into the main Children and Communities Grant.*

A Healthier Wales – (Early Years) – BEL 0060

£0.350m budget reduction

A proportionate reduction was made to this BEL as part of the budget review and reprioritisation exercise carried out in the HSS MEG for 2024-25. Impacts were considered and discussed with Ministers. This will also apply below where 'budget reductions' are referenced.

Support for Childcare and Play – BEL 310

A £14.7m budget reduction from the 2024-25 indicative budget of £99.151m and a budget transfer of £2.073m, within the MEG, to BEL 1087 - Children & Communities Grant. There is also a budget transfer included for 1st Supplementary 2023-24 of £1.224m moving to the CCG non recurrently.

The budget reduction was made from the main Childcare Offer budget line £11.2m, the Early Years Pathfinder budget line £3m and the CIW / SCW and Workforce budget £0.5m

Support for Children's Rights – BEL 311

No changes

Supporting Children – Bel 410

No changes

Supporting Families and Children – BEL 1085

A £4m budget reduction and a budget move of £1.1m, within the MEG, to BEL 1087 - Children & Communities Grant.

The £4m budget reduction is, £3.5m from Baby Bundles and £0.5m from the Children & Families Communication budget.

Children and Communities Grant – BEL 1087

A reduction of £7.085m from the indicative 2024-25 Children and Communities Grant (CCG) budget allocation of £178.495m

A budget transfer between BELs of £3.173m, from within the MEG, from BELs 310 and 1085, with grants being added to the bigger CCG brings the total 2024-25 budget to £174.583m.

CAFCASS Cymru – BEL 1268

A budget increase of £0.678m which relates to the baseline adjustment for the 2023-24 pay award for CAFCASS staff.

2. Impact Assessments

Request 2

- **Combined CRIA across all portfolios:** The overall Child's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) undertaken to inform allocations in the draft Budget 2024-25.
- **CRIA for Health and Social Services MEG:** The CRIA for the Health and Social Services MEG for 2024-25.
- **Other impacts:** Details and/or examples of any changes made to allocations within the Health and Social Services MEG following considerations of equalities, sustainability, the Welsh language, and the Wellbeing of Future Generations.

Response

The Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment published as part of the 2024-25 Draft Budget gives due consideration to the United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child. The integrated approach underpinning the SIIA enables us to better understand the intersectional and unintended impacts of spending decisions and to maximise the impact of available funding, reducing the disproportionate effect on any one specific group or area. To consider an area of impact in isolation risks unintended consequences such as the negative impact in one area being driven by a positive impact in another.

This is vital to demonstrate that the Welsh Government is meeting the requirements of the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure. Publishing a CRIA is in line with the arrangements the Welsh Government itself has put in place, which has established the CRIA as 'the agreed' mechanism to support Ministers to meet the duties under that Measure in both the Children's Rights Scheme itself and the associated Children's Rights Scheme: manual for Welsh Government staff.

The stark reality of the extraordinary financial circumstances we are facing has necessitated a more fundamental approach. We have re-shaped the indicative spending allocations within our budget to provide extra funding and protection for the

services which matter most to people and communities across Wales – the NHS and the core local government settlement, which funds schools, social services and social care and other everyday services. We have done so in line with our principles to:

- Protect core, frontline public services as far as possible.
- Deliver the greatest benefit to households which are hardest hit.
- Prioritise jobs, wherever possible.
- Work in partnership with other public sector bodies to face this financial storm together.
- Re-focus funding away from non-devolved areas, which the UK Government should be funding.

We have taken this approach to ensure we continue to focus funding where it can have the most positive impact in the circumstances, and taking action to ensure we mitigate direct impacts to people and places, as far as possible. Spending more in some areas means there is less to spend in other areas. Where hard decisions have been required, we have sought to identify those areas where the relative impacts are lesser than their alternatives, and we have sought to take action to mitigate impacts as far as possible. Given the circumstances, it has not been possible to avoid negative impacts in all cases.

Further details are contained within the Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment, Annex A in the link below:

[Draft Budget 2024-2025 narrative \(gov.wales\)](#)

Health & Social Services MEG

It is important to note that over £10.5 billion (93% of the HSS MEG) is allocated on direct funding to the NHS, with many other budgets lines also supporting NHS services. Following publication of the draft budget for 2024-25, Health Boards have been issued their budget allocation and are required to submit their plans for 2024-25, living within available budgets. All decisions by health boards will be subject to quality impact assessments, balance of risk judgements and potential consultations, if decisions impact on service change. Each health board will face different

challenges in terms of their local population's needs and the configuration of services. Actions taken to manage cost pressures will vary according to each organisation and will be subject to local determination.

The vision under *A Healthier Wales* is to place a greater focus on prevention and early intervention, which we continue to support through universal, as well as more targeted support. This includes information, advice and support for parents through Parenting. *Give it Time* which has been expanded to support parents of children aged 0-18; ongoing support for speech, language and communication (SLC) through the *Talk with me* SLC plan and campaign; and further investment to reduce or mitigate the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Within the HSS MEG allocation, funding will be allocated to support our Programme for Government commitment on Early Years and Childcare.

Our support for the early years, childcare and play contributes to all of the well-being goals, and specifically to those relating to a prosperous and healthier Wales. Investment in quality childcare and play can help young children develop into healthy, active adults. It develops their cognitive and social and emotional wellbeing and mitigates the harmful effects of adverse childhood experiences. Childcare can also enable parents to work and train and lifts families out of poverty.

Our Childcare Offer specifically supports the Welsh Government's well-being objectives, in particular to:

- Support people and businesses to drive prosperity.
- Promote good health and well-being for everyone.
- Support young people to make the most of their potential.
- Build ambition and encourage learning for life.

We have continued to frame our budget allocations in line with preventative activities, focussing on positive interventions that protect and build on existing foundations, including our commitment to children's rights. This is evidenced, for example, by our continued investment in the work of Public Health Wales; our

ongoing investment in key prevention services such as immunisation programmes for children; and broader health promotion activity for children and young people as outlined in section 7 below. However, we have had to reduce budgets which will impact on children, as explained in the examples below.

Early years, childcare, and play, including the Childcare Offer and Workforce

The Childcare Offer for Wales is demand led and there is £2.5m allocated as an Additional Support Grant. Reductions in the budget for 2024-25 have been made modelled on take up in 2023-24. Given the demand-led nature of the programme, additional budget will be allocated if necessary.

Early Years Integration Transformation Programme

The Early Years Integration Transformation Programme is focussed on developing a more joined-up, responsive early years system that puts the unique needs of each child at its heart, which covers the period of life from pre-birth to the end of the Foundation Phase (0-7).

We have been working with PSBs across Wales to explore how to deliver early years services in a more systematic way, applying the lessons from our existing programmes such as Flying Start and Families First.

The majority of the PSBs have engaged in the programme as pathfinders testing the core components for an early years system and piloting different multi-agency delivery models and approaches, building on what works well in existing programmes such as Flying Start and Families First.

This funding will now cease in March 2024, resulting in the programme ending 1 year earlier than anticipated.

As a pilot programme, it was always envisaged that the programme would be time-limited with conclusion planned for the end of 2024-25. Whilst ending the programme earlier than anticipated, we will work closely with PSBs to identify the most appropriate non-financial support to enable them to embed the learning as part of their business-as-usual model.

Bwndel Babi Programme

The Programme intended to offer support to approximately 26,000 new and expectant parents. With reduced budget, the Programme will need to be targeted on a smaller geographical basis such as Flying Start and/or Bwndel contents removed to reduce costs. If delivered within Flying Start areas, approximately 8,000 new and expectant parents could be supported.

The reduction in budget will mean that some families, at risk of or experiencing poverty living outside of the targeted area, will not benefit from the support offered through the Programme.

3. Programme for Government

Request 3

Allocations in the Draft Budget 2024-25 and the latest position on funding for:

3.1 - PfG Commitment: Advocacy services for parents whose children are at risk of coming into care.

Allocations for the roll out of support for parents whose children are on the edge of care, which is to be delivered in accordance with a national framework.

Response

Funding of £506,000 has been allocated from the Looked After Children Change Fund in 2024-25 for the roll out of independent, professional advocacy support for parents whose children are on the edge of care, with the aim of reducing the numbers of children entering the care system in Wales. The total funding allocated to this commitment across the four years 2022/23-2025/26 is £1,606,400.

3.2 - PfG Commitment: Fund regional residential services for children with complex needs.

Allocations for 2024-25 for the Regional Partnership Boards for the 8 projects which are now operational (and how many additional placements this funds).

Allocations for delivery of any new projects (and how many additional new placements this funds).

Response

Since the publication of the Programme for Government annual report in July this year an additional 7 regional projects have become operational. The total number of projects now operational is 15 providing 26 beds for children with complex needs. The projects are funded through different funding streams including the Regional Integration Fund as well as core funding. Information on the total funding allocations for the projects is not therefore held centrally.

3.3 - PfG Commitment: Eliminating private profit from the care of children looked after.

An annual breakdown of how the commitment to spend £68m is broken down by total over the three years 2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25.

- **Final outturns for 2022-23** / breakdown of who that was allocated to and for what purpose (by local authority and third sector).
- **Forecast outturns for 2023-24** / breakdown of who that was allocated to and for what purpose (by local authority and third sector).
- **Detailed planned allocations for 2024-25** (or the process by which that will be decided).

Response

Annual Breakdown of £68m

2022/23	£13m
<u>2023/24</u>	£26m
<u>2024/25</u>	£29m

In 2022-23 local authorities were asked to submit 3-year bids for funding (2022/23-2024/25) to support them to deliver the commitment to eliminate profit and help them reduce the number of children in care and support children who are looked after and their families.

These bids were assessed by officials and used to determine the allocation of the £68m over the three years to local authorities in Wales. The bids were clearly focused on building in-house or not-for-profit residential and foster care provision, on moving children out of residential care back into a family setting, on providing locally based and designed services, including specialist provision for children with more complex needs and above all improving outcomes for children. Some examples of the types of proposals received are:

- Better support for foster carers, including the development of specialist support services.
- Enhancing the range of foster care options for children.
- Increased recruitment and assessment of local authority foster carers.
- Step Down foster placements.
- Building in-house residential care provision and resilience, including upskilling of local authority staff and practitioners.
- Developing in-house short breaks respite services.
- Converting Placements with Parents to Special Guardianship Orders.
- Development/Expansion of Crisis Support Teams.
- Discharge of Care Orders.

In 2022-23 the allocated funding was fully spent on these activities to support the Welsh Government's commitment to eliminate profit. It is forecast that funding will once again be fully utilised in 2023-24.

3.4 - PfG Commitment: Specialist support for children with complex needs who may be on the edge of care.

Details of the 32 projects so far identified by Regional Partnership Boards cover the whole of Wales and how these are funded by the Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund as detailed in the most recent PfG Annual Report.

Response

For our Regional Partnership Boards, the first year (2022-23) of the Regional Integration Fund (RIF) was one of transition, as we amalgamate previously separate funding streams to create greater alignment of resources, so that we maximise impact and reduce administrative burden. As a result, many of the original 32 projects have now been amalgamated into the 20 programmes of work listed. Whilst this may appear to be a reduction in projects, the overall investment level in year 2 (2023-24) has remained close to that of year 1 of the RIF.

The RIF funding goes to each of the 7 Local Health Boards who act as the 'bankers' for the RPBs: partners draw this funding down as and when necessary, with quarterly finance returns and meetings in place to discuss in year progress against plan. It is therefore not possible to project the exact allocation regions will put towards the relevant model of care in year 3 (2024-25) however we would not expect any major changes at this point.

Under the Model of care 'Supporting families to stay together safely, and therapeutic support for care experienced children', the total projected 2023-4 allocation by year end is £18,243,533, which we anticipate will be broadly similar for 2024-25. The allocation is divided as follows:

Cardiff & The Vale £2,084,429

- Right support, right time, right person
- CYP with complex needs – community

Cwm Taf Morgannwg £802,796

- Choice Project.
- MAPSS Therapeutic Support service.
- Systemic Change Model.

Gwent £1,474,163

- Children's Emotional Health & Development.
- Children's Early Intervention & Resilience.

North Wales £9,867,139

- Early intervention.
- Repatriation & prevention services.
- Building Family resilience to prevent escalation.
- Intensive residential support for children with complex needs.
- Specialist support for children with complex / specialist needs.
- Intensive support teams for children with complex needs.

Powys £610,000

- Edge of care.

West Glamorgan £1,894,177

- New Therapeutic Service.
- Working Together Regional.
- Post adoption – Regional.

West Wales £1,510,829

- Step up / Step down.
- Edge of Care.
- Complex Needs.

3.5 - PfG Commitment: Fund childcare for more families where parents are in education and training or on the edge of work.

Overall allocations for the Childcare Offer in 2024-25.

The cost in 2023-24 of the additional 438 families and the total costs allocated in 2024-25 for the estimated 3,000 more eligible families as referred to in the most recent PfG Annual Report.

Response

In 2024-25 over £76m is being allocated to the Childcare Offer for Wales programme. This includes the Childcare Offer Main grant, LA Administration Grant, the Childcare Offer Additional Support Grant, and digital and internal programme costs. This represents a reduction of approximately £11m from the 2023-24 budget.

By the end of the academic year 22/23, 675 additional families were supported because of the expansion of the Offer to include eligible parents in education/training. Parents in education and training are being funded within the Childcare Offer main grant. Due to the way the data and monitoring information is

being developed under the National Digital System; it is not currently possible to disaggregate these costs from the total Childcare Offer grant.

With current take-up rates reflecting around 55% of eligible parents, the allocated budget allows for the Welsh Government to meet all existing obligations and continue to promote take-up, encouraging more eligible parents to use the support available to them.

3.6 - PfG Commitment: Phased expansion of early years provision to include all 2-year-olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh medium provision.

Allocations and what they are intended to deliver in 2024-25.

Information on whether it will be a full 30 hour offer for all 2-year-olds, and by when this will be delivered.

Response

Childcare is a key priority for the Welsh Government, and our ambition is to offer childcare and early years provision to all two-year olds in Wales.

The Programme for Government commits to deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all 2-year-olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh medium provision. This is being delivered through the Flying Start programme which offers of 12.5 hours of government-funded, high-quality childcare per week for 39 weeks of the year, our ambition is for this to be offered universally to all 2-year-olds. Further information on the 2024-25 allocation for Flying Start is provided in response to 3.7 below.

The Childcare Offer for Wales provides 30 hours of government-funded early education and childcare for up to 48 weeks of the year for eligible parents in education/training and working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds in Wales. Flying Start and the Childcare Offer are separate but interlinked programmes.

With regards to Flying Start childcare, as part of our Cooperation Agreement with Plaid Cymru, we have committed to the expansion of early years provision for all 2-year-olds across Wales.

The current phase of the expansion programme began in April 2023 and is focussing specifically on expansion of Flying Start childcare to more 2-year-olds.

Focusing resources on our most disadvantaged communities, in the first instance, ensures that support reaches families in greatest need at the earliest opportunity.

3.7 - PFG Commitment: Flying Start

Revenue and capital

Response

Flying Start - Revenue

The Flying Start budget is part of the Children and Communities Grant (CCG). The Children and Communities Grant supports local authorities to consider how to deliver the services they provide more strategically. Flexibility within this grant can support and promote joint planning and commissioning to make more effective use of the funding in pursuit of the constituent programmes' aims and objectives.

The Children and Communities Grant addresses the needs of the most disadvantaged and/or vulnerable children, young people and adults in our society through a range of early intervention, prevention and support mechanisms.

The programmes within this grant aim to mitigate or remove disadvantage to disadvantaged and/or vulnerable people to enable them to have the same life chances as others and contribute to a more equal Wales.

The budget for the CCG in 2024-25 is £174.583m. Of this, £142,028m is Flexible Funding covering eight programmes, including core Flying Start.

In 2024-25 we will be investing £32.555m in Flying Start Expansion of which £24.3m is to support more than 5,200 additional children to access high quality Flying Start

childcare to support long-term, positive impacts on the lives of those children and families across Wales facing the greatest challenges.

Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme

The Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme was implemented in October 2022 and is available until March 2025 with a total budget allocation of £70m.

The programme supports both Flying Start and the Childcare Offer and aims to improve and grow new and existing childcare provisions.

The budget is split into two distinct funding streams: small grants funding and major capital funding. Budget allocations available for FY 2024-25 will be £10m for small grants funding with all CIW registered childcare and play providers eligible to apply via their local authority's administration process. The small grants element is used to support projects and items up to the value of £20,000 and the ceiling amount per project is based on the number of CIW childcare places within the setting.

A budget allocation of £15m for 2024-25 will be available for major capital projects for proposals of up to £20,000 and ranges from small refurbishment works through to the introduction of extensions and standalone buildings for childcare provisions. The funding is accessible to CIW registered providers, and local authorities are required to submit a business justification case to apply for capital funding via the CC&EY capital team.

4. Sustainable Social Services Grant Scheme

Request 4

The total amount for the Scheme and a breakdown of all grants relevant to children and young people.

Response

The total value of funding through the Sustainable Social Services Grant Scheme in 2024-25 is £9,299,209, of which £2,912,428 relates to grants relevant to children and young people.

The breakdown of these grants is as follows:

Action for Children	Skills PLUS (Skills+): Skills+ is a service for Care-Experienced Young People (CEYP) aged 14-24. The project will deliver bespoke Pathways that support CEYP's transition to adulthood, through a range of interlinked interventions designed specifically to reduce their vulnerabilities and equip them with the resilience, skills/tools to help them to cope positively with the challenges of independent living.	£599,747
Cyfannol Women's Aid	Ar Trac: Ar Trac will support children and young people who have experienced or witnesses domestic abuse, and who are exhibiting difficulties with their family and peer relationships. By addressing these difficulties and building upon strengths within childhood, Ar Trac aims to minimise the impact of the adverse childhood experiences associated with domestic abuse and	£619,762

	<p>improve physical and mental well-being later in life.</p> <p>The project is delivered by locally based domestic abuse agencies who have a wealth of experience and understanding of their local communities, and will be able to shape the project locally to better meet the needs of children and young people.</p>	
<p>Ethnic Youth Support Team Wales</p>	<p>Supporting BME Children & Young People in Wales: The service aims to improve the wellbeing outcomes of BME Children and Young People with social care needs, through a race-, faith- and culture-sensitive, person-centred and rights-based support service, building on and connecting to EYST's work with BME Children and Young People in Swansea.</p> <p>The services is a referral-based service for BME Children and Young People aged 0-25 with 'additional' or 'multiple' support needs, working directly with them through early intervention and prevention to achieve specific wellbeing outcomes: securing rights and entitlements, improving physical and mental health, supporting transition to independent adulthood, and protecting from abuse and neglect.</p>	<p>£138,552</p>
<p>Lucy Faithfull Foundation</p>	<p>Keeping Children Safe from Sexual Abuse - public education, training and resources to improve the ability of parents, carers, and those who work with children and families to prevent sexual harm and take appropriate action if they have a concern</p>	<p>£97,152</p>

Lucy Faithfull Foundation	Early intervention for vulnerable or at-risk families: a child sexual abuse and exploitation early action and prevention project: Keeping children safe from sexual abuse – public education, training and resources to improve the ability of parents, carers, and those who work with children and families to prevent sexual harm and take appropriate action if they have a concern	£94,612
National Youth Advocacy Service	Parent Advocacy Programme: To support Welsh Government's plans for providing family intervention support with the aim of reducing numbers of children entering the care system in Wales. The project's key aim is preventative intervention whilst ensuring the rights of the child are fully upheld.	£297,399
National Youth Advocacy Service	Project Unity: To break the cycle of children of care-experienced mothers being taken into care and the prevention of children becoming subject to child protection processes. By providing intensive wraparound support and building peer support networks.	£343,707
Platform (formally - Gofal)	Young People's Project 13-16yrs: Platform's Young People's Project, in collaboration with Vibe Youth and Barod, will provide a safe space for young people aged 13-16 years to pause, breathe and connect. Through the provision of a twelve-week wellbeing programme, peer support and one-to-one support, young people will be given the opportunity to explore what mental health and wellbeing means to them. Young people will have the opportunity to meet others facing similar challenges, share stories of recovery and	£362,397

	<p>everyday strategies for wellbeing. The project will provide the opportunity for young people to train to become peer mentors and will give young people a platform to shape the direction of the project.</p>	
<p>The Fostering Network</p>	<p>Fostering Communities: Fostering Communities is a whole systems approach to supporting looked after children and their foster families, throughout Wales. At its heart is a ground-breaking, co-production model, facilitating a shared power approach to programme design, delivery and evaluation. The project will empower the fostering community to improve wellbeing outcomes for looked after children and young people within the national wellbeing framework</p>	<p>£279,429</p>
<p>Whizz-Kidz</p>	<p>Moving On: To increase life satisfaction and happiness of young wheelchair users in Wales through sports and movement based skills programmes in health and education settings.</p>	<p>£79,671</p>

5. Care Experienced Children Change Fund

Request 5

The total amount for the Fund and a breakdown of all allocations.

Response

Project	Allocation for 2024/25 - £3,820,853
National Adoption Service	£669,492
Foster Wales	£2,074,999
Step Up Step Down	£301,300
Fostering Wellbeing	£269,062
Parental Advocacy	£506,000
Total	£3,820,853

6. Children's Social Care Workforce

Request 6

Any allocations associated with supporting local authorities to address the instability of the workforce in children's social care, such as vacancy rates and the use of agency staff, identified both in our [Report on Radical Reform for Care Experienced Children](#) and the recent [Care Inspectorate Wales rapid review of child protection arrangements](#) September 2023

Response

As a government we are focusing on creating a firm foundation on which we can build our social care workforce.

Our significant funding through Social Care Wales aims to lead and support improvement in social care through recruitment and retention of a quality and professional workforce. Areas of work with allocated funding that relate to children's social care include:

£10 million over three years investment in the social worker bursary to make the social work degree financially attainable and an attractive career. The social worker bursary has seen an increase in take up in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23. We are confident that the increased offer of support has helped draw more students into taking up social work as a career, and that this will continue in 2024-25.

The Social Care Wales Workforce Development Programme (SCWWDP). This allocation of grant is available to support local authorities and offers opportunities to fund excellent programmes such as the 'grow your own scheme' which supports paid employment and funded social work training. Take up for this scheme has increased each year and SCW is also estimating an increase in "grow your own" students for the 2023-24 academic year.

Social Care Wales funding is being provided to the WLGA to carry out a piece of work focusing on terms and conditions for social workers including national

approaches. This is to support and attract individuals into the profession and to reduce the movement of qualified staff between local authorities due to variations in terms and conditions.

In recognition of the important role that local authorities play in delivering core social services, the Welsh Government has provided recurrent funding to the sector in the form of a Workforce and Sustainable Social Services grant. The criteria for the use of the grant have been broadly set. Local authorities have been able to use the funding to support increases to pay, but also for other interventions aimed at supporting the delivery of sustainable social care services to ensure that they were better placed to meet increased or unexpected demand. The allocation to local authorities for 2024-25 is £34.4 million.

These positive programmes of work come with the realism that it will take time to feel the impact within the workforce, but this is promising for the future of children's social care.

7. Children's Health

Request 7

Allocations in the Draft Budget 2024-25 and the latest position on funding for:

- Public health as it relates to children and young people, including vaccination.
- Obesity strategy.
- Mental health services, including child and adolescent mental health services, and services to support perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships.
- Eating disorder services.
- Suicide prevention as it relates to children and young people.
- Substance misuse, including vaping among children and young people.
- Neurodevelopmental services.

Response

Neurodivergence services (Autism services)

Through our Neurodivergence Improvement Programme we continue to prioritise improvements in neurodivergence services, including children's neurodevelopmental services. I announced an additional £12m funding over three years up to March 2025, £6M is available in 2024-25. Through the improvement programme we have provided clear guidance to Regional Partnership Boards on the required transformational change.

Whilst the improvement programme monies are bringing additional capacity to health led diagnostic services, RPBs have been encouraged to invest in new and innovative pilot projects to provide families with information, advice and early intervention prior to referral for diagnosis. A range of projects are being piloted in different areas across Wales. The following are examples of current pilots:

- Cardiff & The Vale are piloting the role of Community Connectors to signpost and connect families of young children to local support services prior to or whilst waiting for a diagnostic assessment.

- Neath & Port Talbot council sought to employ an assistant Education Psychologist to deliver parent/carer community drop-in sessions one day a week within all communities across NPT.
- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board are piloting innovation with prescribing models of ADHD medication for children given the current rise in demand to avoid long waits. The aim is to shorten the diagnostic process and complete assessment and consideration of medication in the same day. In BCUHB they are also developing a pathway for parent/carers and professionals to access advice, consultation, and support prior to referring for an assessment or at the point of referral.

We look forward to the progression of this innovation in order to learn and adopt any emerging best practice on a wider scale.

The focus of 2024-25 will be to learn from these local early pilots and scale up successful projects to a national model of service delivery. We have established a Childrens Neurodevelopmental Community of Practice and Steering Group through which we can share best practice. We have already been able to showcase the work of Hwyl Dda and their referral pathway for Tourette's Syndrome. We were also pleased that Aneurin Bevan and Carers Voices Wales presented their NHS Wales award winning work on co-production and re-designing their neurodevelopmental pathway. Case studies of this work will be available and shared across services for further learning.

All regions are tackling waiting lists and creating opportunities for early intervention by reviewing referral pathways. This work is supported by the NHS Executive Performance & Assurance Team who have completed a significant piece of work to understand the barriers and challenges to reducing waiting times. The implementation of their recommendations in the New Year will drive forward service improvement in 2024-25. Regions will be able to re-shape existing services or develop new services based on these recommendations.

We will separately continue to support and develop the successful Integrated Autism Service and the National Neurodivergence Team which is supporting delivery of our improvement aims. The National Neurodivergence Team have established a Family Support ND Development Officer post specifically to develop additional resources for families of neurodivergent children.

Alongside all of this we will be working with RPBs to implement the findings of the review of the implementation of the Autism Code of Practice to further strengthen service delivery and ensure compliance with duties. A final and second phase of the evaluation to ensure improved compliance at a regional level will commence in the summer of 2024.

Mental Health

We will continue to ringfence mental health funding for NHS and the draft budget includes £800m for this. This budget is supporting services across the age range, including child and adolescent mental health services.

We are also investing £2.2m annually in the NHS Executive to develop a Strategic Programme for Mental Health and a Patient Safety Programme. This will provide dedicated resource to NHS Wales to drive improvements in performance, quality and safety and will include a focus on children and young people through a Clinical Network. This work will continue to support health boards to meet waiting time standards on a sustainable basis and to reduce variation through a CAMHS services specification.

We will be publishing our draft mental health strategy early in the new year, the timing of which is enabling us to have greater clarity on our 2024-25 budgets and provides us with an opportunity to reflect on new commitments, cross-Government and multi-sectoral commitments that underpin our strategies to ensure they remain deliverable in the challenging financial circumstances.

We have developed the strategy with the understanding that there will need to be a way of setting priorities, ensuring best use of existing resources and an opportunity to be clear about what can realistically be delivered. This has included consideration

of improving access to mental health services and includes a focus on supporting perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships. The published strategy will be accompanied by a costed delivery plan which over the life of the strategy will be renewed and refreshed. This will provide the opportunity to provide further detail on the required work to support the strategy and to identify new investments should the economic position change.

In this period of financial constraint, we have worked hard to support continued investment in mental health, and we continue to prioritise mental health as an area that requires this investment and as such no reduction has been made to health board allocations.

Substance Misuse

As part of the Draft Budget for 2024-25, we will continue to invest in our substance misuse agenda totalling £69million, of which over £41million goes to our Area Planning Boards (APBs) through our Substance Misuse Action Fund.

Through the APB Substance Misuse Action Fund the Welsh Government invests £5.25million ring-fenced money for children and young people. Recognising the rise in demand for support, **in 2024-25 this budget will rise by a further £1million to £6.25million.**

The Welsh Government will soon publish a Substance Misuse Treatment Framework (SMTF) for Children and Young People (expected early 2024). The SMTF summarises evidence and best practice to guide those supporting Children and Young People with substance misuse issues. We will also publish child friendly versions of the SMTF.

Out of Work Service

Building on the success and lessons from the European funded Out of Work Service 2016-2022, the Welsh Government are funding a successor Out of Work Service to help people recovering from substance misuse and/or mental ill-health. The primary objective of the service is to support participants towards and into employment

(participants aged 25 or older) or into education, training or employment (NEET participants aged 16-24). The new service commenced in October 2022 and over 900 young people aged 16-24 have enrolled and been supported by the service at September 2023.

The budget for the delivery of the service to March 2025 will be over £13million (£2.64million in 2022-23 and £5.4million in both 2023-24 and 2024-25) and aims to support up to 10,000 people including 3,000 young people across Wales.

The Out of Work Service will deliver against a number of Welsh Government strategic commitments in respect to supporting people with substance misuse and/or mental health conditions, not only through structured treatment and healthcare, but also through a range of other measures. This is set out in a range of Welsh Government key strategies including Stronger, Fairer, Greener Wales – a Plan for Employability and Skills and to Delivering the Young Person’s Guarantee.

Vaping

In July 2022, we published our new Tobacco strategy *A smoke-free Wales* where we set out our ambition for Wales to become smoke-free by 2030. It set out three themes through which we will drive our actions, one of these is Future Generations. *Towards a Smoke-free Wales 2022-2024* is the first two-year delivery plan which sets out our actions which will work towards and contribute to achieving this vision. Our plans will support everyone in Wales to live in a society where smoke-free is the norm.

In taking forward our tobacco control strategy, *A Smoke-free Wales*, we have made it clear that we intend to work closely with those affected by tobacco, including young people, to understand their motivations for smoking or for using e-cigarettes and what interventions and communications methods will work, for example in education settings. Whilst there is evidence that vaping is less harmful than smoking tobacco and can be used as a smoking cessation tool, our message is clear. If you don’t vape, don’t start.

The UK Government announced their new policy priorities on tobacco and vaping devices in April 2023. This included the launch of a call for evidence on youth vaping to identify opportunities to reduce the number of children accessing and using vape products – and explore where government can go further. On 4 October 2023, the Prime Minister made an announcement to address the harms caused by smoking and to curb the rise in youth vaping. The policy proposals they announced covered a change to law to increase the age of sale so that children turning 14 or younger this year will never be able to be legally sold cigarettes. Also, to curb the rise in youth vaping by consulting on measures to reduce the appeal and availability of vapes to children.

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill was formally announced in the King's Speech during the state opening of Parliament on 7th November 2023. The consultation on 'Creating a smokefree generation and tackling youth vaping' closed on December 7th with over 25,000 responses, officials are working closely with UK Government to analyse the responses. We expect the response to the consultation to be published by 18th January 2024.

Flying Start

All children and families eligible for Flying Start should receive their programme of health visiting and other health services delivered by the programme from the Flying Start health team.

The Flying Start health programme sets down an enhanced programme of interventions which should be delivered to all Flying Start families. A family receiving Flying Start health services can expect as many as 7 additional 'contacts' from their health visitor. The promotion of key public health messages and of healthy lifestyles is a key part of the additional Flying Start health support offered by health visitors and the wider workforce.

Public Health

There are a range of health improvement strategies that support the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Wales, including our Healthy Weight Healthy Wales (HWHW) and Tobacco Control Strategies. Both take specific actions

in relation to children and young people, including support Children and Family pilots through HWHW, supporting the School Health Research Network and taking action to reduce smoking during pregnancy and take action to reduce the numbers of young people vaping and smoking.

Public Health Wales's (PHW) core purpose is to support improved health and wellbeing, reduce health inequalities and increase healthy life expectancy for everyone in Wales, now and for future generations. This includes work in supporting young people, whether that be through supporting vaccination and child measurement programmes, or the Network of Health Promoting Schools. This is part of their core budget allocation for 2024-25.

Vaccination

All children and young people in Wales receive vaccinations as part of the routine schedule. Funding for this programme sits within health boards core allocations and the implementation of the schedule is the responsibility of health boards.

School Health Research Network

We continue to invest in the School Health Research network (SHRN). In 2021/22, 202 (95%) schools participated in the secondary Student Health and Wellbeing Survey, an increase from 198 in 2019/20. In total, 123,204 students in years 7 to 11 completed (a 75% response rate), which is the largest response to the survey to date.

In 2022-23, SHRN piloted expansion to primary schools with the first Student Health and Wellbeing Survey being undertaken with years 3-6, building on a 2021 pilot with year 6 only. In total, 354 (29%) schools took part, with 32,606 (23%) of students completing.

Indicative funding for next year of approximately £400k from the Health Improvement Budget has been allocated to support the continued development of SHRN to give us population level data to inform our public health approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Obesity Strategy

Our *Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales* Strategy is our long-term strategy to tackle obesity and overweight. We are currently developing the delivery plan that will span 2024-2026. The plan will be supported by a total of £6.9m in 2024-25. Specifically, we are investing £2.9m into continued delivery of the All-Wales weight management pathway. We have also allocated £600k to Public Health Wales to continue to support Children and Families Pilots for a further year, which are taking place in three areas - Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil and Anglesey. A core part of this approach is the implementation of a secondary prevention Home Based Intervention for families of children in the early years from 3 – 7 years of age in line with the foundation phase.

In addition, the Prevention and Early Years Fund totals £6.85m for the 2024-25 financial year and is invested by Local Health Boards and Public Health Wales to specifically support interventions in the obesity and tobacco policy areas in line with our HWHW and Tobacco strategies.

8. Cost of living

Request 8

- **Health Boards:** The delivery of services to children and young people by the Health Boards in Wales and the impact of the rising costs of energy on this provision.
- **Social Services:** Policy and oversight of the provision of all social service activities of Local Authorities in Wales and any associated discussions with the Minister for Finance and Local Government.
- **Child poverty:** Details of what discussions have taken place with other relevant Ministers in respect of allocations which have a significant impact on children's health and social care, for example the Minister for Social Justice in terms of the budget of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and broader policy issues such as child poverty.

Response

Health Boards

As with other public sector organisations, pressures on energy costs have been a significant challenge for the NHS in 2023-24. The additional funding issued this year to the NHS will cover the pressure of energy costs over and above planned levels. For 2024-25, this additional funding will be baselined and added into the main NHS allocation.

Social Services

The bulk of Welsh Government financial support for social and children's services is delivered through the un-hypothecated local government revenue settlement, although there are also significant specific grant funding streams. The Local Government settlement for 2023-24 saw an increase of 7.9%, following an increase of 9.4% the previous financial year. The level of support for 2024-25 is £5.688bn, an increase of 3.1%. Local Authorities will have experienced significant inflationary and demand increases across the breadth of their functions in 2023-24, a significant proportion of which will be baselined since they relate to staff costs whether in-house or through commissioned services. The Welsh Local Government Association, on

behalf of local government, collectively provides its assessment of the pressures, priorities and opportunities for local authorities each year for discussion at the Finance Sub-Group [[Finance Sub-group meeting: 25 October 2023 | GOV.WALES](#)]. Local Authorities will also be considering the level of council tax each wishes to set for the next financial year.

Local Authorities will set their own budgets for each service prior to 10 March 2024. Details on local authority expenditure by service is published annually [Local authority revenue and capital outturn expenditure: April 2022 to March 2023 | GOV.WALES](#). The trend over recent years has been for social services and education to be allocated an increasing proportion of the total revenue expenditure by local authorities, with social services having seen the biggest increase in expenditure in 2022-2023. Outturn figures are not available for 2023-2024 until summer 2024 but budgeted increases for social services for 2023-2024 were for an increase of over 11% for social services expenditure (i.e. to £2.653bn).

Child Poverty

Discussions have regularly taken place with the Minister for Social Justice in terms of collective impact of decision making on child poverty. Cabinet meetings with a focus on child poverty, including the need to consider the potential for cumulative impacts on programme and budgetary decisions took place in January, April and November.

In May 2023 Bilateral Ministerial discussions took place reinforcing the Cabinet commitment for tackling child poverty and inequality across government as a central driver for budgets and policy development.

The Ministers for Social Justice and the Minister for Education and Welsh Language are responsible for the budgets of our statutory commissioners.

9 . Costs of legislation

Request 9

- Financial implications or anticipated in 2022-23 and 2023-34 of any subordinate legislation relevant to children and young people within the Minister's portfolio.
- Information on the financial impact of any relevant UK Parliament legislation.

Response

No subordinate legislation involving relevant costs has been identified.

Welsh Government's evidence to inform the scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2024-25 by Health & Social Care Committee

Contents

Prioritisation	2
Question 1	2
Waiting times	6
Question 2	6
Mental health	8
Question 3	8
Workforce	10
Question 4	10
Question 5	11
Service transformation	13
Question 6	13
Prevention	15
Question 7	15
Estates and infrastructure	18
Question 8	18
Health inequalities	23
Question 9	23
Question 10	25
Assessing impact/value for money	29
Question 11	29
Health boards' financial performance	34
Question 12	34
Social care	38
Question 13	38

Prioritisation

Question 1

Details of the approach taken by Welsh Government to prioritise areas of spending – across the whole budget and within health and social care, and to ‘target resources towards those at greatest need’ (in light of the ‘significant budgetary pressures’ announced by the Welsh Government in August 2023).

Response:

Since setting the spending plans in the Draft Budget for 2023-24, we have experienced record prolonged levels of high inflation along with continued challenges in the fiscal context, particularly in areas such as public sector pay. In addition, the cost-of-living crisis has increased the pressure on all public services.

As a result, overall, we are having to spend more than previously planned in 2023-24, placing unprecedented pressure on the devolved Welsh Budget. The First Minister published a written statement on 9 August 2023, where he indicated that work would take place over the summer months to address the impact of our budget being worth around £900m less than when it was set in 2021.

In order to deal with the pressures facing public services in Wales this year, particularly the NHS and rail services, Ministers took decisions to reprioritise funding to these spending areas. We have taken prudent action by revisiting spending plans for 2023-24, to enable us to balance our duty of robust fiscal management and this government’s commitment to continue to protect core public services and target support to those with the greatest need.

We made these difficult choices as early as we could in 2023-24 in order to prevent even more difficult decisions in the 2024-25 Draft Budget.

For the Health & Social Services MEG, this meant an additional revenue allocation of £425m as well as a significant reallocation of funding within the MEG in order to

support the NHS. The NHS were also issued with target controls totals for their forecast deficit and tasked with taking actions to reduce their forecast spend by 10%, circa £64m.

The financial challenge for the NHS, common to all areas of the UK, relates to a number of significant factors:

- the challenge in managing higher costs post-pandemic, where new services now exist, and levels of staffing and capacity have increased.
- inflationary pressures across all areas, which are outside of health board control – for example, pay and non-pay inflation, including the costs of medicines and increasing costs of packages of care.
- increasing demand on services.

For the Draft Budget for 2024-25, the 2023-24 in-year budget position was made recurrent, increasing the indicative revenue position by £207m and effectively rebasing the Health and Social Services (HSS) MEG budget. Through the budget process a further £450m was allocated to the MEG, recognising that significant inflation and demand pressures will continue to be faced by the NHS in 2024-25. Even with this significant allocation of additional funding to support inflation and demand pressures, along with the actions to reduce forecast costs, this will still mean savings delivery in line with 2023-24 levels will be required. Further difficult choices will therefore be required in-year and next year for both the Health and Social Services MEG and the NHS to manage within the budgets set out.

The local government Revenue Support Grant (RSG) provides core funding for local authorities through the local government settlement.

Local authorities deliver a wide range of public services, often to the most vulnerable in our society or those who are economically disadvantaged. These include significant services for children, through education and social services, and a wide range of services for adults who may be facing challenges in their everyday lives,

through social services, housing support and other community services. Sixty-six per cent of local authority resources are directed to education and social services.

Recognising the need to protect these important services provided by local authorities, the level of funding through the RSG was not impacted and remained as set out in the original spending plans in 2023-24.

Further information on the decisions taken in 2023-24 can be found in the [Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment document](#).

In reshaping the budget in the HSS MEG for 2024-25, we have reprioritised budget from across the MEG to support frontline services in the NHS (in BEL 20). We will issue the NHS with a revised allocation incorporating the changes for 2023-24 and allocating a new uplift for 2024-25 in recognition of the inescapable pressures from inflation and demand.

We are able to maintain the £170m funding we allocated to support the recovery of planned care, and this will be recurrent for 2024-25 and fully ringfenced within the main NHS allocation.

As part of the rebasing of our budget we were not able to maintain the proposed increases in budget for 2024-25 for Mental Health, Social Care and Children and Early Years. Further information is provided later in this response on these decisions.

We have reviewed the ongoing investment in Covid response areas and have been able to reduce that funding in line with current expenditure forecasts and re-direct that funding towards frontline NHS costs. We also plan to baseline this allocation into the main NHS allocation on a recurrent basis, giving NHS organisations the assurance to effectively plan for the needs of their population in areas such as vaccination.

We have carefully reviewed the funding to support the NHS Education and Training commissioning plan for 2024-25 and will be maintaining the funding level at the level set in 2023-24. This will sustain the largest ever investment in workforce training for

the NHS. We will also continue to maintain our commitment to establish a new medical school in North Wales as well the commitments under the co-operation agreement with Plaid Cymru for the Sanctuary model in mental health, the expansion of early years provision for all 2-year-olds across Wales and eliminating private profit from the looked after children care sector.

Also included in our budget for 2024-25 is a £20m increase in non-cash funding, covering such items as depreciation costs.

The HSS capital budget for 2024-25 remains at £399m as per the indicative position published last year. This includes an increase in funding for the Social Care Capital Fund for 2024-25.

The increase in the Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) budget relates to the latest assessment of budget cover needed for such things as expected movements in impairments and provisions, mainly in the NHS.

It is worth noting that the Draft budget table for 2024-25 contains a relatively high number of budget movements within the MEG. These are not part of the budget reprioritisation exercise and simply reflect the process of maintaining our budgets and making sure funding is in the correct place.

Waiting times

Question 2

Allocations to recover the waiting times backlog and provide treatments delayed by the pandemic.

Response:

We continue to support the annual additional investment of £170m to NHS Wales to support the national commitment to reduce delays in treatment.

Since the Planned Care Recovery Plan was issued in April 2022, and the additional investment has been provided, we have seen consecutive monthly reductions in the number of open pathways waiting over 104 weeks.

- The total number of open pathways waiting over 104 weeks was 26,439 at the end of September, down 18 months in a row and the lowest since August 2021. This was 62.5% lower than the high of March 2022.
- At the end of September 2023, there were 17 specialities with open pathways over 104 weeks; an additional 13 specialities have been cleared of long waits since September 2022.

In 2023-24, we held £50m of the annual allocation (£170m) to target a more regional approach to delivery, this has helped to ensure targeting of areas for more longer-term delivery models in regard to regional working.

- For South West Wales - the allocation was targeted at regional orthopaedics with developments at Neath Port Talbot which is open to regional high volume low acuity treatments. Investment has also been targeted at diagnostics in particular endoscopy plans. There is also regional working in ophthalmology across the two health boards for more efficient cataract surgery.

- For South East Wales - the allocation is targeted at regional ophthalmology, and diagnostics, in support of the future Llantrisant development.
- North Wales - targeting regional orthopaedics, and additional capacity to manage areas of fragility.

This allocation has been allocated on a recurrent ring-fenced basis within the NHS allocation, resulting in the full £170m being allocated to Health Boards on a recurrent ring-fenced basis.

Mental health

Question 3

A breakdown of allocations to improve mental health and wellbeing in Wales, including allocations to:

- support implementation of the Welsh Government's new mental health strategy;
- improve access to mental health services and outcomes for both adults and children and young people;
- implement the Committee's recommendations on tackling mental health inequalities.

Response:

We will continue to ringfence mental health funding for the NHS and the draft budget includes £800m for this. This includes an uplift for inflationary and demand pressures for 2024-25 of £25m.

We are also investing £2.2m annually in the NHS Executive to develop a Strategic Programme for Mental Health and a Patient Safety Programme. This will provide dedicated resource to NHS Wales to drive improvements in performance, quality and safety.

We will be publishing our draft mental health strategy early in the new year, the timing of which will enable us to have greater clarity on our 2024-25 budgets. This short delay is providing us with an opportunity to reflect on new commitments, cross-Government and multi-sectoral commitments that underpin our strategies to ensure they remain deliverable in the challenging financial circumstances.

The draft strategy is based around a number of principles which include equity of access, experience and outcomes, and person-centred care and has been informed by the Committees recommendations.

We have developed the strategy with the understanding that there will need to be a

way of setting priorities, ensuring best use of existing resources and an opportunity to be clear about what can realistically be delivered. This has included consideration of improving access to mental health services and the Committee's recommendations on tackling mental health inequalities. Our first annual update against the committee report will be submitted to the Committee in January.

The published strategy will be accompanied by a costed delivery plan, which over the life of the strategy will be renewed and refreshed. This will provide the opportunity to identify new investments should the economic position change.

In this period of financial constraint, we have worked hard to support continued investment in mental health, and we continue to prioritise mental health as an area that requires this investment.

Workforce

Question 4

Allocations to support implementation of the 10-year strategy for the health and social care workforce and the national workforce implementation plan, including specific reference to retention and improvement of staff wellbeing.

Response:

Despite the difficult financial climate, we continue to invest in the sustainability of our NHS workforce. The Welsh Government has, and will continue, to invest in the workforce required to support our health system in Wales. £281.98 million was invested in 2023-24 and we will maintain this level for 2024-25. This will support education and training programmes for healthcare professionals in Wales.

This continues to be a record level of funding and will support the highest ever number of training opportunities in Wales. The Welsh Government is committed to providing the NHS the workforce it needs to meet ever increasing demand. We are achieving this through increase training places, encouraging young people to take up health professions and recruiting outside Wales when necessary.

Despite the difficult financial climate, we have continued to invest in the sustainability of our NHS workforce.

We provide core funding to Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW), our statutory workforce body, to deliver on key priorities such as improving staff retention and taking positive actions to improve staff wellbeing. For example, HEIW have this year delivered the Nurse Retention Plan and the first iteration of a new annual staff survey, the results of which will allow us to gain an overall assessment of the areas that require improvement and ultimately provide the necessary learning to improve staff health and wellbeing.

HEIW also utilise their core funding to continue to deliver on the Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care and their assigned actions in the National Workforce Implementation Plan.

Primary care

Question 5

How the budget will support delivery of the Welsh Government's commitment to reform primary care, and the shift of more care out of hospitals into primary care/community settings.

Response:

The majority of funding allocated to health boards to provide health services is not hypothecated. It is, therefore, neither practical nor meaningful to singly use core budgets as a way to measure the shift of care out of hospitals towards prevention and community-based care in line with the vision in [A Healthier Wales](#). Nevertheless, the funding and workforce resources associated with services shifting into the community are expected to follow the service.

In addition to the significant core funding which makes up the majority of health board budgets, the Welsh Government's 2024-25 health and social care draft budget includes the following funding for building community capacity and more preventative and integrated service delivery models, making effective use of available resources, skills and digital technology:

- £20m – for clusters to decide how to invest to meet local priorities;
- £146.7m – Regional Integration Fund to develop community capacity;
- £11.95m – anticipatory care plans for people most at risk of urgent care and increased weekend community nursing capacity;
- £5m – increased community based allied health professional capacity.
- Over £55m investment to date, in developing integrated health and care community hubs through the Integration and Rebalancing Capital Fund (IRCF).

The main mechanism the Welsh Government uses to guide health boards and their partners in the use of their funding allocations is the annual NHS Planning Framework, which sets national priorities.

Planning priorities for 2024-25 include the building of capacity and integration of

community-based care to improve access to coordinated care from the most suitable health and care professional close to home.

We have and will continue to work with NHS colleagues to reform the national contracts for the four primary care services to meet the majority of people's health and care needs as part of an integrated community health and social care system.

Service transformation

Question 6

How this budget will balance the need to meet immediate/short-term pressures (e.g. the waiting times backlog, workforce shortages) with longer-term service transformation.

Response:

In developing the budget approach for the HSS MEG for 2024-25, careful consideration has been given to balancing the need to recognise unavoidable inflation and demand pressure, deliver improvements in short-term priorities and continue to support longer-term service transformation.

To illustrate, from a planned care perspective, there is a £15m planned care transformation budget to support local and national transformation projects.

£2 million of the budget is used to staff the Planned Care Programme and clinical leads, who are responsible for developing the transformation projects and driving their implementation within the NHS organisations, reflecting national policy and guidance.

The funding for 2024-25 has broadly been divided into four areas:

1. Outpatient transformation central support - designed to develop capacity within the outpatient teams to drive transformation, including support to embed new ways of working.
2. Outpatient transformation projects - supporting the implementation of innovative approaches and initiatives that contribute towards sustainable transformation, such as alternative to outpatient follow-up through 'see on symptom', patient-initiated follow-up and looking at straight-to-test pathways.
3. Eye Care recovery - supporting the implementation of both recovery activity and innovative approaches and initiatives specific for eye care, linking with primary care optometry in support of the new contract arrangements.
4. National programmes include the implementation of the prostate cancer supported self-management programme, teledermoscopy programme

(dermatology), specialist advice and guidance, clinical leads and the orthopaedic network programme team.

New for 2023-24 was the introduction of the Healthcare Pathway alliance between primary and secondary care referrals, and more focused review of best practice through Getting it Right First Time (GIRFT) reviews in urology, gynaecology and ophthalmology. Orthopaedics has previously been carried out in 2022-23.

GIRFT is also supporting the national theatre optimisation programme, building on the work undertaken at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health board and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health board.

This transformation funding is in addition to the £170m ring-fenced funding for planned care, which is focussed on ensuring continued improvement in planned care performance and reducing long waits for treatment.

Prevention

Question 7

Whether the budget demonstrates a greater focus on prevention i.e. by showing a clear shift of resources towards prevention/early intervention. (The Welsh NHS Confederation, for example, says that without this shift the NHS is not sustainable)

Response:

The Welsh Government continues to focus on embedding a shift towards prevention and early intervention, as outlined in *A Healthier Wales*.

It remains the case that prevention is fundamental to a wide range of activity across health and social care and NHS Wales, supporting people in Wales to live longer, healthier lives.

As noted previously, the majority of funding allocated to health boards to provide health services is not hypothecated. It is, therefore, neither practical nor meaningful to singly use core budgets as a way to measure the shift to prevention and early intervention.

We are nevertheless able to highlight specific funding streams aimed at prevention, including funding through our [Healthy Weight Healthy Wales](#) strategy, our Prevention and Early Years funding as well as activity that is preventative by its nature, such as vaccination and screening. The responses to Question 5 above, illustrates the investment in primary care, which is also a demonstration of the shift to early intervention.

We have maintained the highly valued £146.7m Regional Integration Fund which is helping health, social care and the third sector to work together to develop integrated models of care that will help people to look after their own health and wellbeing, live well at home, prevent the need for conveyance or admission to hospital and help them return home quickly if they have needed secondary care.

The Planning Framework issued to Health Boards in December 2023 iterates the

need for a renewed focus on prevention, and there are specific actions in the objectives of health board chairs looking at smoking in pregnancy and on increasing the capacity of weight management services across Wales. The planning framework also outlines our desire to see a greater shift of funding into primary and community care.

Public Health Wales (PHW) will receive funding of over £150m in 2024-25. By the nature of the majority of the work undertaken by PHW, this investment is focused on prevention, whether that be through screening programmes or our work to encourage healthy behaviour change in the population, through activity such as continuing to support people to be of a healthy weight or to stop smoking.

Delivery of the National Immunisation Framework is a key element of our prevention work to protect our population. Funding for vaccination under the national Covid response has been baselined as recurrent discretionary allocation to health boards. This will provide a more sustainable approach to delivering our spring and winter programmes alongside other significant vaccination developments during 2024.

We continue to invest in our *Healthy Weight Healthy Wales* strategy to tackle overweight and obesity, with £2.9m allocated to support health boards to continue to develop and roll out their weight management pathways, and £4.042m allocated to support other activities, such as our Children and Family pilots and systems work across all health board areas.

We will be publishing our draft mental health strategy early in the new year, the timing of which will enable us to have greater clarity on our 2024-25 budgets. The new strategy includes taking action to protect and promote people's mental wellbeing. This will help protect against mental health conditions and help people to cope better when they experience symptoms or have a diagnosis.

We launched our Programme for Government commitment to develop a National Framework for Social Prescribing (NFfSP) at an online event on 7 December 2023.

One of the principles of social prescribing is taking an early preventative approach to

enhancing people's health and wellbeing, with evidence showing it could help ease the burden on more front-line, specialist services.

The NFfSP aims to develop a shared understanding of the language used and the approach taken to social prescribing in Wales; support social prescribing practitioners and drive-up skills; set out the outcomes expected from a user, organisation, commissioner, and referrer perspective; and ensure a quality of provision by community assets. It will also monitor and evaluate the development of social prescribing as it continues to grow across Wales.

Estates and infrastructure

Question 8

Capital and revenue allocations to develop, improve, and maintain NHS estates and infrastructure, including digital infrastructure.

Response:

We are continuing to invest significant sums in the NHS estate across Wales. Whilst there are obvious challenges to the estate posed by an ageing building stock, NHS organisations are actively developing an assessment of prioritised funding requests to the Welsh Government.

Maintaining the existing estate continues to require significant investment with £83m made available to NHS organisations as discretionary capital to support the day to day running of the buildings. Further supporting the provision of a safe and compliant estate, £20m has been made available to support prioritised investment across the following:

- Main site infrastructure
- Fire
- Decarbonisation

The largest investments being supported in 2024-25 remain the refurbishment of Prince Charles Hospital in Merthyr Tydfil (a £220m scheme) which will see the transformation of the site going forward with works due to complete in 2026.

2024-25 will see the completion of the orthopaedic hub development at Llandudno Hospital. This will provide benefits for patients, staff and the wider North Wales community by delivering a planned 1,900 procedures a year. Work is scheduled to start in February 2024 with the expectation that the hub will be operating at full capacity in early 2025.

The development of the Radiotherapy Satellite Unit at Nevill Hall hospital is

continuing at pace – the construction of which is due to be completed early 2025. This significant development will bring oncology services much closer to the residents of East Wales.

The presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) is requiring continued investment across two main sites in NHS Wales – Withybush and Nevill Hall. These essentially unplanned works demonstrate some of the challenges of dealing with the ageing estate.

Digital, technology and Innovation

The Digital Priorities Investment Fund (DPIF) is used to fund strategic digital transformation opportunities in NHS Wales, and it is intended to support the delivery of NHS Wales' service change priorities through accelerating the delivery of informatics improvements. In delivering this, work needs to align to one of five themes:

- Transforming digital services for patients and public
- Transforming digital services for professionals
- Investing in data and intelligent information
- Modernising devices and moving to cloud services
- Cyber-security and resilience

These themes are aligned with the headline missions set out in the [Digital and Data Strategy for Health and Social Care in Wales](#). The Strategy builds on the strategic direction set out in our 2015 strategy which has been a key enabler of *A Healthier Wales*.

As an example of work in 2023, Welsh Government, with key partners in NHS Wales, has:

- Launched the NHS Wales App, which has been rolled out to over 200 GP practices as of the end of November with planned complete rollout by the end of March 2024.
- Funded the Programme for Government commitment to introduce a joined up electronic prescribing service across Wales that cuts across health settings.

The launch of the Electronic Prescription Service, integrated between primary and secondary care, saving considerable time for prescribers in both primary and secondary care.

- Continued delivery of the NHS Wales Cyber Resilience Unit as part of Digital Health and Care Wales.
- Funded the All-Wales Infrastructure Programme (focused on the delivery of a single identity management solution across all NHS Wales organisations).
- Funded a £6m Capital investment in Cyber security devices and infrastructure across the NHS Wales estate.
- Launched the Welsh Nursing Care Record to all adults' in-patient wards across Wales, with paediatric wards expected to be rolled out in 2024-25.
- Continued delivery of the National Data Resource (NDR) which came into live service on 1 August 2023. It aims to make it easier to join up Health and Social Care data from various sources. This will improve the ability to share, link and use data. The first data pipelines are currently being built to support the shared medicines record by end of March 2024 and delivery on a range of infrastructure and data support items will continue into 2024-25.

The DPIF fund has been reprioritized to focus on essential delivery of transformative digital services. The DPIF budget for 2024-25 is £20m for Capital and £43m for Revenue. This funding will see continued investment in a range of digital infrastructure and data improvements. This includes the continued standardisation of the Welsh Patient Administration System, continued rollout of the award-winning Welsh Nursing Care Record service into paediatric settings, digital ICU in critical care settings, digitising the eyecare referral process, funding for the National Strategic Technology Enabled Care programme and looking at how care can be delivered closer to home.

DPIF will continue to develop the NHS Wales App, transitioning to a continuous development service post-rollout in March 2024, it will also progress the procurement and implementation of an all-Wales Digital Maternity system as well as funding to continue the implementation and adoption of the NDR.

In 2024-25 DPIF will continue funding a combined £16m capital and £1.7m revenue for the essential, at-pace replacement of the Radiology Information System, and Laboratory Information Management System, with a modern service.

DPIF will also continue to fund the Programme for Government commitment to introduce a joined up electronic prescribing service across Wales that cuts across health settings. £5 million capital and £17m revenue funding across Digital Medicines funding streams including the Electronic Prescription Service in primary care, ePMA in secondary care across all seven health boards plus Velindre, the introduction of the Shared Medicines Record, and additional supplementary work.

Additional funding has been allocated centrally for digital programmes and initiatives, which could be used to support *A Healthier Wales* and recovery programmes.

Strengthened national governance is now in place and will be used to ensure these diverse funding streams and DPIF are used to ensure alignment and coordination of investments to deliver and to optimize our return on investments.

As part of the reprioritisation of funding within the HSS MEG, we have reduced our contribution to the work on Digital Inclusion, through the Digital Communities Wales programme, in the Social Justice MEG. Since 2019 the Social Justice and Health MEGs have invested £9.5m in digital inclusion services through the Digital Communities Wales programme. Tackling digital inequalities remains a key commitment and have therefore protected the budget as far as possible. The ongoing investment will focus on maintaining the Digital Communities Wales programme whilst acknowledging that overall activity, outputs, and outcomes will be impacted by the budget reduction. The team will also seek to link up and work with other organisations focussing on digital inclusion and to continue to identify barriers to digital inclusion via stakeholder engagement work.

Separately, the revised £13m Innovation and Technology Programme (ITP) budget for 2024-25 will continue to support a national level profile for innovation across Wales. Our continued commitment to supporting transformational innovation in health and social care delivers continuous improvement in service delivery, financial

prudence, and economic efficiencies which in turn, delivers the strategic change required to improve population health outcomes.

Many of the projects and platforms the funding supports levers significant collaboration and part funding from academia, the public sector and industry. The ITP programme also supports many direct and indirect jobs across the sector, and we have looked to avoid the need for job losses across our funded programmes yet still delivering savings for 2024-25.

We have continued to support investment in the professional development of future senior leaders across health and social services, delivered by the Intensive Learning Academies (ILAs). To avoid significant financial pressures on these successful innovation projects and organisations, we have identified savings by prudent investment in the support of new projects and initiatives in the delivery of Wales Innovates and ensured smarter collaboration and the maximizing of co-production across the existing programmes.

Health inequalities

Question 9

Evidence of a cross-government approach to tackling inequalities and the wider determinants of health, and that 'population health' is a consideration across government department budgets.

Response:

Tackling inequality in all its forms is a 'golden thread' that runs through our Programme for Government. Tackling inequalities in health in its broadest sense means looking not just at healthcare, but at the wider determinants of health, that often lie outside of the NHS. These are areas such as housing, employment, and education. In all of these areas, population health is a key consideration as to the impact and outcomes. This can be seen in the introduction of the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning Experience as part of the new Curriculum for Wales, the continued investment in our programmes supporting employment and in the engagement with officials in the reform of homelessness legislation.

£10 million of funding will continue to deliver Out of Work peer mentoring support to people recovering from substance misuse and/or mental ill-health back towards education and employment and separately In-Work Support to people absent from work or at risk of becoming absent due to their physical or mental ill-health.

The implementation of the Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act 2020 places a Duty of Quality on Welsh Ministers and NHS bodies to provide a focus on improving the quality of health services and equitable population health outcomes on an ongoing basis. The development of Quality Statements in service-specific areas will help health boards to plan services and make resourcing decisions to ensure quality services are delivered across the whole population.

The Welsh Government will shortly be consulting on a set of draft regulations to mandate the use of Health Impact Assessments in specified circumstances. These regulations will promote a broader consideration of socio-economic factors, so that positive health impacts can be maximised, and potential negative effects eliminated,

reduced, or mitigated. They will go some way to ensuring that public bodies consider the impacts of their decisions on the mental and physical health of their population and support a reduction in health inequalities. There is no budget allocated to this activity.

The Welsh Government has placed a strong emphasis on equity and inclusion in health and care. This means ensuring that everyone in Wales has access to the same high-quality healthcare, regardless of their background or circumstances. A *Healthier Wales* - our long-term plan for health and social care - has addressing health inequalities as a core theme running throughout. Part of our work includes the establishment of an NHS Health Inequalities Group, which is co-chaired by Welsh Government and NHS Wales, to focus and drive efforts towards tackling health inequalities through the lens of the NHS.

Question 10

How the impact of funding allocations on different groups/communities has been taken into account during the development of the budget proposals.

Response:

We expect the financial outlook for the NHS, next year, to be one of the most challenging we have ever faced.

We have considered the potential impact and have reprioritised across the MEG, this exercise will help to mitigate the more serious impacts on frontline services, patient care, access and performance targets. We aim to offset the most severe impacts across all parts of Wales and provide protection for the most vulnerable, including children, disabled, older and vulnerable people.

While we have redirected funding from across the Welsh Government, this still means health boards will face some challenging decisions to manage within their individual budgets. All decisions by Health Boards will be subject to quality impact assessments, balance of risk judgements and potential consultations, if decisions impact on service change. Each health board faces different challenges in terms of population need and the configuration of services; the actions taken to manage any cost pressures will vary according to organisation and will be subject to local determination.

In prioritising funding to the NHS, we have reviewed all centrally held budgets in Health & Social Services and redirected funding from a number of areas. Some examples are:

Integrated Community Services

We have maintained funding through the £146.7m Regional Integration Fund which is developing preventative and capacity building models of care specifically for the following key population groups;

- Older people with complex needs.
- Children with complex needs.

- Unpaid Carers.
- People with learning disabilities and neurodivergence.
- People with poor mental and emotional health.

Mental Health

We will continue to protect the mental health NHS ringfence, which provides core support to mental health services across Wales, including to some of the most vulnerable people in society. We cannot increase additional funding in 2024-25, as originally planned, by £15m, and have also reduced the existing mental health central budget by a further £6m.

As mentioned in Question 3, we will be publishing our draft mental health strategy early in the new year which will outline our priorities for spend. The draft strategy is based around a number of principles which include equity of access, experience and outcomes, and person-centred care. It has been informed by the Committee's recommendations on tackling mental health inequalities. As part of the strategy development, we have considered the impact of the actions on different groups/communities, and this is captured within the relevant impact assessments. These draft impact assessments will also be subject consultation as they will be published alongside the draft strategy.

Prehabilitation

A planned £3m increased investment targeted specifically at those on waiting lists who could benefit from extra support to improve their general health and wellbeing won't go ahead. Health Boards are nevertheless investing in these approaches from their core budgets, and we have developed a digital offer which will be rolled out within existing resources. We continue to invest in weight management services through health boards and our national help me quit stop smoking service.

Health Protection

We are reprioritising £22m of funding within our health protection budgets, which supports a wide range of measures aimed at protecting the public from potential health threats. By re-prioritising we will strengthen delivery in some targeted areas,

including emergency planning, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and delivery of the HIV action plan and allocate funding directly to the NHS to support front line health protection services from the national Covid response.

Social Care

We have reprioritised £10.5m from the Social Care Workforce Grant. To ensure continued delivery of existing activity, including protecting spend on eliminating profit within the care of looked-after children, we are reviewing planned activity and exploring efficiencies and rescoping activity until 2025-26. We are also protecting the core local government settlement, which funds social care.

We have reviewed funding from our Invest to Save budgets including funding for looked-after children. We will continue to support the schemes we have already committed to in 2024-25, totalling £3.8m but we will not be able to take forward further planned schemes.

The Social Care Reform Fund will not receive the original planned £5m uplift. Officials are working to protect spend which relates to services to avoid or minimize potential impact in terms of reduced services, potential staff reductions and avoid the need to reduce support already offered either formally or indicatively, thereby avoiding or minimising impacts on local authorities and social care partners which could affect disabled people, the elderly and the most vulnerable members of society.

An example of taking account of the impact of funding allocations on different groups would be continuing to provide additional funding (£3.5m 2024-25) for unpaid carers to take a break from their caring role and £1.75m in 2024-25 to receive small grants for essential help, thereby sustaining caring arrangements for people within their home and reducing demand on NHS and residential care.

Childcare Offer

The Childcare Offer supports parental employment. Parents surveyed reported a range of positive impacts from accessing the Offer:

- 75 per cent of parents reported that the Offer had made it easier for them to undertake their work;
- 37 per cent of parents reported that they would be working fewer hours had the Offer not been available to them – this impact was greater for parents earning under £26,000 per year (42 per cent reported that they would be working fewer hours without the Offer);
- 10 per cent of parents said they would be in a job with fewer career progression opportunities, and a further 10 per cent said they would not be working at all if the Offer had not been available to them.

The Childcare Offer for Wales is demand led and there is £2.5m allocated as an Additional Support Grant. Reductions in the budget for 2024-25 have been made modelled on take up in 2023-24. Given the demand-led nature of the programme, additional budget will be allocated if necessary.

Baby Bundles

The Bwndel Babi Programme intended to offer support to approximately 26,000 new and expectant parents. With reduced budget, the Programme will need to be targeted on a smaller geographical basis such as Flying Start and/or Bwndel contents removed to reduce costs. If delivered within Flying Start areas, approximately 8,000 new and expectant parents could be supported.

The reduction in budget will mean that some families at risk of or experiencing poverty living outside of the targeted area will not benefit from the support offered through the Programme.

Assessing impact/value for money

Question 11

The mechanisms in place (within the health and care system and at Welsh Government level) to assess whether spending by health boards/trusts and local authorities is achieving its aims and delivering value for money. What/where does the Welsh Government consider are the main challenges in assessing outcomes/value for money.

Response:

NHS

The NHS has long standing processes which report on performance and financial monitoring. The Welsh Government HSS Finance team receive and scrutinise the financial reporting information on a monthly and annual basis.

We also have the Financial Planning and Delivery team within the NHS Executive who work between the NHS and Government to ensure financial sustainability and delivery in the NHS, alongside maximising the impact and use of health and social care spending in Wales. It also supports the pursuit of an integrated quality and safety agenda, focusing on how the NHS uses its resources and the outcomes it achieves to identify opportunities for improvement.

As part of the System Enhanced Monitoring and Recovery Framework, the Utilisation of Resources Group was reframed in August 2023 as the NHS Wales Value and Sustainability Board, which meets monthly. The Board will drive a systematic approach to strengthen cross system working, to deliver actions for financial improvement and to deliver more sustainable health care on a consistent basis.

The principle is for the strengthened national approach to support and compliment local planning and delivery arrangements to progress identification, development, and implementation of opportunities for both in-year and recurrent financial improvement across NHS Wales.

The establishment of the Value and Sustainability Board in Welsh Government is used to highlight the variation across several significant budget areas, across the

health and social care system.

This work commenced earlier this year and has provided an oversight mechanism into a number of value pathways to drive value for money. Some early examples in medicines management, procurement and continuing health care have demonstrated more focus on variation and standardisation is and will have an impact on value for money differentials across the health and social care system.

Work is underway to identify clinical pathways through the value in health centres to support the medium-term aims of this work. We are looking at a number of high-value low-impact pathways, which support not only improved value for money but also improve clinical outcomes and patient experience. This work is supported by all the NHS Wales Health Boards and has currently identified five health conditions as its focus for this year and next.

Further opportunities to standardise approaches and pathways will continue to be developed, but these remain challenging to deliver without clear clinical engagement and patient communication. Using the strategic national programmes in Wales, the NHS and Welsh Government are engaging with clinical colleagues and stakeholders to embed best practice and value for money approaches.

It remains a challenge to deliver a once for Wales approach in all areas due in part to the variation in public health across different communities, and also the availability of workforce in some areas will restrict an efficiency led approach. Work is underway to assess further sustainability issues in service provision and identify opportunities to eliminate excessive cost drivers in these challenged areas.

We will continue to invest in a value-based approach to recovery over the medium term, with a focus on improving outcomes that matter to patients; £14m is allocated in 2024-25 for this. This allocation will also support NHS recovery, with a focus on delivery of high value interventions that ensure improved outcomes for patients and support service sustainability and reducing waits for treatment over the medium term. This investment will give greater focus on delivery of outcomes that matter for

patients and will complement the implementation of plans currently being developed to tackle the immediate backlog of patients waiting for treatment.

In recent years, we have improved and embedded our planning and delivery frameworks with the NHS. This has included a focus on a number of areas to deliver on improvements in financial sustainability, for example, the implementation of Getting it Right First Time (GIRFT) related initiatives and priorities such as patient initiated follow-ups in planned care and implementing a value-based healthcare approach in a number of condition areas, to improve outcomes relative to resources utilised.

We also have the Welsh Value in Health Centre, hosted by Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board in 2023-24 (but moving to the NHS Executive for 2024-25), which provides capacity and support to Local Health Boards in the delivery of value based healthcare activity which will improve the outcomes of our population.

Social Care

Welsh Government direct investment in social care is intended to support local authority mainstream spending in relation to specific aspects of service development and improvement. Such investment is subject to individual grant agreements which include proportionate provisions in relation to the assessment of outcomes and value for money.

Almost all of the funding for local authority social services is funded through the un-hypothecated general revenue settlement and local authorities' own resources from council tax, fees and charges and other income. This expenditure in relation to social care is under the control of individual local authorities, including the determination of intended outcomes for that spend and the associated assessment of value for money, within the requirements of relevant statutory provisions.

There are both specific service related requirements (such as through the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014) and more general provisions, which establish or update Local Government in Wales (such as in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021) and set the framework within which local authorities

operate and are accountable. Through this the Welsh Government ensures that there is a local and national general framework of assurance and control.

Key elements of this framework are:

- requirements on local effectiveness and efficiency, on scrutiny and on performance
- requirements for external audit
- the publication of data (such as the Local Authority Social Services Annual Report) to enable local and national transparency, monitoring and scrutiny and inspection through Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

Local Authorities have a general obligation to secure economic, effective and efficient services which Authorities must keep under review (The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021).

Similarly, to provide for a general culture where councils in Wales continually aim to do better, Welsh Government has legislated to require that Councils must keep their overall performance under review. This includes requiring they seek the view of citizens and publish an annual self-assessment of how effectively they are exercising their functions. Each local authority must also periodically ensure that a panel assessment of its performance takes place.

Local scrutiny is an essential element of this assurance, in addition to local authority-specific scrutiny, the role of which was strengthened for all services through the Local Government and Elections Act 2021.

The Auditor General for Wales is responsible for auditing both the accounts of and the value for money of local authorities.

The Welsh Government publishes data on social service and other local authority services budgets and expenditure each year. To complement this, local authority social service provision is monitored, on a monthly basis, via the Social Services Checkpoint report. This provides, for example, data around the number of contacts,

the number related to safeguarding, assessments, children and adults receiving care and support, and children looked after.

This is further complemented by the measuring activity and performance data of the Performance and Improvement Framework for social services. Such data is an important asset in understanding the environment of social care both locally and nationally, being used to assess the volume of people local authorities provide care and support to and the demand on particular services and functions. It also serves as a tool that can be used by local authorities to monitor their capacity to deliver against the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. A report on measuring activity and performance data of the Performance and Improvement Framework for social services is published annually. This data provides an annual summary of the activity of local authority social services across Wales.

The above is underpinned by arrangements to consider the operations, efficiency, etc, of local authority social services departments through the regulator, Care Inspectorate Wales.

Health boards' financial performance

Question 12

An update on the overall financial performance of health boards, including:

- projected end of year financial position for health boards, and which have continued to fail to meet their financial duties;
- which health boards have received additional end of year and in-year financial support, the extent of that support and the planned duration;
- details of how the Welsh Government will support and work with health boards to bring NHS Wales back into financial balance.

Response:

At the outset of this financial year, the planned deficit outlined by Local Health Boards totalled £648m. NHS Strategic Health Authorities and Trusts outlined plans to deliver a balanced financial position.

The drivers of this position for Local Health Boards relate to a significant underlying deficit from last financial year, and significant inflationary and demand pressures over and above available funding. These pressures are not unique to NHS Wales but are challenges facing all healthcare services across the UK. In setting out this position, NHS organisations planned to deliver savings of £221m, a level of savings delivery in excess of what has been delivered previously.

NHS organisations have been facing in-year challenges to deliver the plans that were set out, due to operational challenges and persistent inflationary pressures.

In recognition of these challenges, an additional £425m was allocated to the Health and Social Services to help support the NHS this financial year. In addition, we reviewed central budgets and repurposed funding towards NHS organisations where possible. Whilst this additional funding support was welcomed and was essential, Health Boards still faced some difficult decisions to balance their budgets both this financial year and next.

As a result of our actions, funding will be also provided to organisations in support of the pay award commitments that have been agreed with and committed to our union partners. Local Health Boards have also been notified of the additional allocations being made in recognition of the challenges that are being faced, we confirmed that each Local Health was required to reduce planned deficits by 10%.

Following these allocations and deficit reduction expectations, revised target control totals have been set for Local Health Boards which across the seven Boards combine to total a deficit of £123m. These are target deficit positions for Local Health Boards to work towards achieving and are offset by funding within central budgets.

Full details on the NHS position of these allocations and the target control totals set for each organisation were published as part of a [written statement](#) by the Minister for Health and Social Services on 8 November 2023.

On the 17 of October 2023, the Minister for Finance and Local Government provided an [oral statement](#) to the Senedd on the Welsh Government's 2023-24 financial position. That statement detailed the outcome of the work over the summer to address the impact of the Welsh Government budget being worth around £900m less than it was when it was set in 2021. The statement also contains information on the target controls totals for Health Boards.

Performance against these target control totals has been closely monitored since they were issued, and this continues to be an on-going process. We continue to work with all NHS Wales organisations on a consistent national basis, and organisational specific basis, in progressing delivery of the target forecast positions set out for the remainder of this financial year.

The expectation is that each Local Health Board makes progress recognising that whilst there are some challenges which effect all organisations which have been recognised with additional funding such as inflationary pressures, other challenges will be unique to organisations given different population needs, geography, and configuration of services across Health Boards. Delivery actions which may be possible in some Health Boards may not be possible in others.

All Health Boards are expected to be making the best decisions possible to balance service, workforce, and financial risk within these delivery parameters. Organisations are expected to ensure that decisions are robustly impact assessed in terms of quality, safety, risk, and deliverability, and that balance of risk judgment and decision making are optimised. Local Health Boards will be best placed to determine what actions are the most appropriate to deliver financial improvement whilst balancing all other variables and risks.

The Health and Social Services MEG is reporting a forecast deficit position on Fiscal Resource (revenue) at M08 of £92.7m for 2023-24.

Included within this is the following forecast picture for the NHS:

Organisation	M08 Forecast £000s	Target Control Total £000s	Distance to TCT M08 £000s
Swansea Bay	-17,134	17,000	-134
Aneurin Bevan	-57,627	13,000	-44,627
Betsi Cadwaladr	-33,033	20,000	-13,033
Cardiff & Vale	-16,460	16,000	-460
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	0	0	0
Hywel Dda	-72,700	45,000	-27,700
Powys	-12,000	12,000	-0
HEIW	0	0	0
DHCW	0	0	0
PHW	0	0	0
Velindre	0	0	0
WAST	0	0	0
NHS Wales	-208,953	123,000	-85,953

At present, of the seven Health Boards, four are forecasting delivery of target control totals and three are not and are likely to have challenges in doing so.

The actions being taken to manage this position down further focus on:

- Ensuring all organisations are clear on the requirement and are identifying actions to deliver the Target Control Totals outlined.

- Ongoing review of all options and choices in the MEG through robust financial controls, to deliver savings and improve the overarching forecast position (over £240m of savings and opportunities rated green at M08).
- Enhancing system processes, controls to support financial improvement.
- As mentioned above, formal review meetings with all NHS organisations have been undertaken with emphasis on reporting improvements for month nine.
- On 13 September 2023 the Minister for Health and Social Services confirmed that all seven LHB's were now in escalation measures, with the escalation framework supporting financial delivery strengthened.
- Actions to deliver increased savings being identified and progressed via the National Value & Sustainability Board chaired by the Director General.
- WG officials working with the NHS Executive, to monitor progress against the target control totals set out, alongside implementation of actions with each organisation as part of the escalation framework. This includes working with organisations to support the delivery of savings that health boards have identified within plans and implementing processes to strengthen actions on a consistent national basis to support local savings delivery.

Social care

Question 13

Planned allocation for social care, including:

- Any additional funding identified for 2024-25, and how such funding will be targeted.
- How the allocations will help to ensure the ongoing viability and stability of social care services, including residential and domiciliary care.
- What support the draft budget will provide for unpaid carers, including evidence of any new support schemes and specific spend on respite care and financial support for carers.
- Measures in the draft budget that will improve the sustainability of the social care workforce, particularly domiciliary care staff shortages.
- How the draft budget will help the social care sector to respond to the increased cost of living, including specific spend to support domiciliary care workers, and unpaid carers and disabled people, and their families.
- Details of planned spend on the National Office of Care and Support including staff costs.

Response:

As noted above, almost all of the funding for local authority social services is funded through the un-hypothecated general revenue settlement and local authorities' own resources from council tax, fees and charges and other income, and is under the control of individual local authorities.

The Welsh Government's direct investment in social care is intended to support local authority mainstream spending in relation to specific aspects of service development and improvement.

An example of the latter would be the Social Care Reform Fund, which was introduced in April 2022 to support activity to promote reform and improvement in social care, to complement the funding provided in the Local Government settlement.

The Social Care Reform Fund is used to support the reform of Social Care, to improve delivery and increase the sustainability of services across the social care sector. The funding is used to help deliver the Programme for Government commitments to reform social care for looked after children and to protect, re-build and develop our services for vulnerable people and for unpaid carers, and establish a National Social Care Office.

In relation to unpaid carers, the Carers Support Fund (£1.75m in 2024-25) will support unpaid carers to cope with the rising cost of living via the provision of grants to buy basic essential items, such as food, household and electronic items or access to counselling, financial advice, well-being and peer support.

The Short Breaks Scheme for unpaid carers (£3.5m in 2024-25) is also funded from the Social Care Reform Fund and provides opportunities for unpaid carers to have a break from their caring role.

There is no additional funding to enable expansion of financial support/ new schemes for unpaid carers.

In addition to this funding, £1m is provided to health boards via the Regional Integration Fund to support unpaid carers where the cared-for person is admitted to hospital or being discharged.

Finally, funding to national organisations is made from the Sustainable Social Services Third sector grant scheme to provide services and support to unpaid carers and to deliver the objectives of the Welsh Government strategy for unpaid carers.

In addition, our Programme for Government contains a number of commitments that set out our vision for children's services in Wales. Our ambition is for whole system change and, at its heart, we want to see more children and young people being enabled to live with their families and in their home neighbourhoods with many fewer needing to enter care. We also want to ensure the period that young people are in care is as short as possible.

We are committed to keeping families together. Our vision is to redesign how we look after children and young people so we can do the best for our young people, their families, and communities by providing services that are locally based, locally designed and locally accountable. It is about putting in place the right type of care for each child: reforming and joining up services for looked after children and care leavers, providing additional specialist support for children with complex needs and better supporting those who care for children.

Sustaining the previous year's £10m increase in the Social Care Reform Fund to £52m into 2024-25 will be used to enhance the support provided to the Programme for Government Commitments and thus to our vision for children's services in Wales. Funding has been awarded to Local Authorities to support proposals to deliver these commitments.

Eliminating profit from the care of looked after children

In particular, the allocation in the Social Care Reform Fund for eliminating profit from the care of looked after children has increased from £10m in 2022-23 to £20m in 2024-25.

As part of the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, there is a clear commitment to 'eliminate private profit from the care of children looked after' as a key component of our radical agenda.

Feedback from children and young people suggests they have strong feelings about being cared for by privately owned organisations that make a profit from their experience of being in care. The Welsh Government does not believe there should be a market for care for children, or that profits should be made from caring for children facing particular challenges in their lives and intends to bring forward legislation to end this. This means the future care of children that are looked after in Wales will be provided by public sector, charitable or not-for-profit organisations.

Our aim is to ensure that public money invested in the care of children looked after does not profit individuals or corporate entities, but instead is spent on children's services to deliver better experiences and outcomes for children and young people,

addressing service development and improvement and further professional development for staff. We intend to focus, in the first instance, on children's residential care and foster care.

Over the remainder of this Senedd term we need to focus on working with care experienced children, local authorities and partners to increase public and not-for-profit provision, so there is a strong foundation to make a transition to not-for-profit care that meets the needs and entitlements of children and young people.

Radical Reform

Similarly, the allocation in the Social Care Reform Fund for radical reform of children's services has increased from £3m in 2022-23 to £9m in 2024-25.

We have committed through our Programme for Government to explore radical reform of current services for looked after children and care leavers in order to deliver a new vision and ambition for children's services, based on consistent practice, less risk averse behaviours and national restorative approaches adopted across Wales. Achieving this vision is not solely the responsibility of local authorities; it requires partnership working across public services and third sector organisations.

The programme will deliver preventative interventions for families with children on the edge of care including parental advocacy services, family group conferencing, Family Justice reform and a national practice framework. It will also require greater intervention and support for local authorities who are not delivering on our ambition to substantially reduce the number of children in care.

Real Living Wage

The Draft Budget for 2024-25 includes funding to raise the wages of social care workers, as part of our wider commitment to protect frontline public services. The uplift will apply to registered workers in care homes and domiciliary care (both adults and children's services) and registered domiciliary care workers in supported living settings. It will also be received by all personal assistants funded through a local authority direct payment.

Delivering improved pay through the Real Living Wage will help to address low pay associated with the sector, including in the context of a rising cost of living and increase the attractiveness of social care work. This delivers not only improvements for social care workforce, but improved workforce retention and outcomes for people receiving care and support. While the uplift to the Real Living Wage alone will not address all challenges within Social Care, it will contribute to the sustainability and longer-term ambition to raise the profile of the sector as a professional place to work, enhance opportunities for individuals to progress their careers, and to help improve recruitment and retention. The Real Living Wage for Social Care workforce aims to integrate with the Social Care Fair Work Forum's recognition of low pay challenges in the sector. It also connects with policy objectives in the Welsh Government Health and Social Services Group around the promotion of the health and well-being of people using services. It contributes to allow individuals to achieve positive outcomes and can positively impact workforce capacity and morale.

Social Worker Bursary

Funding for the social worker bursary is provided to students taking up the social work degree and offers additional financial support. This makes the social work degree more financially attainable and will ensure we have a sustainable supply of future social workers. The increase to the bursary of £10m over three years announced in 2022 has been available to students who took up the course since 2021-22.

The enhanced financial support will be available for both undergraduate and postgraduate students in Wales via the Social Work Bursary. The increase to the bursary brings our funding for this programme to almost £10m over three years to assist with the training of future social workers. Of this £10m package of funding, the changes we are making total £3.5m across the three years. This represents a more than 50 per cent increase on the original bursary for both undergraduates and postgraduates.

Social workers carry out a vital role within our communities, supporting people to take charge of their own lives. They are at the core of our social care system and key to the delivery of effective care. The student Social Work bursary supports people

with the right skills and attributes to be able to undertake social work training and aims to contribute to the growth of a sustainable social work workforce in Wales and is a contribution to the costs incurred by individuals training to be social workers.

Workforce and Sustainable Social Services grant (workforce grant)

In recognition of the important role that local authorities play in delivering core social services, the Welsh Government has provided recurrent funding to the sector in the form of a Workforce and Sustainable Social Services grant. The criteria for the use of the grant have been broadly set. Local authorities have been able to use the funding to support increases to pay, but also for other interventions aimed at supporting the delivery of sustainable social care services to ensure that they were better placed to meet increased or unexpected demand. In practice, the funding has been used for a variety of measures from salary uplifts to actions aimed at supporting the delivery of services. This grant has been issued annually to local authorities since 2019 and will total £34.4m for 2024-25.

The staffing cost allocation for National Office for Care and Support posts is £464,512.

Agenda Item 5

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted

ROE 06

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Genedlaethol y Prifathrawon (NAHT) Cymru

Response from: National Association of Head Teachers Union (NAHT) Cymru

Consultation questions

1. How important is outdoor education to children and young people's overall education and development?

- Very important
- Quite important
- Don't know
- Not very important
- Not at all important

2. What are the main benefits to children and young people from having a residential outdoor education experience? Please list your top three benefits:

Residential outdoor education gives young people the opportunity to develop independence and learn new creative skills through teamwork and through pushing themselves.

There are many benefits which will vary depending on the individual child, so for a suggested top three, I propose:

- Learning independence and resilience creatively in a new and fun but challenging environment.
- Developing practical teamworking skills and broadening awareness of other children's backgrounds and culture in real time.
- Learning more about themselves as individuals, developing a sense of identity and how to face challenges and taking risk within a safe, controlled environment.

3. Should children and young people have a guaranteed opportunity to participate in a residential outdoor education experience, at some stage during their school years, if they wish to?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

4. Should an opportunity to participate in a residential outdoor education experience, at some stage during their school years, be free of charge on one occasion to pupils?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

5. What are the main barriers which you believe currently exist to children and young people accessing residential outdoor education experiences? (please tick all that apply)

- Financial constraints
- Health reasons
- Disabilities
- Additional Learning Needs
- Parental anxiety/uncertainty
- Child anxiety/uncertainty
- Other (Please state)
- None

6. Equalities considerations:

Could the proposed Bill have any positive impacts on some children and young people in particular? If so, who and why?

If new, earmarked funding were available to support a guaranteed outdoor experience to young people, they would be able to benefit from the developmental opportunities and richly rewarding group activities available to them.

That outdoor education would offer benefits to the vast majority of young people is not the issue. It is the opportunity cost that providing a fully-funded week of outdoor education to every child in Wales once in their school career, when overall education funding is scarce and is so desperately needed in the school system to ensure that schools are able to provide sufficient, qualified staff to teach those children and to provide sufficient classroom equipment and resources.

Could the proposed Bill have any negative impacts on some children and young people in particular. If so, who and why? What could this Bill do to mitigate any negative impacts?

The Bill's potential negative impact is that it could divert scarce funding away from where it is desperately needed in other areas of education and be required to be spent exclusively on a dedicated area, in this case outdoor education. This limits flexibility and could lead to an inefficient allocation of scarce resources.

7. What age do you believe is most suitable for children and young people to be offered an opportunity to undertake a residential outdoor education experience?

- Year 6 (age 10-11)
- Younger (please state)
- Older (please state)

- Not at any age
We believe that children in the 7-11 age group receive the greatest benefit from outdoor education.

8. Is four nights/five days the best length for a residential outdoor experience?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please explain your answer and highlight any possible implications from having a standard approach of four night/five day experiences (whether positive or negative).

The right answer will of course vary from child to child and may be different for different age groups. What constitutes "best length" also depends on how you are choosing to define it, and what other constraints are in play, such as funding but also the time away from home, family and other friendship groups and from more formal schooling.

9. Do you agree there is a need for legislation to ensure all children and young people are given an opportunity to access a residential outdoor education experience, at some stage during their school years?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

10. Is there anything else you would like to say about this proposal?

There are clear benefits to young people from taking part in outdoor education and we welcome the intention behind and spirit of the proposal to extend those benefits to all children of school age in Wales during their school career.

The concern that we have relates to the costs of the proposal – both direct and indirect – and the opportunity cost that choosing to fund outdoor education would have for the many competing demands on the finite and limited budget available to schools in Wales.

Firstly, fully funding the cost of five day / four night guaranteed outdoor education for every child in Wales will have a considerable cost implication. The Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill puts the direct cost just of providing education to all Year 6 pupils in Wales each year as in the region of £9.9m to £13.6m. The Explanatory Memorandum says that this funding would come from savings to spending on other (unspecified) public services.

Requiring outdoor education to be provided, rather than promoting the option of it happening, without a dedicated and ringfenced pot of "new" money for the task would by definition then drain resources out of classrooms and reduce the ability of schools to pay for dedicated teaching staff, equipment and other resources. There may also be some children for whom outdoor education may not be desirable nor the best use of limited funding, so making it a requirement would be wasteful.

In addition, there are significant cost implications relating to teaching staff. Each class of young people on an outdoor education experience will need to be accompanied by fully qualified staff members, and in greater number since the staff to pupil ratio will need to be higher, and assuming overtime is not paid to the staff who usually teach those children in the classroom.

There will also be some children who, for whatever reason, whether because the outdoor education is not suitable or appropriate to their needs, or because the children or their parents are unwilling, are not able to attend the outdoor education experience but who will still be attending school. So there would be cost implications for the additional cover staff required to provide education and care to those children.

There is potentially a twofold deficit – the loss of funding from schools to pay for the guaranteed outdoor education opportunity, and the additional cost to schools of having to provide additional staff to accompany pupils on outdoor education, as well as to provide cover for those children who have remained on the school site.

So, while we are in favour of the many benefits that outdoor education might bring, we cannot support the proposal as the ringfenced funding for it would then not be flowing through to the school system where it is so desperately needed.

Agenda Item 6

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Bil Addysg Awyr Agored Breswyl \(Cymru\)](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Residential Outdoor Education \(Wales\) Bill](#)

ROE 05

Ymateb gan: Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

Response from: Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

1. PRINCIPLES

1.1 Firstly, we would like to acknowledge that we agree with the thinking at the heart of the Bill. We do not doubt for a minute that outdoor education can enrich learning and that pupils benefit from spending time learning outdoors. The benefits of such activities have been noted – mental and physical well-being, improving basic skills, increasing confidence, to name but a few.

1.2 Likewise, we applaud the desire to ensure equal opportunities for all pupils. This ambition is admirable and we as a union would support and applaud it. No pupil should be deprived of opportunities because of their family's financial situation.

1.3 It also appears that the new Curriculum for Wales is a golden opportunity to include outdoor education as part of the school curriculum. There is quite a bit more flexibility within the new curriculum for Wales and the emphasis on 'cynefin' means that outdoor activities will perfectly suit the requirements of the new curriculum.

1.4 Looking at the four purposes of the new curriculum for Wales, it is evident that residential outdoor education can contribute to achieving those purposes. It would be a different approach and an opportunity for those that have difficulties within a formal learning environment to excel within a completely different atmosphere and context.

2. IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE

2.1 Schools in Wales have a strong tradition of going to residential centres eg Urdd centres, outdoor centres within counties etc, enjoying outdoor activities, which enrich the curriculum. The biggest change that this Bill would introduce would be to make statutory something that is currently optional. This change to being a statutory duty would be a big step. Currently, schools, local authorities, staff, parents and pupils have the choice whether they want to arrange and provide residential outdoor education opportunities for pupils. Often the decision as to whether they

offer such opportunities is dependent on staffing capacity, how accessible residential outdoor centres are and the cost of the activities.

2.2 If residential outdoor activities were to be made statutory, some schools would have to provide such activities. As the Bill doesn't specify a particular age, who will decide which schools will undertake these activities? If a pupil went to Primary School A and Secondary School B, one of those schools would have to provide the residential outdoor activities. Another pupil at Secondary School B could have gone to Primary School C where residential outdoor activities were arranged, and then another pupil within the same year at Secondary School B could have attended Primary School D where they had the opportunity to attend a residential outdoor activity for two nights. That pupil would need residential provision for two nights at Secondary School B. It seems that there could be quite a bit of complexity to ensure provision for all and to ensure that no pupil slips through the net.

2.3 There is benefit in other activities too, e.g. trips abroad. Why is priority given to making residential outdoor education statutory? Ideally, we would like to see all pupils having the opportunity to go on a trip abroad. There is a danger in making certain educational elements compulsory.

3. CAPACITY AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

3.1 When making an opportunity for residential outdoor activities statutory for all pupils, the question must be asked: is there enough capacity within our outdoor centres? Certain times of the year will surely be more popular than others and a problem may be foreseen when trying to find the appropriate number of places within residential centres. Sharing a cohort of pupils, within the same school year, would involve additional costs for schools, as sufficient staff would be needed in the school and in the residential centre.

3.2 It is true that the Bill states that pupils will not be forced to participate, but what about our school staff? It was noted that around 2 out of every 3 schools arranged such a course in Key Stage 2 but only half of our secondary schools arranged similar activities. Do our schools have the capacity? How many teachers can go away for four nights and shoulder the responsibility of looking after pupils for that period? This means that they will be away from their families for quite a long period and it also means that they will effectively be 'on duty' for five days and four nights. Will they be paid extra for their work? Traditionally, teachers have taken part voluntarily in residential courses but due to the increasing demands on teachers, it is becoming more and more difficult to get staff who are ready to 'volunteer' for these courses. We realise that there will be specialist teachers at the centres that can supervise the activities, but there is still a lot of responsibility on the teachers/assistants that go on these courses with their pupils. In paragraph 63 of the Explanatory Memorandum 24 November 2023, when talking about 'outcomes for teachers', the benefits for teachers are stated but there is no mention of the additional requirements. I wonder

if the person who drafted the Bill has thought about these challenges? Teachers are already under a lot of pressure and many are feeling the strain. This will further add to their workload.

4. COSTS

4.1 We have a real concern that funding for this Bill will be taken from core school budgets. We feel that there are so many things that need funding at the moment, and local authority budgets are being cut. There is a real danger that this could lead to the loss of staff, and as a teaching union we would be totally opposed to that. There are so many changes happening in our schools at the moment, so I wonder if it is timely to put extra pressure on teachers and schools at this point?

4.2 In paragraph 265 of the Explanatory Memorandum 24 November 2023, the areas to which costs will be associated are listed. There is no mention of support staff costs. Staffing needs costs need to be looked at anew. Such a trip shouldn't put additional pressures on the staff that will attend the residential centres nor on those remaining at the school. Consideration must be given to how much it will cost to pay overtime to those supervising, and also to find supply staff.

4.3 It is important to ensure that there is provision for all pupils regardless of their condition, e.g. who is responsible for looking after pupils with special conditions – will there be financial provision for such needs?

4.4 When thinking about the costs tied in with this Bill, we remember what was stated in the draft budget published on 19 December:

'For the second year in a row, our funding settlement is not sufficient to respond to the extraordinary pressures Wales faces, including persistently high inflation, the cost-of-living pressures people and businesses continue to experience, unfunded public sector pay rises or to recognise rising demand for services... This is the final year in the three-year Spending Review period; a final year in which there was less funding available to meet all our statutory commitments, let alone our priorities and ambitious Programme for Government... In making this Draft Budget, we have had to take incredibly difficult decisions – the starkest and most painful since devolution. This has not been a typical year, where we have had an abundance of positive choices to make about where we can target increased and additional investment.'

4.5 When discussing the manner in which 'school funding' was safeguarded and protected, we note the words 'as far as possible' and also the following sentence 'it has not been possible to avoid all impacts on young people, then it is must be asked: is there money available to invest in such an ambitious and costly plan? We are concerned that funding such a scheme would mean cutting funding elsewhere. School budgets are tight at the moment. It is difficult to fund what is already being provided, let alone considering funding new initiatives.

5. EQUIPMENT

5.1 It is noted that not all pupils take advantage of the opportunities currently offered to them. It is very possible that the reason why some pupils do not attend the courses are their cost. However, the costs of such courses are not limited to the cost of the course itself and transport to the course. In order to ensure that disadvantaged pupils can access the residential activities, it will be necessary to ensure that they do not need to buy specific equipment for the activities. Buying an extra pair of shoes, a raincoat or a sleeping bag is going to be a burden for some families.

6. THE NATURE OF ACTIVITIES

6.1 What exactly is meant by outdoor activities? It must be remembered that there is considerable variety, e.g. not only are there 'adventure' activities, such as climbing, abseiling etc, but do outdoor art workshops, orienteering activities etc count? Do activities somewhere like the Urdd Centre at Llangrannog count?

7. THE WELSH LANGUAGE

7.1 We welcome the attention given to the Welsh language and mandatory Welsh provision, but we do not welcome the conditions 'be provided in Welsh, subject to availability, where requested by a school'. It should be ensured that such provision is available in Welsh for all, and English medium schools should be encouraged to combine outdoor education with opportunities to do so through the medium of Welsh. It should be used as an opportunity to learn about the culture and context of various areas in Wales. The new Curriculum for Wales offers great opportunities for these elements.

8. TRACKING

8.1 In order to ensure that all pupils have had the opportunity to attend a residential outdoor course, and a robust tracking system and a great deal of co-operation between local authorities and schools will be required. It appears that the process could be complex and that individuals could slip through the net. Has consideration been given to the cost of an effective system and also the additional bureaucratic workload?

9. ALN

9.1 It will be important to ensure that ALN pupils have the same opportunities to access residential outdoor education as all other pupils. Paragraph 78 of the Explanatory Memorandum (24 November 2023) states that there are some specialist providers for ALN pupils. Has consideration been given to specialist Welsh medium provision?

9.2 When thinking about providing activities such as these for everyone, there is a range of needs that will have to be addressed. Physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health challenges, and health conditions of all kinds will have to be covered.

10. REFERRAL UNITS

10.1 The Bill states that the right to receive residential outdoor education only applies to pupils in maintained schools and therefore does not include pupils that receive education other than at school, for example at pupil referral units. I wonder if depriving them of such opportunities would create more problems?

11. LOCATION

11.1 Who will decide which centre a school will attend? Will the distance of the centre from the school have an impact on costs? Will schools have to attend the nearest centre? If so, will there be equality of opportunity for pupils in this regard?

11.2 We remember that the Bill states 'costs that are reasonable to incur are provided for including, but not limited to, the cost of board and lodging and transport'. Shouldn't it be more specific? Will pupils have the right to travel wherever they wish within Wales or outside Wales? This will have a significant impact on the cost of the trip.

11.3 Will the activities have to take place in Wales? We feel that it should be ensured that every visit has a Welsh element attached to it.

12. QUALITY

12.1 It is stated that guidelines will 'Set requirements that must be satisfied before a person is permitted to provide residential outdoor education'. Safety is crucial when it comes to such activities. Who will be accountable for quality and safety assurance at these centres?

13. IN SUMMARY

Although we believe that there are many commendable and principled elements of this Bill, we do not feel that enough attention has been paid to the details or to the costs. If the state of budgets were healthy, then we would welcome the Bill, but the current economic climate leads to considerable doubts as to the practicality of the plans.

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted

Agenda Item 7.1

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

14 December 2023

Recent evidence from the Children's Commissioner for Wales: racism and child poverty

Dear Jenny,

We recently held our annual scrutiny session with the Children's Commissioner for Wales. One of the areas we explored was the impact of the Commissioner's influence. We note your current areas of work include anti-racism and child poverty. You may therefore be interested on the Commissioner's evidence to us when asked which areas she felt she had the most influence, she said:

"So, we have, probably, had most traction in relation to education issues. We've been pleased with the response so far to the racism work and earlier conversations have indicated that Government are open to our recommendations and have in fact told us that they would wait to complete their anti-bullying guidance so that they could consider the recommendations of our report, for example.

We've also had good influence, we feel, in relation to the new attendance guidance that's been published and many of our suggestions were taken on board there, including looking at the reduced timetables and making sure that the needs of kinship carers were responded to in that document.

We also had influence positively in the home education space recently. When I came into the role I felt that it was a very polarised issue with a lot of tension on both sides, and perhaps the different groups not necessarily coming together effectively. So, I proposed to convene a forum for home-educating parents so that they could voice their concerns and have their questions answered about the new guidance that was about to come in—it came in in April 2023. And that was



positively received by Government and, I think, was concluded to be a very beneficial exercise all round.

So, education on the whole is one area where we do feel that there is openness to our input. We have tried a lot to influence the poverty agenda and the child poverty strategy, which we hope to see a final version of very soon. We feel that perhaps we haven't experienced as much openness so far in that dialogue. We have convened and collaboratively very significantly with other bodies on this issue. We hosted a child poverty summit recently and we've put forward recommendations and suggestions, on which there is a great deal of consensus from other groups, and have communicated that as best we can to Ministers very regularly; so, we are hoping that the final strategy will reflect our suggestions, but it's not, you know—. So far, we don't feel as confident about having positively influenced that yet, although, you know, we've done our best."¹

We wanted to draw to your attention this contrast the Commissioner highlighted.

Since we took this evidence, the Welsh Government have published their response to the Commissioner's annual report. Unlike previous years, the Welsh Government have not clearly indicated whether they have accepted or rejected each recommendation. We note that during the annual scrutiny session, the Commissioner talked about monitoring progress on these recommendations, saying that they would be measuring and tracking "if they've been accepted...."² suggesting that they were expecting the Welsh Government response to follow the format of previous years. Clearly stating whether a recommendation is accepted or rejected is important for clarity and transparency. We will be writing to the Minister for Social Justice on this issue as well.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

¹ [CYPE Committee, 6 December, Record of Proceedings paragraphs 180-183](#)

² [CYPE Committee, 6 December, Record of Proceedings paragraph 188](#)

Agenda Item 7.2

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

**Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language**



**Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government**

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

14 December 2023

Dear Jayne

In response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee Inquiry in to peer on peer sexual harassment among learners, I committed to provide the Committee with an update in September 2022, and then at 6 month intervals thereafter, on the numbers and proportions of local authorities and schools with relationships and sexuality education (RSE) leads in place.

All regional school improvement services in Wales have an RSE lead in place. RSE leads in the regional school improvement service across Wales provide support to schools and deliver and co-ordinate quality professional learning in their region. The Welsh Government highlighted the critical importance of continuing professional support for all aspects of RSE in the Curriculum for Wales annual report for the academic year 2022/23. Over the next academic year, the Welsh Government will work in collaboration with our partners to ensure practitioners are increasingly able to draw on professional support and resources that are publicly available and shared with other schools and settings across Wales.

Schools have the discretion to organise the leadership of RSE to best meet the needs of their learners. Schools do this in a range of ways: many do have a designated RSE lead, and others lead this RSE through a wellbeing team or through the senior leadership team, particularly in the case of smaller schools. The most recent information received by the Welsh Government indicates that over half of local authorities expect schools to lead this area of the curriculum through designating a specific lead for RSE and the majority of schools in these local authorities have taken this approach and designated a named lead.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Miles'.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Jeremy Miles MS

Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

18 December 2023

Free school meals holiday provision

Dear Jeremy,

Thank you for your [letter of 1 December about free school meals holiday provision](#). We considered this at our meeting on 6 December.

As we indicated in our [original letter of 25 October](#), we continue to have concerns that the decision to stop free school meals holiday provision was made so closely to the 2023 summer holidays, thereby potentially impacting on the ability of others, such as local authorities or charities, to make alternative provision.

While we welcome the initiatives outlined in your letter, including the Food and Fun scheme and the Playworks Holiday Project, it is concerning that only five out of 22 local authorities in Wales were able to continue to provide free school meal provision over the summer holiday. We understand the significant financial pressures both the Welsh Government and local authorities face, and that difficult decisions have to be made. However, as the cost of living crisis continues to bite hard on families, we are concerned that children and young people must not bear the brunt of the impacts. This is likely to be an issue we will discuss during our forthcoming budget scrutiny.

We note the [recent report of the Wales Expert Group](#) on the cost of living, which said that one of the actions that would most effectively help with the cost of living crisis was to:

"...target additional interventions towards those in greatest hardship."

We are concerned that without sufficient data on participation in alternative schemes it is difficult to identify if these alternative schemes are meeting the needs that the more comprehensive programme was addressing.

We note that the Expert Group also welcomed the Food and Fun programme, and called for this to be extended to cover other holiday periods in 2023-24.¹

1. Can you clarify whether you intend to fund the Food and Fun scheme in other school holiday periods over 2023/24?
2. In your letter, you noted that data on Food and Fun participation levels would be available "later in the Autumn". Can you clarify when this data will be available, and can you commit to sharing this with the Committee? Will this data provide a breakdown of the demographics of the children and young people who benefited from this scheme?
3. We note your comments in the letter that the Welsh Government does not hold data on provision that it does not fund. How then is the Welsh Government able to evaluate to what extent replacement schemes are meeting needs previously met by the free school meal holiday provision? Without this data, how is the Welsh Government able to ensure it is meeting its commitment that no child goes hungry and that the Welsh Government is ensuring that limited funding is being used to its maximum effect?

In light of the Equality and Social Justice Committee's interest in child poverty I am copying this letter to their Chair.

We would appreciate a response by 29 January 2024.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Cc: Jenny Rathbone MS, Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee.

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

¹ [Welsh Government, Report of the Wales Expert Group on the cost of living crisis, 26 September 2023.](#)





Agenda Item 7.4

December 2023

Dear Jayne Bryant MS, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee,

Following the success of the last plenary meeting of the Welsh Youth Parliament for this term, we would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for your contributions to strengthening the voice of the young people of Wales.

The feedback from the weekend, and from members of the Welsh Youth Parliament, has been extremely encouraging and we would like to thank you for your leading role, together with the Welsh Government, in ensuring that our reports receive a full and thorough response.

Although this is now the end of the term, we as a Youth Parliament are keen that our reports and campaigns will aid the Government in going from strength to strength when planning their strategies in the fields of mental health, sustainable travel and changes to the school day.

We strongly doubt that this is the end of discussing such topics and we may see similar themes arise in the next term of the new Welsh Youth Parliament next year.

Thank you once again for championing our voices and for the many opportunities to contribute to the work of the Committee, it has been one of the many highlights of our term.

A heartfelt thank you to you once more.

Yours faithfully,
Welsh Youth Parliament

Agenda Item 7.5

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Julie Morgan MS

Deputy Minister for Social Services

19 December 2023

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

Clarification of the steps leading to the closure of the FDAC pilot in November 2023

Dear Julie,

As you know, we have a specific interest in work being undertaken to safely reduce the number of children coming into care, particularly given the significant rise in rates in Wales and those rates being significantly higher than elsewhere in the UK. This issue was a key focus of our recent in-depth inquiry into the radical reforms needed for care experienced children.

During our inquiry, we examined in detail the benefits of the Vale Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) model. We recommended that the Welsh Government continue the roll-out of the FDAC model across Wales, subject to a successful evaluation of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan pilot. We were pleased that you accepted that recommendation.

Since then, we have been contacted by stakeholders who have expressed concern and disappointment about the closure of the Cardiff and the Vale FDAC pilot in November 2023, and the manner by which that closure was communicated to relevant staff and other interested parties.

We wrote to you on 25 September to seek clarifications about the short- and long-term future of the FDAC pilot, and the impact of the closure on children and families being supported by the FDAC team.¹ Your response was dated 16 October.² We also wrote to Cardiff Council and to Vale of Glamorgan Council to understand what they were doing to secure the short- and long-term future of

¹ Welsh Parliament, 'Letter from the Chair of the Children Young People and Education Committee to the Deputy Minister', 25/09/23

² Welsh Government, 'Letter from the Deputy Minister for Social Services', 16/10/23



the FDAC.³ We received substantively similar responses on 1 November and 14 November respectively.⁴

Your response and the responses from the councils state that the pilot came to its scheduled – and anticipated – end in November 2023. They imply that the gap between the closure of the pilot in late 2023 and the publication of the CASCAE evaluation of the pilot in early 2024 had always been anticipated, and that our concern over the closure of the pilot in November 2023 is the result of “some confusion” on our part.

It is not confusion that is causing us concern. We have known since the start of our inquiry that the FDAC pilot was initially scheduled to close in November 2023. We have also known since the start of our inquiry that CASCAE’s evaluation of the pilot is scheduled for early 2024. Please see Annex A, which summarises information that the Committee has received from you and others in relation to the closure of the FDAC pilot, and represents in broad terms our understanding of the steps leading up to its closure in November 2023. We welcome any clarification or corrections of either the timing or the substance of the events outlined below; we will assume that they are accurate if we do not receive information to the contrary.

You told us in March 2023 that you were “looking at ways of extending the funding in order for the evaluation to be completed”.⁵ Since then, you and your officials have given strong and consistent assurances of the Welsh Government’s commitment to FDAC, including explicit reassurances that budgetary constraints would not affect Welsh Government decisions about whether or not it should be rolled out across Wales. Our areas of questioning about the funding of FDAC and its long term future on 14 September 2023, and the multiple responses by you and your officials on that date, provided ample opportunity for precise clarification of the up-to-date position on the funding gap for the FDAC pilot and its implications. This did not happen.⁶

This meant that we had no reason to believe that the Welsh Government no longer intended to provide funding to extend the pilot, as you committed to do in March 2023. You will, therefore, understand our surprise and concern when the Welsh Government gave notification of the closure of the pilot within days of the evidence session on 14 September.

I would be grateful for a written response to the questions set out below.

³ Welsh Parliament, [‘Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee to Cardiff Council’](#), 25/09/23 and Welsh Parliament, [‘Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee to Vale of Glamorgan Council’](#), 25/09/23

⁴ Cardiff Council, [‘Welsh Government funding of the Family Drug and Alcohol Court \(FDAC\) Pilot’](#), 01/11/23 and Vale of Glamorgan Council, [‘Welsh Government \(WG\) funding of the Family Drug and Alcohol Court \(FDAC\) Pilot’](#), 16/11/23

⁵ Children, Young People and Education Committee, [09/03/23, Record of Proceedings](#), paragraph 222

⁶ Children, Young People and Education Committee, [14/09/23, Record of Proceedings](#), paragraphs 132-141

The transparency of evidence provided to us by the Welsh Government

We trust that the evidence that the Welsh Government provides to us is accurate and reliable. We regret that, in relation to the closure of the FDAC pilot, we do not feel that this was the case.

1. Can you confirm that Welsh Government officials regularly attended FDAC Strategic Steering Group meetings and, therefore, knew before the evidence session on 14 September that the FDAC pilot would (or was very likely to) end in November 2023 given the absence of Welsh Government funds to extend the pilot until the evaluation could be completed?
2. Why was the request for funding to extend the pilot, and the possibility of that request being refused, and the implications of that refusal not raised with us during the evidence session on 14 September?
3. Prior to the evidence session on 14 September, what discussions - if any - did you have with members of the judiciary and other key staff involved in the delivery of the FDAC pilot about your decision to refuse the councils' funding request and close the pilot in November 2023?
4. Do you believe that the manner by which the Welsh Government and council leaders communicated with stakeholders about the closure of the pilot has affected the goodwill of professionals associated with FDAC, including members of the judiciary, and consequently negatively impacted its chance of future success?

The future of FDAC in Wales

We recognise that reducing the rates of children going into care in Wales is extraordinarily complicated and difficult. Based on the evidence we have received, the FDAC court model is one of relatively few tried and tested approaches to keeping families together that has been proven to be effective, benefitting both families and statutory services alike. We therefore view the rollout of FDAC across Wales as a key opportunity to stop children being taken into care, potentially subjecting them and their families to the unacceptable experiences of the care system and the cruel cycles of care that we identified in our report. We will be bitterly disappointed if this opportunity is missed.

5. Do you wish to amend, or add to, your response to our report recommendation, which committed the Welsh Government to rolling out the FDAC model across Wales, subject to a successful evaluation of the pilot?

If you remain committed to the rollout of the FDAC pilot subject to a successful evaluation:

- a. How will the long-term rollout of the pilot across Wales be affected by the decision to refuse the local authorities' request for funding to extend the pilot until the evaluation has been published? For example, is it realistic to think that FDAC can be reopened given the staff have been issued with notice of redundancy?

If you are no longer committed to the rollout of the FDAC pilot subject to a successful evaluation:

- a. Why does the Welsh Government no longer support the national rollout of FDAC?
 - b. What, if anything, will the Welsh Government be doing *instead of supporting the rollout of FDAC* to support children to remain with their families?
6. Why did the Welsh Government decide not to approve the request from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan councils to provide funding to extend the FDAC pilot until after the publication of CASCADE's evaluation? To what extent was that decision taken because longer term funding from April 2024 was not seen as a priority?
 7. Will the closure of the pilot in November 2023, and/or the uncertainty over whether it would be extended, have any impact on CASCADE's ability to carry out a robust evaluation of the pilot for the purposes of assessing whether it should be rolled out across Wales?

I appreciate that this is an exceptionally busy period for the Welsh Government. I would, however, be grateful for a response no later than Thursday 22 February so that we can consider it during our meeting on Wednesday 28 February.

I have copied this correspondence to the President of the Family Division, Sir Andrew McFarlane, due to his strong support for the FDAC approach across England and Wales and his involvement in our work relating to care experienced children and young people. I have also copied this correspondence to the Centre for Justice Innovation, Cardiff Council and Vale of Glamorgan Council for their information.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Cc. Sir Andrew McFarlane
President of the Family Division

Cc. Phil Bowen
Director of the Centre for Justice Innovation

Cc. Councillor Ash Lister
Cabinet Member for Social Services, Cardiff Council

Cc. Robert Tomas
Chief Executive, Vale of Glamorgan Council

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Annex: FDAC timeline

Spring 2023	The Strategic Steering Group makes a request to the Welsh Government for additional short term funding of £60,000 to extend the FDAC pilot to after the publication of CASCADE's evaluation. (Membership of the steering being senior legal and children's services staff for the lead authorities, Family Court Judge, Welsh Government, Cafcass Cymru, the Centre for Justice Innovation and other stakeholders.)
9 March	<p>Oral evidence to the CYPE Committee:</p> <p>Deputy Minister: "We are absolutely convinced of the value of the problem-solving family court model. ... It's being evaluated by CASCADE, based in Cardiff University, and they do need a bit longer, beyond the two years, to continue their evaluation, and we want to see the evaluation, really, to decide how we would go forward. So, we're looking at ways of extending the funding in order for the evaluation to be completed, and then, we will see what the evaluation says to see if we can make it serve a wider population in Wales. But, certainly, the evidence we've got so far has been very encouraging."⁷</p>
May	<p>CYPE Committee's report recommendation 9:</p> <p>"The Welsh Government must work with local authorities, members of the judiciary and other relevant stakeholders to continue the roll-out of the FDAC model across Wales, subject to a successful evaluation of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan pilot."⁸</p>
July	<p>Welsh Government response to the CYPE Committee's report recommendation 9:</p> <p>"Response: Accept</p> <p>The Welsh Government will review the evaluation of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan pilot to consider sustainable delivery models for a National Rollout. We will work with local authorities, members of the judiciary and other relevant stakeholder to ensure key partners are involved in advising and scoping future FDACs in Wales.</p> <p>Financial Implications: Yes, any additional costs will be considerable and will have to be identified from existing budgets."⁹</p>
14 September	<p>Oral evidence to the CYPE Committee:</p>

⁷ Children, Young People and Education Committee, [09/03/23, Record of Proceedings](#), paragraph 222

⁸ Welsh Parliament, ['If not now, then when? Radical reform for care experienced children and young people'](#), May 2023, pages 68-69

⁹ Welsh Government, ['Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Children, Young People and Education Committee report entitled "If not now, then when? Radical reform for care-experienced children and young people"'](#), July 2023, page 9

	<p>James Evans: ... With the financial situation that you outlined at the start, how confident are you that you can actually keep delivering this model, because you did say you wanted to do it, following its evaluation in January?</p> <p>Deputy Minister: "I'm very supportive of the family drug and alcohol court. I was pleased to launch it and have had feedback from it since, and we are evaluating it... But, we, you know—as you said, these are difficult and financially difficult, challenging times, and we really have to scrutinise and prioritise where we can best put our money, given the financial situation we're in. But we'll have the evaluation and I'm hopeful we'll make, then, the right decision about how we move forward."</p> <p>James Evans: "... is this one of the areas that is being looked at as a potential saving or is it on the backburner until the evaluation is done?"</p> <p>Deputy Minister: It's waiting for the evaluation. We certainly haven't looked at it as a potential saving.</p> <p>James Evans: But is it being looked at now?</p> <p>Deputy Minister: We haven't, no."¹⁰</p>
18 - 26 September	Relevant staff and members of the judiciary are informed that the pilot will close in November 2023 for financial reasons. Staff are given notice of deployment or redundancy.
25 September	<p>Letter from the Chair of the CYPE Committee:</p> <p>Following concerns raised to the Committee privately by stakeholders, the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee writes to the Deputy Minister and Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils to seek clarification and assurances about the closure of the FDAC pilot.¹¹</p>
16 October	<p>Letter from the Deputy Minister to the CYPE Committee:</p> <p>"I appreciate the concerns of the Committee regarding our decision not to provide additional funding to extend the pilot for a further year. I must assure you that funding has not been reduced for the FDAC pilot, the project has come to its scheduled end which was set for November 2023."¹²</p>
1 & 14 November	<p>Letters from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan councils</p> <p>The Committee receives substantively identical letters from both councils, implying that the closure of the pilot in November 2023 had always been anticipated. The letters add that "any extension to the pilot was not feasible within their [the Welsh Government's] current budget constraints", and that the</p>

¹⁰ Children, Young People and Education Committee, [14/09/23, Record of Proceedings](#), paragraphs 132-137

¹¹ Welsh Parliament, ['Letter from the Chair of the Children Young People and Education Committee to the Deputy Minister'](#), 25/09/23

¹² Welsh Government, ['Letter from the Deputy Minister for Social Services'](#), 16/10/23

Committee's concern over the lack of funding to extend the pilot in November 2023 is the result of "some confusion". ¹³
--

¹³ Cardiff Council, 'Welsh Government funding of the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) Pilot', 01/11/23 and Vale of Glamorgan Council, 'Welsh Government (WG) funding of the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) Pilot', 16/11/23

Agenda Item 7.6

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Jeremy Miles MS

Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

19 December 2023

PISA results

Dear Jeremy,

We are writing about the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, announced on 5 December, and the broader issue of school improvement and raising standards.

The PISA results

As you acknowledged in your [statement](#), Wales' results in the 2022 PISA cycle are disappointing, particularly given the improvement shown in the 2018 cycle. We note that:

- Wales' scores decreased in all three subject domains of mathematics, reading and science. In all three cases, the decrease was statistically significant and was larger than the decrease in scores of the other three UK nations.
- Wales' scores are significantly lower than the OECD average; this coming after Wales had 'caught up' with the OECD average in 2018.
- Wales' scores remain the lowest in the UK, across all three subject domains.
- Wales would have missed the target of achieving 500 points in each of the three subject domains, set in 2014 and discontinued in 2022, by some distance. It would have also missed



the original target, set in 2011 and discontinued in 2014, of being among the top 20 'ranked' nations in PISA.¹

In looking at attainment gaps, we note that the gap in performance between pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and the least disadvantaged backgrounds was smaller in Wales than on average across OECD countries in all three domains. We also note that Wales had more "academically resilient" learners – that is being in the bottom quarter of PISA's economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) index but performing in the top quarter. However, there remain considerable gaps between pupils eligible for free school meals and other pupils – 48 points in mathematics, 42 points in reading and 48 points in science. We can see that in reading this has widened from 34 points in 2018.²

Wales had fewer higher achievers in PISA than other countries. The proportion of learners in Wales who performed at the highest proficiency levels, Level 5 or 6, was:

- 6% in mathematics, significantly lower than the OECD average of 9%;
- 5% in reading, significantly lower than the OECD average of 7%; and
- 6% in science, significantly lower than the OECD average of 7%.³

Furthermore, the results for Wales show the gap between the highest performing (90th percentile) and lower performing (10th percentile) pupils in PISA widened in all three domains in 2022, compared to 2018. Regrettably, this does not reflect improvement among our highest achievers but a greater decline in the lowest achievers than the decline in our highest achievers. (However, the 90th percentile score in science did remain the same.) The gap is, however, narrower than in the other three UK nations in mathematics and science. Again, this is due to the difference between our highest achievers being greater than the difference between our lowest achievers.⁴

1. We would welcome your views on any further thinking you have had on what needs to be done to address some of these issues.

Other measures of education performance

We are well aware that PISA is of course not the only measure of educational performance. The qualifications young people gain when leaving school or college continue to serve as a very significant measure of this. It is therefore disappointing to see that GCSE data for 2023, published last

¹ [Welsh Government, PISA 2022: National Report for Wales, research report, December 2023](#)

² [Welsh Government, PISA 2022: National Report for Wales, research report, December 2023](#)

³ [Welsh Government, PISA 2022: National Report for Wales, research report, December 2023](#)

⁴ [Welsh Government, PISA 2022: National Report for Wales, research report, December 2023](#)

week, shows that the deprivation attainment gap has widened during the pandemic (2018/19 to 2022/23), having already widened in the last few years prior to the pandemic (2015/16 to 2018/19):

- The difference between the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and other pupils, achieving GCSE grades A*-A, widened from 14.6 percentage points in 2015/16 to 14.8 percentage points in 2018/19, and to 16.7 percentage points in 2022/23.
- The difference between the proportion of pupils eFSM and other pupils, achieving GCSE grades A*-C, widened from 24.9 percentage points in 2015/16 to 28.1 percentage points in 2018/19, and to 29.8 percentage points in 2022/23.
- The difference between the proportion of pupils eFSM, achieving GCSE grades A*-G, widened from 2.6 percentage points in 2015/16 to 5.7 percentage points in 2018/19, and to 7.7 percentage points in 2022/23.⁵

Other recently published data on the personalised assessments taken by pupils in Years 2 to 9 also showed a decline, coinciding with the pandemic, in reading and numeracy levels.⁶ We note that, in light of this, you published a new Mathematics and Numeracy Plan⁷, and an updated oracy and reading toolkit⁸.

The decline was particularly the case in Welsh where pupils' reading levels in 2022/23 were on average 11 months behind those of pupils of the same age in 2020/21 (the decline was four months in the case of English reading).

2. Have you identified the reasons behind this difference in performance in English and Welsh?

3. What steps are you taking to address and narrow the gap?

Our work

As you are aware, we are undertaking a Senedd long piece of work scrutinising implementation of the key education reforms, the new curriculum and ALN. We acknowledge that these are key tools in driving improvements in the Welsh education system. We also know that for many years there have been efforts geared towards raising standards and narrowing inequalities, as currently reflected by the Programme for Government objective and your "national mission" of "high standards and aspirations for all".

⁵ [Welsh Government, Examination results, September 2022 to August 2023 \(provisional\), 5 October 2023](#).

⁶ [Welsh Government, Patterns in reading and numeracy attainment: from 2018/19 to 2022/23, 23 November 2023](#).

⁷ [Welsh Government, Mathematics and numeracy plan 2023, 29 November 2023](#).

⁸ [Welsh Government, Written Statement: Whole School Approach to Oracy and Reading, 23 March 2023](#).



In addition to our ongoing scrutiny of curriculum and ALN reform, we are likely to do some specific work looking at school standards. However, before we start that work, we have invited you to a general scrutiny session on 28 February 2024. It would be helpful to have your response to this letter before this session, particularly your response to the observations made here, particularly now you have had opportunity to analyse and reflect on the PISA results. We would therefore appreciate a response by Friday 17 February.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 7.7

Information from Llamau regarding the Welsh Government White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales

Llamau are in favour of the total removal of priority need, but recognise this could have unintended consequences for those people already in or about to go into the proposed 'exemption' groups.

The proposed abolition of the "priority need" test can potentially have negative implications for care leavers and care-experienced children. Here are some potential issues that require further consideration:-

1. **Increased Competition for Limited Housing:** Abolishing the priority need test may lead to increased competition for limited housing resources. Care leavers and care-experienced children, who may already face challenges in securing stable accommodation, could face additional difficulties if there is heightened demand for housing.
2. **Potential Delay in Housing Assistance:** With the removal of the priority need test, there might be a need for a lead-in time for the new system to take effect. During this period, care leavers and care-experienced individuals may experience delays in accessing housing assistance, which could contribute to their vulnerability.
3. **Specific Vulnerabilities of Care Leavers:** Care leavers often face unique challenges, including the transition to independent living without family support. The removal of the priority need test should be accompanied by measures to address the specific vulnerabilities of care leavers, ensuring they receive the necessary support during the transition to independent living.
4. **Impact on Homelessness Prevention:** The priority need test serves as a mechanism to identify and prioritize vulnerable individuals at risk of homelessness. Its removal may impact the effectiveness of homelessness prevention efforts, particularly for care leavers who may be at a higher risk of housing instability.
5. **Need for Adequate Support Services:** As part of the broader strategy, it's crucial to ensure that care leavers have access to support services that address their unique needs. This includes mental health support, education and employment assistance, and other services that contribute to their overall well-being and housing stability.
6. **Resource Allocation:** Local authorities will still need to manage their resources effectively and determine how individuals, including care leavers, are prioritized for housing allocations. Clear guidance and policies should be in place to ensure fair and transparent resource allocation that considers the specific needs of care leavers.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation: The impact of the abolition of the priority need test on care leavers should be closely monitored and evaluated. This includes assessing whether care leavers are disproportionately affected, and if so, adjustments to the system may be necessary to address any unintended consequences.

As you can see, our main concerns, whilst supporting the principle, is, without significant allocation of resources, young people who are care experienced may see reduced support as the expansion of priority need occurs. We are also concerned the proposals are not robust enough and may see a variation in how the guidance is used in practice.

Agenda Item 7.8

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau

Petitions Committee

Senedd Cymru
Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
Deisebau@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddDeisebau
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
Petitions@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddPetitions
0300 200 6565

Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Tŷ Hywel

Cardiff Bay

CF99 1SN

19 December 2023

Dear Jayne

Petition P-06-1359 Offer Welsh working parents the same financial support for childcare as England &
Petition P-06-1362 Match the new childcare offer in England of 15 hours for 2 year old's from April 2024

The Petitions Committee are currently considering the above two petitions, which were both considered at our meeting on 11 December 2023, alongside correspondence from the Deputy Minister for Social Services and both petitioners.

At the meeting Members agreed to write to your Committee in order to bring the petitions to your attention and to ask that the issues raised in both petitions are raised as part of your Committee's budget scrutiny in the Spring term.

Further information about the petitions, including related correspondence, is available on our website at: <https://business.senedd.wales/ielssueDetails.aspx?Ild=41902&Opt=3> & <https://business.senedd.wales/ielssueDetails.aspx?Ild=41910&Opt=3>.

If you have any queries, please contact the Committee clerking team at the e-mail address below, or on 0300 200 6454. I would be grateful if you could send your response by e-mail to the clerking team at petitions@senedd.wales.

Yours sincerely



Jack Sargeant MS

Chair



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament

Pack Page 116

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.
We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 7.9

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Julie Morgan MS

Deputy Minister for Social Services

20 December 2023

Data relating to children's services agency staff

Dear Julie,

In our report on radical reform for care experienced people, we quoted Social Care Wales, who had informed us that in 2022, 49% of all children's services staff were agency workers, with 85.6% of those agency workers filling vacancies for qualified social workers.¹ When you gave evidence to us on 14 September, you suggested that these figures may be incorrect.²

During the drafting of our report, the Committee clerks queried directly with Social Care Wales whether the 49 figure quoted in Social Care Wales' written evidence³ represented individuals or a percentage. Social Care Wales replied to confirm that it was a percentage. Since our meeting on 14 September, we have again queried the figure with Social Care Wales.⁴ They have since acknowledged that "The confirmation of this figure as a percentage in the subsequent email [the email responding to clerks] was an error by Social Care Wales."⁵

¹ Welsh Parliament, 'If not now, then when? Radical reform for care experienced children and young people', May 2023, page 30

² Children, Young People and Education Committee, 14/09/23, Record of Proceedings, paragraphs 118-123

³ Written evidence, Social Care Wales (additional information)

⁴ Welsh Parliament, 'Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee to the Chief Executive of Social Care Wales', 10/10/23

⁵ Social Care Wales, 'Re: The use of agency staff in children's services', 27/11/23, page 2



Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

Based on the briefing note provided to us by Social Care Wales in their letter dated 27 November, we understand that, **as of September 2023, 17.5% of children's services social workers (429 individuals) were primarily employed by an agency.**

It is unfortunate that the Committee was provided with inaccurate information. However, the fact that 17% of children's services social workers are agency staff is alarming and explains the considerable disruption in the lives of the care experienced children and young people we spoke to. We reiterate our conclusions and recommendations as set out in our report.⁶

As I stated during our meeting on 14 September, errors such as these demonstrate clearly why data transparency is so important.⁷ On this issue too, we reiterate our calls for formal data collecting duties to be placed on relevant public bodies, and for that data to be collated, verified and published by the Welsh Government.⁸

A quality, stable children's social care workforce is vital. We have invited Social Care Wales to discuss workforce matters further with the Committee and I have copied them into this letter.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Cc. Sue Evans
Chief Executive, Social Care Wales

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

⁶ Welsh Parliament, '[If not now, then when? Radical reform for care experienced children and young people](#)', May 2023, pages 35-38

⁷ Children, Young People and Education Committee, [14/09/23, Record of Proceedings](#), paragraph 128

⁸ Welsh Parliament, '[If not now, then when? Radical reform for care experienced children and young people](#)', May 2023, pages 49 - 54

Agenda Item 7.10

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Sue Evans

Chief Executive, Social Care Wales

20 December 2023

Senedd Cymru
Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

Invitation to appear before Committee & data about children's services workforce

Dear Sue,

Thank you for your ongoing contributions to our work as it relates to care experienced children and young people, including [your February 2023 response](#) to our request for written information, and the [recent briefing note](#) you provided relating to local authorities' social care workforce.

Invitation to appear before Committee

Our inquiry into radical reform of services for care experienced children and young people illustrated the crucial role of Social Care Wales in relation to the children's social care workforce. In particular, it highlighted the importance of a stable and quality workforce was clear in terms of properly supporting children, young people and their families and being able to manage cases effectively working with the wide range of agencies that can be involved in their lives. In turn, it was also clear that a stable workforce is key to safely reducing the numbers of children in care.

Although our report was published in May 2023, our work in this area is ongoing. We remain concerned about the experiences of many children and young people of the care system, and the capacity of the Welsh Government and public bodies to deliver the truly radical reform that we believe the care system needs.

We therefore invite you to appear before Committee for a one-off scrutiny session about the work of Social Care Wales as it relates to care experienced children and young people and their families. We propose that this takes place during the morning of **Wednesday 20 March 2023**.

It is unfortunate that Social Care Wales' error in clarifying the data to our clerks by e-mail was so substantive, and that it related to an issue that was so important to the children and young people we spoke to.

However, we welcome new data you provided to us in November 2023 about the numbers of children's services social workers who are employed by an agency. This new data disaggregates different groups of children's workforce, including children's services social workers (our main area of interest in this inquiry) and children's residential care staff. The November 2023 briefing appears to have clarified that 17.5% of children's services social workers were working for an agency:

*As of September 2023, the register shows the total number of Childrens Services Social Workers was 2,456. Of these, **429 (17.5%)** declared their primary employer as an agency.¹ [Our emphasis]*

In response to a written question from us about the 'extent of the use of agency staff for children's social care and its impact', you told us in February 2023 (as clarified by your November 2023 briefing note) that:

*"the use of agency workers in children's services has decreased slightly over the course of the year from **56 [individuals] in 2021 to 49 [individuals] in 2022. 85.6% of all agency staff utilised in children's services were for qualified social workers"**.² [Our emphasis]*

Its difficult to reconcile how in 2022 the number of individual agency workers for all children's social care staff was 49, but by 2023 the number of individual agency workers for children's services social workers alone was 429. This would appear to represent an increase of over 1,000% in just one year.³ This increase appears highly unlikely, so we assume that either this is not a like for like comparison, or that there is – still – a lack of clarity about certain workforce data.

This ongoing uncertainty about children's social care workforce data that is routinely verified and published in England only reinforces our concerns about the transparency, accuracy and reliability of data published in Wales.⁴ We will be seeking to clarify this data as part of our scrutiny session with you as proposed above.

¹ Social Care Wales, 'Re: The use of agency staff in children's services', 27/11/23, page 2

² Written evidence, Social Care Wales (additional information)

³ 85.6% of 49 individuals is 42 individuals. 429 is an increase of 1,021% compared to 42.

⁴ Welsh Parliament, 'If not now, then when? Radical reform for care experienced children and young people', May 2023, pages 49-54

Due to the mutual interest in the issues that we will discuss during the proposed scrutiny session, I will invite members of the Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee to attend. I have copied this correspondence to the Chair of that Committee for his information.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Cc. Russell George MS
Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Gillian Baranski

Chief Inspector, Care Inspectorate Wales

20 December 2023

Annual scrutiny

Dear Gillian,

As you may know, we carry out annual scrutiny of a series of public bodies whose work is directly relevant to our remit (Estyn, Qualifications Wales, and the Children's Commissioner for Wales). The scrutiny usually comprises one evidence session per year following the publication of the public body's annual report. These annual scrutiny sessions offer an opportunity to discuss the public bodies' work in detail and consider any corporate and financial issues outlined in their annual reports.

Our inquiry into radical reform of services for care experienced children and young people illustrated to us the crucial role of Care Inspectorate Wales in relation to overseeing, and driving improvements within, local authorities' children's services departments and other registered children's care providers. Although our report was published in May 2023, our work in this area is ongoing. We remain concerned about the experiences of many children and young people of the care system, and the capacity of the Welsh Government and public bodies to deliver the truly radical reform that we believe the care system needs. We are also aware of the vital role of Care Inspectorate Wales in relation to childcare and early years education, both of which also fall with our remit.

We would therefore like to add scrutiny of Care Inspectorate Wales in its role as the independent regulator and inspector of children's social care and childcare to our recurring annual scrutiny calendar. We propose that the first such session would be held during the morning of **Wednesday 20 March 2024**, and would cover:

- the performance of local authority children's services,
- your recent rapid review of child protection arrangements;
- the use of unregistered accommodation for children in care;

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

- care homes for children operating without registration;
- Deprivation of Liberty Orders;
- criminally exploited children and young people;
- missing children;
- workforce issues; and
- other matters relevant to your 2022-23 Annual Report.

Future sessions would be held shortly after the publication of your annual report (i.e. during the autumn/spring terms).

I very much hope that you are amenable to this request. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact our clerks in the first instance (SeneddChildren@Senedd.Wales).

Due to the mutual interest in the issues that we will discuss during the proposed scrutiny sessions, I will invite members of the Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee to attend. I have copied this correspondence to the Chair of that Committee for his information.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Cc. Russell George MS
Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Russell George MS

Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

20 December 2023

Invitation to join scrutiny sessions with Social Care Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales

Dear Russell,

As you may know, in May 2023 we published 'If not now, then when?', our report about services for care experienced children and young people in Wales. Since the publication of the report, we have continued to press the Welsh Government and others for truly 'radical reform' of the care system, which we believe is necessary to significantly improve the experiences of the many children, young people and their families who come into contact with it.

As part of that work, we have invited Social Care Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales to attend Committee (separately) on **Wednesday 20 March 2024** to give evidence about their roles in relation to the children's social care workforce and the regulation and inspection of children's social care and childcare. Given that social care falls within your Committee's remit, I would like to invite you and your fellow Committee members to attend those sessions

Our clerks will liaise directly with Care Inspectorate Wales and Social Care Wales to finalise a time for the scrutiny sessions. Once they have done so, they will contact your clerks directly with the relevant details. I would be grateful if your clerks could confirm to us who you expect to attend no later than 13 March 2024 (one week before the proposed date).

We have also proposed to Care Inspectorate Wales that we scrutinise them on a recurring annual basis shortly after the publication of their annual report. The first such annual scrutiny would be held in autumn 2024. I would also like to invite Health and Social Care Committee members to attend those annual scrutiny sessions too; our clerks will share the relevant details with you closer to the time.

Yours sincerely,

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

Jayne Bryant

Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Equality and Social Justice Committee - Calling Time on Child Poverty - How Wales Can Do Better

DECEMBER 2023

I would like to thank the members of the Equality and Social Justice Committee for their report: *Calling Time in Child Poverty – How Wales Can Do Better* which my officials and I have considered carefully.

As the Committee is aware, our strategic approach to tackling child poverty will be reflected in our Child Poverty Strategy, to be published in the new year. The engagement and consultation undertaken to develop the Child Poverty Strategy (the Strategy) has helped Welsh Government to understand where, as part of the wider delivery of the Programme for Government, we need to focus our efforts to achieve the greatest impact in tackling child poverty in as short a time as is possible and to sustain ongoing change.

The Strategy is a high-level framework to maximise the levers we have at our disposal across government to make our contribution to eradicating child poverty. There are actions that we need to take, and are taking, to ensure that organisations can better collaborate and work with partners with tackling child poverty as a common aim. We will work with our partners to support the implementation of cross-cutting work to achieve this.

I am committed to tackling child poverty as an absolute priority, as is the Welsh Government. We will continue to use every lever we have available, and take a leadership role in co-ordinating wider action to work towards eradicating child poverty in Wales.

I have set out my response to the Committee's recommendations below.

Recommendation 1

In updating its strategic approach to tackling child poverty, the Welsh Government should:

- I. set interim and longer-term **targets** for reducing child poverty learning from the approaches taken in other countries such as Scotland and New Zealand. These should aim for ambitious and realistic reductions for children in relative poverty, absolute poverty, material deprivation and persistent poverty.
- II. Publish a detailed **action plan** setting out how it will achieve its targets. Each activity within the action plan should set out which Minister is responsible for delivering it, timescales, and how it will be monitored. The action plan should be published within 6 months of publication of the final Strategy.

Response: Accept in principle

- I. Work to develop a robust monitoring framework is being taken forwards at pace. The framework will take into consideration the national indicators and national milestones we have in place under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. We believe a framework based on a range of measures will more accurately reflect

progress against our approach to this complex set of problems than a purely target-based measure. The most effective way to implement targets is through a co-ordinated approach across every level where relevant powers are held. Whilst we will continue to liaise with Scottish Government to understand the scope and impact of their suite of interventions on those living in poverty, a range of important powers on child poverty are not devolved in Wales, which limits the value of comparison with countries such as Scotland or New Zealand, remembering of course that tax and welfare benefits are key tools for tackling poverty.

In order to develop clear monitoring arrangements, we have given a commitment to seek independent research advice during 2024 on suitable national poverty indicators, data availability and a framework to monitor and demonstrate transparent accountability in reporting on our progress in tackling poverty. We will also continue to produce a full progress report against the Strategy every three years, as required under the Children and Families Measure 2010. This includes involving people with lived experience, including children and young people, in telling us whether we are achieving progress against the Strategy.

- II. Rather than having an overarching action plan, the Child Poverty Strategy provides a framework in which there are separate action plans across Ministerial portfolios which detail and measure progress under the relevant Programme for Government activity. The new Strategy will support prioritisation, integration and collaboration, encouraging partners to work in new or different ways in order to have the greatest impact.

Financial Implications –

None.

Recommendation 2

The Welsh Government should focus its final Strategy much more clearly on **children's rights, referencing individual articles** and using the five principles set out in 'The Right Way.' The Welsh Government should ensure there is direct read across between what it was told by children, young people, parents and carers, with specific priority actions in the final Strategy to address the needs of groups of children most likely to be affected by poverty.

Response: Accept

The final Strategy will include clearer and more explicit reference to the individual articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The final Strategy will also include a reference to '[The Right Way](#)' under Objective 5. As we work with partners to strengthen collaboration, find solutions together and promote good practice, it will be important to ensure that together we take a children's rights approach. The 5 principles of 'The Right Way' will inform this.

The commitments included under the 5 objectives in the Strategy have been informed by what we were told by children, young people, parents and carers and the organisations that support them.

The responses to the formal consultation on the draft Strategy were clear that the objectives and priorities set out in the Strategy are the right ones.

Of those who answered questions on whether they agreed that Objectives 1-5 should be an Objective of the strategy:

- 92% agreed with Objective 1
- 94% agreed with Objective 2
- 91% agreed with Objective 3
- 89% agreed with Objective 4
- 93% agreed with Objective 5

Of those who answered questions on whether they agreed that priorities 1-5 should be a priority of the strategy:

- 87% agreed with Priority 1
- 89% agreed with Priority 2
- 88% agreed with Priority 3
- 86% agreed with Priority 4
- 87% agreed with Priority 5

We will review the Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) to set out the evidence from children and young people and how this influenced the Strategy with more clarity.

We will also publish a more detailed account of the evidence gathered through pre-consultation engagement from those with lived experience of poverty and the organisations that support them.

Financial Implications

None.

Recommendation 3

The Welsh Government should prioritise programmes where there is clear evidence that they are effective at reducing child poverty and should provide sustainable funding to programmes that have proved their worth. This prioritisation should inform allocations in future budgets.

Response: Accept

Resources should always be targeted towards areas where they are most effective. This is particularly relevant when resources are most limited, and it has therefore been a key consideration in the Welsh Government's 2023-24 and 2024-25 budget processes.

We are clear that cross-government momentum on tackling poverty and inequality should be maintained and strengthened at every opportunity to support children, young people, and families. We are also clear on the importance of continuing to carefully assess the cumulative impacts of our decisions on those living in poverty.

The Child Poverty Strategy will focus our activity on those programmes and interventions which have the greatest impact in reducing child poverty within our devolved powers.

We publish a Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment (SIIA) alongside the draft Budget, which outlines the contextual evidence that supports our spending decisions, including those related to children and young people. This helps to ensure we prioritise the right programmes. The SIIA is one of a suite of documents published as part of the draft Budget and is critical to identifying key trends, strategic and cumulative impacts at portfolio level, across a range of areas, including giving due consideration across the statutory requirements.

We continue to outline the steps we are taking to reform budget and tax process improvements as part of our Budget Improvement Plan which is published alongside the Draft Budget and work collaboratively with the Budget Improvement Impact Advisory Group (BIIAG) to explore how we undertake the Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment moving forward (SIIA).

Detailed impact assessments, including a Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) are undertaken as part of our ongoing policy development and review.

Financial Implications –

None.

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government should provide an update on progress with the development of the Welsh Benefits System, including:

- I. Milestones it expects to achieve over the next year, timescales for implementing other actions, and how it plans to address barriers to implementing a coherent system such as eligibility criteria, uncertainty around data sharing, and technological challenges.
- II. What consideration it has given to how the pilots being run in Scotland on involving the Department for Work and Pensions can inform its work around the Welsh Benefits System.
- III. Analysis of how a version of the Scottish Child Payment might be introduced in Wales in the future.

The Welsh Government should clarify the timings for the bi-annual progress updates promised in response to recommendation 5 of our debt and the cost of living report.

Response: Accept

- I. The Partnership Council for Wales, which includes all 22 Local Authorities, has agreed:
 - the final draft of the Charter for delivery of Welsh Benefits (Annex A).
 - the establishment of an external Steering Group to develop an implementation plan and oversee its delivery.
 - to nominate representatives for the external Steering Group.

- a plan for regular update reports on progress to streamline the administration of Welsh benefits, grants, and payments.

To ensure focus remains on developing an implementation plan at pace, officials are working with WLGA to confirm the membership of the external Steering Group that will hold its inaugural meeting in January 2024. The external Steering Group will provide regular progress updates to the Partnership Council for Wales and these will be shared with the Equality and Social Justice Committee.

I will continue to provide updates to Senedd Members as we make progress against these actions.

- II. Welsh Government officials have regular contact with Scottish Government officials to learn lessons from their experience of delivering benefits and their adoption of a Charter and evaluation framework. We will be carefully examining the pilots being planned by Social Security Scotland for joint work with the DWP to understand how outcomes could inform our approach to delivering the Welsh benefits, payments, and grants.
- III. The devolution settlement does not give the Welsh Ministers the powers to implement a scheme along the lines of the Scottish Child Payment. However, we are doing detailed work to more clearly establish the balance of reserved and devolved powers in this area, as well as liaising with the Scottish Government to understand the scope, impact and challenges of their child payment.

Paragraph 130 of Schedule 7A to the Government of Wales Act 2006 (as amended by the Wales Act 2017) states 'social security schemes supported from public funds' are matters reserved to UK Parliament, on which the Senedd cannot legislate. The definition of social security schemes specifically includes schemes providing financial assistance for social security purposes and in particular, includes providing assistance to individuals who qualify by reason of old age, survivorship, disability, sickness, incapacity, injury, unemployment, maternity or the care of children or others needing care, who qualify by reason of low income, or in relation to their housing costs.

The Scotland Act 1998 gives the Scottish Government limited powers for elements of social security. As a result, the Scottish Government also receive a Barnett consequential for social security, something that is not available to the Welsh Government under the current devolution settlement.

It is recommended that updates in response to recommendation 5 of the Committee's Debt and the Cost of Living report are aligned with the progress reports to the Partnership Council for Wales. The arrangements for this will be discussed by the External Steering Group in January 2024.

Financial Implications –

None.

Recommendation 5

The Welsh Government should commit to funding seamless and affordable childcare provision through the Barnett consequential it will receive from increased childcare spending in England. It should develop plans for doing this by July.

Response: Accept in Principle

Developing high quality support for children and families in the early years has been a long-standing priority for the Welsh Government, and this commitment is reflected in the Programme for Government and in the Cooperation Agreement. Our Children and Communities Grant (CCG) which supports early intervention and prevention activities for children, young people and their families provided funding of £172.269m in 2023-24. High quality learning and care in the early years supports child development and plays an important role in supporting school readiness and addressing the attainment gap to maximise child development outcomes to support the best start in life, particularly for our most disadvantaged children.

Since 2022, as a result of Flying Start Expansion, 4,589 additional childcare places have been offered as well as extending opportunities to those in training or on the edge of work. The Welsh Government is facing the toughest financial situation we have faced since devolution. This means we need to prioritise the finite resources we have. As a result of the extremely difficult economic conditions currently, this means that we are not currently in a position to confirm any new commitments to funded expansion of childcare beyond those we have already published.

As has been the longstanding practice of WG, any consequential for 2024-25 received via the Barnett formula will be managed through the Draft Budget process based on the funding received. Where there is a case for using the consequential funding for similar purposes, Welsh Ministers will deploy in line with its priorities.

Financial Implications –

None.

Recommendation 6

At the earliest available opportunity, the Welsh Government should improve coordination across government of its efforts to tackle child poverty by appointing a dedicated Minister for Babies, Children and Young People with responsibility for tackling child poverty. In the interim, the First Minister should take responsibility for this area, as is being done in Ireland and has previously been done in New Zealand.

Response: Reject

The allocation of ministerial portfolios is the responsibility of the First Minister, but tackling poverty is the responsibility of all Welsh Ministers within their portfolio. The Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip has specific responsibilities related to co-ordination of measures to mitigate Child Poverty and regularly discusses shared interests in poverty and inequalities with other Ministers.

Every member of the Cabinet has a duty placed on them as Welsh Ministers to give due regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The 'due regard' duty set out in section 1 of the Rights of the Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 Measure, applies to all Welsh Ministers, when exercising any of their functions.

The strategy confirms we will continue to take a children's rights approach to the delivery of our Programme for Government, in line with the UNCRC, with tackling poverty and inequality as cross cutting policy drivers.

Financial Implications –

None.

Agenda Item 7.14

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

Jeremy Miles MS

Minister for Education and Welsh Language

21 December 2023

Post-compulsory education and the Welsh language: the learners' voice

Dear Jeremy,

We recently considered the [Welsh Language Commissioner's new report on post compulsory education and the Welsh language: the learners' voice](#).

We note some of the statistics provided in the report. For example:

- The differences between the percentage of subjects taught in the Welsh medium between school learners (72%) and college learners (4%).
- The statistics from the Welsh Government that show that during 2021-22 15.2% of school sixth form activities were Welsh medium compared with 0.2% of further education institutions activities.
- The three common reasons for those who are fluent or can speak a fair amount of Welsh for not studying through the Welsh medium are the:
 - Perception that their English language skills are stronger, and that studying through the English medium is easier for them;
 - Subject / subjects not available in Welsh; and
 - Perception that further studies are likely to be in English or that there are better study prospects in English.



- The regional differences between those learners who felt there were sufficient opportunities to study through the Welsh medium in their area. While the overall figure was 60% who agreed or strongly agreed, the report shows clear regional differences. For example, in Mid Wales 78% of learners agreed or strongly agreed whereas, in South East Wales only 47% of learners agreed or strongly agreed. The report states that “there is a clear lack of post-16 provision in several areas”.

In the conclusions and findings of the report, it notes that the post-16 sector needs to address the lack of Welsh-medium provision, particularly in “more vocational areas”. The Commissioner also highlights a number of other areas where further work or consideration is needed including:

- Raising awareness of the opportunities to use Welsh as learners progress through their post-school education;
- Strengthening Welsh language provision across the post-16 sector;
- Increasing the number of students taking post-16 qualifications through Welsh medium;
- Increasing opportunities for people to use the Welsh language in the workplace; and
- Addressing barriers that prevent learners from studying in Welsh post-16.

We would welcome your thoughts on the issues covered in the Commissioner’s report; what steps the Welsh Government can take to address these issues; and what role the newly established Commission for Tertiary Education and Research will play in dealing with these issues. .

Due to their responsibilities for the Welsh language, I am copying this letter to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee. I am also copying this letter to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

We would appreciate a response by 1 February 2024.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 7.15

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd Meddwl a Llesiant
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

20 December 2023

Dear Jayne

Thank you for the letter which seeks to follow up on recommendation 11 of the Mental Health support in Higher education CYPE report and relates to an update on the Advisory Group for Mental Health in FE and HE.

The Group was established in February 2023 for an initial 6-month period and brought together professionals across both tertiary and health sectors to ensure a more integrated approach to providing mental health support to post-16 learners.

The group's terms of reference, provided as part of the [Welsh Government](#) CYPE report response and included in this letter at Annex A, stated that its purpose was to:

- identify and support implementation of ways which improve access to mental health services by post-16 students and
- ensure institutions have consistent and accessible resources to support prevention and/or early intervention.

A review of the group is now underway to consider the effectiveness of the approach and advise on next steps.

The Advisory Group has provided an opportunity for the education and health sectors to come together, to share best practice and identify opportunities for close partnership working. A significant outcome has been the commissioning of a feasibility study on the roll-out of a Mental Health liaison service across Wales, as outlined in our response to recommendation 25.

Funded through HEFCW, the feasibility study will build on the initial pilot which was conducted with one local health board, and begin to scope the potential of a Welsh-wide model that takes account of the diverse needs of higher education including as this relates to rural contexts and the Welsh language. Stakeholders from NHS workforce, tertiary education sector, local health boards and Mental Health officials have been engaged from

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Jeremy.Miles@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Jeremy.Miles@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

the outset. Funding has also been allocated to a parallel feasibility study in FE, which will provide baseline information to help assess whether the approach could be extended to include FE in future. The outcomes of these studies will be considered by the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, which will take over responsibility for funding mental health support in HE and FE once fully operational.

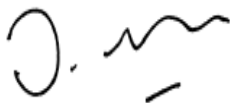
In addition to the progression of the mental health pilot, the Advisory Group has also fulfilled its aim to contribute to and inform the development of the new Together for Mental Health strategy. Facilitated by Welsh Government mental health officials, group members took part in a stakeholder workshop, where they discussed the vision statements and identify areas of difference and similarity in their approaches and challenges with mental health provision.

This collective, qualitative response is supported by the individual response to the pre consultation survey which took place over the summer. The work of the Advisory Group and the responses to the consultation have informed the draft mental health strategy which will be published for consultation early next year. This includes removing barriers to accessing mental health services and to ensuring easy access to information about support for students.

Student mental health and well-being is a key ministerial priority and as the Commission is established in the new year and its strategic priorities considered we expect it to continue this cross-policy work with the health sector to deliver mental health support at the right level at the right time.

We thank you for your continued interested in this topic.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd Meddwl a
Llesiant
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and
Wellbeing

**(National) Mental Health Advisory Group for
Further and Higher Education
Terms of Reference**

Key Deliverables

- Provide a set of advice and actions to inform the development of the new Mental Health strategy for Wales
- Establish a national approach to improve primary care access to mental health support for post-16 education students across Wales.
- Establish a consistent approach to mental health referrals and support across the post-16 education sectors and NHS.
- Identify the gaps or barriers in training and resources to equip students to self manage their mental health and wellbeing.

Purpose and Scope of the Group

The group's purpose is to address the following questions:

- What barriers exist to post-16 students to access the correct mental health services and support services and how can they be overcome?
- What (more) can FE and HE institutions do to support prevention and / or early Intervention?

To achieve this, the Group will:

- Review and agree which of the recommendations as set out in the Post-16 mental health policy proposals should be prioritised
- identify any immediate actions that could be taken to address any urgent needs identified
- Interface between health and further / higher education sectors – with a focus on identifying barriers and ensuring equitable access to support where needed.
- Bring sector specific knowledge, providing up to date insight on research and activities in the Mental Health and Education space.
- Advise on the use of routinely collected data across the sectors and how it can inform evidence-based decision making.

Consider what the Welsh Government can do to support the delivery of a national approach

NB This is not a decision group. The Group's role is to provide advice to inform decisions by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and the Deputy Minister for Health and Well-being.

Frequency and Management of the Meetings

The Group will meet initially on 6 February 2023 followed by subsequent bi-monthly meetings.

All meetings will be scheduled in advance and will be conducted via Teams or in person if members would prefer. Meetings will last no longer than two hours.

Duration: The group will be established for a period of 6 months where it will be reviewed to consider the effectiveness of the approach.

Papers for the meeting (along with updates to actions from the previous meeting) will be issued three working days before the meeting.

The secretariat of the meetings will be undertaken by Welsh Government.

Chairing of the Meeting

The meeting will be chaired by Deputy Minister for Health and Wellbeing.

Group Membership

The membership will consist of a maximum of ten members. Members have been selected based on their expertise in the field of mental health and well-being, further and higher education sectors and include representatives from student associations.

The membership of the Group, will include:

Chair –Lynne Neagle MS, Deputy Minister for Health and Well-being

Orla Tarn, President NUS Wales

Ben Lewis, AMOSSHE, Direct of Student Life Cardiff University

Professor Ann John - Professor, Health Data Science

Amanda Wilkinson - Director Universities Wales

David Hagendyk – Chief Executive Colegau Cymru

Jane Johns, Head of Widening Access and Inclusion, HEFCW

Angela Jones – Public Health Wales

Welsh Government Officials

Alex Slade - Director of Primary Care and Mental Health

Sinead Gallagher – Deputy Director Higher Education

Karron Williams - Senior Quality & Effectiveness Policy Manager

Matt Downton - Head of Mental Health & Vulnerable Groups

If members cannot attend meetings, they are welcome to send a deputy or provide comments in advance by email.

Reporting Arrangements

Members tasked with completing activities to support the work of the Group are asked to provide updates to the Secretariat according to an agreed timescale.

The Group will report on its deliverables at the 6 months end date.

Agenda Item 7.16

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru

21 December 2023

Dear Jayne,

Thank you for your letter dated 21 November to the Deputy Minister for Climate Change regarding learner transport. I am responding as the Deputy Minister is unwell.

I appreciate the important work the Committee is undertaking in this area and the comments made by families, young people and the organisations who represent them. I sympathise with the concerns raised in relation to learner travel and recognise the importance of this issue for parents, children and young people.

Learner travel is a cross-cutting complex area. As Committee members are aware, the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure (LTM) is the legislative framework that underpins learner transport in Wales. A review of the LTM was published in 2022 and a further internal analysis and evaluation exercise was undertaken earlier this year. These pieces of work reflect the findings from various pieces of work from the Children, Young People & Education Committee, that the transport needs of learners are complex, as are the networks, tools and resources required to deliver effective home to school transport services.

We do, however, believe that despite these challenges, there are opportunities for innovative approaches to be implemented to improve consistency and delivery of learner travel support across Wales. These opportunities are set out in the Learner Travel Recommendations Report that will be published in January 2024. The report sets out a modest pathway to develop a safe and sustainable learner travel offer that aligns with Welsh Government policies

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Julie.James@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Julie.James@gov.Wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

and aspirations, reflecting legislative changes that have taken place since the introduction of the LTM in 2008.

Thank you for raising the Committee's findings with me. I have addressed each of your themes in turn for ease of reference.

Evidence gathered: What are your views on the evidence we have gathered? Does this reflect your understanding of the issues across Wales, and the impact it can have on access to education and childcare?

We will be interested to read the final report of the Children, Young People and Education Committee's current review on whether disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare and we thank the Committee for looking into this important issue.

In the meantime, I appreciate you sharing directly with me the relevant findings on the experiences of children and young people with ALN of travelling to and from their places of learning and the impact it can have on wider family members.

Learners with ALN often face greater social barriers, not only to their learning. We therefore expect additional care to be taken for vulnerable learners accessing transport provided by local authorities, to ensure greater consistency in their safety and wellbeing.

The individual development plan (IDP) includes provision for transport needs for children and young people with ALN to be documented and is an opportunity for individuals, their families and the relevant authority to ensure that the appropriate provision is sought. Completing the travel arrangement section in IDPs, when relevant, can help with the coordination and delivery of school transport for the most vulnerable learners.

We hear of learners with ALN facing transport difficulties when accessing further education and that the provision of transport is inconsistent across Wales. As the letter suggests this can be a particular problem for those over 19 years old. Often a learner with more complex ALN will stay in school until they are around 19 years old before continuing their education at a further education college.

We are aware of the excellent independent travel training that Cardiff Council deliver to young people to provide them with lifelong skills to be able to access places of learning, employment and social opportunities by giving them the skills and confidence to use public transport. Although this type of intervention will not be suitable for everyone, we would like to encourage more local authorities, and learning institutions to consider alternative options.

Transport to extra-curricular activities, including provision such as breakfast clubs, is a challenging issue faced by all children and young people. The current legislation does not require local authorities to provide transport for these activities. The 2022 LTM review highlighted the fact that even if we did have the financial resources to support such provision, the weakness in current networks and infrastructure make implementing and expansion of provision difficult. Put simply, we do not have the bus drivers, the bus operators, the capacity in our school buildings or the resources locally to be able to provide school transport for extra curricular activities on top of the statutory provision. Our aspirations to introduce a locally informed franchised bus network, complemented by community transport networks does, we hope, provide opportunities to address some of these accessibility issues for children and young people across Wales by maximising the resources available.

The LTM Recommendations report that we hope to publish shortly recommends an immediate update the statutory guidance document to improve consistency of provision across the local authorities and ensure alignment with legislative changes that have taken place including the enactment of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. The evidence that you have presented will help inform the update to these guidance documents. This will include ensuring that local authorities and other delivery partners consider best practice regarding procurement of contracts to include minimum standards of awareness and training around transporting children with ALN.

Pupil Absence Report:

Could you outline the Welsh Government's current position on our recommendation?

The reasons for absence in schools is multifaceted. The Welsh Government will continue to explore the causes of low levels of learner attendance at schools and how this might be addressed at local and national level. We will use the findings to inform policy developments and interventions.

Our ambition will be to deliver a learner first approach to learner travel, however we have to be realistic to the challenges that were highlighted in the first review around transport networks, tools and resources required to deliver effective services for home to school transport. The internal evaluation and analysis exercise undertaken earlier this year collated a wide range of local, national and international evidence to identify innovative approaches to learner travel provision. Local authorities across Wales are already deploying some excellent and innovative practice to maximise resources to enhance transport provision to learners and the broader community. We want to embed the right structures so local authorities and other delivery partners can share and disseminate best practice to improve consistency of provision and to ensure that the transport infrastructure is in place to reduce any barriers to accessing education.

Petitions:

As we approach the end of the year, can you advise what has happened since this advice was submitted to you over the summer? What will be the next steps, and when will they result in change on the ground for learners across Wales? While we acknowledge the complexities around learner travel and the ongoing financial challenges faced across the public sector, we believe there is a real need for pace and urgency when dealing with this important issue.

An internal analysis and evaluation exercise was conducted earlier this year. The Committee will be sent a copy of this report which outlines a set of recommendation to improve the consistency and quality of learner transport provision across Wales.

Children's Commissioner:

We would welcome your views on the Commissioner's recommendation for a free public transport pilot for children and young people under 18 within this Senedd term.

One of the key aims of the Welsh Government's Transport Strategy, Llwybr Newydd, is to reduce the cost of sustainable travel for **everyone** in Wales, including young people.

Within the current operating model children up to the age of 5 will be allowed to travel free on local buses when accompanied by an adult. Those between 5 years old and up to 16 years

will also be able to receive either half fare or 1/3 off the normal bus fare, dependent on the bus operator, or if the service is operating under contract to the local authority.

We have looked at a range of options to make travel on public transport easier, more accessible and affordable for all in the community by simplifying the fares and ticketing system. We have undertaken a comprehensive piece of planning work around options to deliver a 'Fairer Fares' offer for bus passengers in Wales, which has included the potential introduction of capped single fares, zonal fares, integrated bus and rail ticketing and enhanced young person's ticketing. Some of these initiatives are currently being trialled on the Transport for Wales operated TrawsCymru network and we will be using this learning to inform a long term, sustainable and affordable solution that will encourage modal shift for all.

Under the current operating model, the only way we can offer discounted or free travel is to negotiate reimbursement arrangements with operators which has proven to be costly, as has been seen with the free travel offer for under 22s in Scotland. The proposed Bus Bill, which we will be bringing to the Senedd in 2024, will provide us with the opportunity to look a fresh at bus service delivery across Wales, including taking forward our work on fairer fares (and therefore the possibility around an enhanced provision for children and young people). As our aims are ambitious, these reforms will take time, but it is vital that we get this right to support all citizens of Wales.

In the meantime, we fund and provide the MyTravelPass scheme for 16 to 21 year olds which provides approximately 1/3 off the cost of bus travel. There are also a number of discounted bus network tickets available across Wales and a number of opportunities for discounted travel on the TfW rail network. The report recently published by the Welsh Youth Parliament, *Sustainable Ways*, has highlighted the need to undertake further work to ensure children and young people are aware of these schemes. We have therefore asked Transport for Wales to undertake a campaign to raise the profile of the discounts available for children and young people travelling on public transport.

Children in Wales:

What work is the Welsh Government doing to alleviate the cost of living pressures on transport costs for children, young people and their families?

The Welsh Government provides funding to local authorities for pre-16 provision in schools through the Local Government Revenue Settlement in the form of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). The RSG is not ring-fenced; the funding allocated to each authority is available to the authority to spend as it sees fit on the range of services for which it is responsible, including school transport. In determining the level of funding required to deliver their statutory duties local authorities may draw on other sources of funding outside the RSG.

In 2022/23 local authorities reported a total spend of £160 million on home to school transport. The latest published data outlining local authority spend on education, including learner travel, is available at the following link: [Education revenue outturn expenditure, by authority and service \(£ thousand\) \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/government-figures/education-revenue-outturn-expenditure-by-authority-and-service-2022-23)

As outlined above we have committed, along with Transport for Wales, to take forward a piece of work to run a targeted campaign and develop relevant and accessible resources, to ensure that children and young people are aware of all the public transport assistance they can access including:

- Children up to the age of 5 years old travel free on bus services across Wales and then either at half fare or two thirds the normal adult fare from the age of 5 and up to 16 years old.

- The Welsh Government's "MyTravelPass" is a discounted travel scheme, which is available for all young people aged 16 to 21 years. This £2 million scheme provides approximately 30% off the standard adult bus fare on local bus services across Wales. For further details of the scheme please see the following link: [Home !\[\]\(694fcb4611893e9db5249daba48abfc1_img.jpg\) mytravelpass | Welsh Government](#).
- There are also various discounted bus tickets offered by the different bus operators across Wales.
- Under 11's can travel for free on Transport for Wales operated rail services and under 16's can travel for free on off-peak Transport for Wales services when accompanied by a fare paying adult.
- Additionally, the 16-17 Saver railcard is also available for use on all rail services across Wales and England offering 50% off most rail fares every day of the year with no time restrictions and no minimum fare for an annual cost of £30.
- the Education Maintenance Allowance funding for further education can be used to support travel costs: [Education Maintenance Allowance, funding for Further Education | Student Finance Wales](#)

The Welsh Government has also compiled a list of support and advice to help individuals and families with the cost of living. This information is regularly updated and can be accessed on the following link: [Get help with the cost of living | GOV.WALES](#)

Welsh Youth Parliament:

What are your views on the recommendations made by the Welsh Youth Parliament?

Please see attached Annex A, our written response to the Welsh Youth Parliament.

Financial pressures on local authorities:

To what extent is the Welsh Government monitoring changes in local authority provision as a result of financial constraints; and the impact that is then having on learner engagement and attendance?

We monitor local authorities school transport provision closely through our work with the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers (ATCO), which provides a forum for local authorities to raise any concern on this issue. As part of the recent analysis and evaluation exercise, we reviewed all 22 local authority home to school transport and received survey responses from 14 local authorities who provided information on their costs, delivery models, issues and barriers associated with home to school transport in relation to the Measure and associated guidance.

Some really excellent practices have been identified with local authorities thinking creatively and innovatively about their learner travel provision. For example, the invest-to-save independent travel training provision in Cardiff and Monmouthshire Council reviewing their community transport provision and collaborating with bus operators to maximise the opportunities for children and young people to use public transport networks to access their places of learning. We support and encourage more of this integrated approach and joined up service delivery across Wales.

I hope this letter provides you with the reassurances required at this time by your committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie James". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Delyth Lewis
Senedd Commission Staff
Senedd Ieuenctid Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Delyth.Lewis@senedd.wales

21 December 2023

Dear Welsh Youth Parliament Members,

Thank you for the Sustainable Ways Report published by your Climate Change and Environment Committee. I am a passionate advocate for encouraging modal shift, getting people out of their cars and travelling sustainably – either through active travel or on public transport and the findings of your work are an important contribution to driving this agenda forward.

The report highlights some incredibly important issues, views and challenges that we as a government welcome. I would like to assure you that the content and its recommendations have been reviewed in detail by Ministers and officials and your findings will help inform the policies we develop and deliver whilst we progress on our transformational journey to develop an integrated transport network across Wales.

Many of your recommendations complement our aspirations set out in Llwybr Newydd, our Transport Strategy, where we have set out clear our ambitions to deliver an integrated active travel and public transport network that is both accessible, sustainable and efficient for the people of Wales.

We are in the early stages of this process. The Bus Bill which we are planning to bring to the Senedd next year will be a major step towards realising our ambitions. The Bill provides us with an opportunity to look afresh at bus service delivery across Wales by moving away from a commercial network (where private bus operators determine which routes they run and how much they charge) to a franchised model of delivery. Bus franchising allows the franchising authority (planned to be Welsh Government) to specify key aspects of bus services, including routes, timetables, fares, hours of operation and service quality standards – many of the themes that your recommendations touch on. Bus operators are therefore then responsible

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Julie.James@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Julie.James@gov.Wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

for running these services under contracts awarded by the franchising authority. As our aims are ambitious, these reforms will take time, but it is vital that we get this right to support all citizens of Wales.

Transport for Wales are responsible for delivering the Welsh Government's vision of a high quality safe, integrated, affordable and accessible transport network. In 2022 they, with the support of the Children's Commissioner, introduced a Children and Young People's Charter. Building on this work, we have asked them to accelerate the Children & Young People's Advisory Group who we will be ask to explore options for taking forward the recommendations of your report.

I will take each recommendation in turn so that you have a clear understanding of our position and, where relevant, the actions we will take.

THEME – AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING

Recommendation 1:

Places of learning to put a greater emphasis on improving young people's understanding of the practicalities of how they can travel sustainably in their local area

Welsh Government response:

Welsh Government agree with the sentiments of this recommendation and we will continue to support places of learning in developing the resources they require to encourage and promote sustainable travel in their local area.

We continue to invest in promoting Active Travel and have recently worked with Sustrans to provide support to schools to develop Active Travel School Plans, which aim to identify and address barriers to active travel to school, to help increase the number of pupils and staff walking, scooting or cycling regularly.

A set of resources and approaches were launched on 4 October this year and are available, online, for use by places of learning This investment complements our long standing Active Journeys programme, and cycling and child pedestrian training.

A new Walk to School programme, delivered by Living Streets has started working with local authorities and schools and will operate for two years providing schools and their learners with the skills and resource required to support sustainable travel.

Recommendation 2:

An increase in efforts to promote sustainable travel, and schemes like MyTravelPass.

Welsh Government response:

Welsh Government agree that children, young people, their families and others of influence in their lives should be fully aware of all the benefits and opportunities available to them to travel sustainably.

We were concerned to read about the low proportion of those responding to the survey who knew about the MyTravelPass scheme. Although schools and colleges are notified of the initiative on an annual basis, and we have asked delivery partners, such as the Children's Commissioner to also promote these initiatives, the report demonstrates the requirement to do further work in promoting this benefit.

We will explore options with Transport for Wales to develop tailored communication resources for use by schools, colleges, local authorities and other key stakeholders, such as the Welsh Youth Parliament, to promote this benefit to eligible applicants.

We believe that a campaign targeting young people should be cocreated with young people, through Transport for Wales' Children & Young People's Advisory Group to be established in early 2024 and will ask them to prioritise this recommendation.

THEME - AFFORDABILITY

Recommendation 3:

The introduction of free public transport for people under the age of 25.

Welsh Government response:

One of the key aims of the Welsh Government's Transport Strategy, Llwybr Newydd, is to reduce the cost of sustainable travel for everyone in Wales, including young people, and we are currently looking at a range of options to make travel by public transport more affordable for all in the community, including under 25s by simplifying the fares and ticketing system.

We have undertaken a comprehensive piece of planning work around options to deliver a 'Fairer Fares' offer for bus passengers in Wales, which has included the potential introduction of an enhanced young person's ticket option.

However, we have been faced with a challenging funding settlement from the UK Government. Following the Covid pandemic, we have had to prioritise our bus funding to ensure essential bus services are maintained whilst keeping fares as low as possible through the conditions set out in the Bus Emergency Scheme and current Bus Transition Fund, that has successfully sustained the bus industry over the past 2 years.

By the end of this financial year Welsh Government will have provided over £200m of emergency funding to protect our bus network across Wales since the onset of the Covid pandemic. This means that we haven't been able to progress as quickly as we would have liked on our Fairer Fares commitments. As and when the funding position does improve, we are keen to progress this piece of work and will continue to work with children and young people to develop any future intervention.

Recommendation 4:

The introduction and effective promotion of schemes to support young people to access equipment like bikes.

Welsh Government Response:

We recognise that access to cycles, as well as lack of secure cycle storage is an important barrier to greater uptake of cycling. Through our grants to local authorities, Welsh Government has funded school bike fleets to enable access to roadworthy cycles for cycle training and for trips during the school day.

We have supported public bike share schemes, such as in Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan and Swansea, which offer affordable cycle hire. There are already a large number of charities and social enterprises across Wales, which repair and re-sell second hand bikes, making cycle ownership much more affordable.

Welsh Government is currently exploring options to provide more support for this sector and encourage schemes in areas where these do not exist currently.

Recommendation 5:

Greater Investment in our public transport service, with a focus on:

- Expanding public transport routes
- Increasing the frequency of services
- Ensuring that services are reliable
- Reducing journey times

Welsh Government Response:

The current privatised operating model for buses means that buses are run by commercial companies for profit. This model does not provide Welsh Government with the tools, resources nor flexibility to make the changes that the recommendations request.

The Bus Bill which will be introduced to the Senedd next year will, however, provide the legislative framework to introduce a franchised model of delivery where Welsh Government, along with our delivery partners will be able to develop a truly integrated public transport network to reflect the requirements of local communities.

Under the franchise model we would be able to run bus routes that work for local communities, that integrate with rail services and link up with Active Travel routes. We will be able to introduce one ticket for people to be able to travel on all modes of transport, with a single timetable that can align with other bus and rail services.

In preparation for this radical reform, we are working collaboratively with Transport for Wales and local authorities to agree on the shape of public transport networks in the different regions of Wales. We are working to deliver a coherent, consistent, well planned and passenger friendly network with simple affordable tickets valid across all services.

Recommendation 6:

Improved connectivity between different modes of sustainable travel.

Welsh Government response

Integrated journey planning is one of the four key workstreams in Llwybr Newydd, recognising that modal shift requires a holistic, integrated approach to journey planning, working across different modes and sectors to make it easier for people to travel door-to-door using sustainable transport modes. Integrated journey planning involves a complex range of issues such as timetabling, information provision, infrastructure planning and policy development

All local authorities are required to develop Active Travel Network Plan in which they have planned the walking and cycling routes for each of their towns - railway and bus stations are key destinations for these routes. Transport for Wales is working with local authorities on making improvements at stations, for example by putting in secure cycle parking.

As outlined in response to recommendation 5, by introducing a franchised model of delivery for the Bus network we will be able to develop an integrated public transport and active travel network improving connectivity between different modes of sustainable travel.

Recommendation 7:

The removal of barriers facing different groups including neurodiverse young people and those with physical disabilities

Welsh Government Response:

Safety is a key theme of our forthcoming Equality Action Plan, another one of Llwybr Newydd's key workstreams.

We want everyone to feel confident, safe and secure in using the sustainable transport mode of their choice. The action plan will feature measures to address personal safety on public transport, in active travel and on the roads. We will also integrate safety considerations into all aspects of transport policy and planning, including the design of infrastructure.

The Equality Action Plan will be published in early 2024. We will ensure that the Children & Young People's Advisory Group has the option to engage with this piece of transport planning as it develops.

in the development and implementation of policies and programmes the Welsh Government applies the Social Model of Disability, recognising that those who are covered by the legal definition of disability are frequently disabled by barriers in society, rather than by their impairment or condition. We will take this approach in developing our franchised network.

Transport for Wales has an access and inclusion panel made up of people with protected characteristics. This panel helps scrutinise our accessibility policies and advise on how to engage and support passengers to use bus and rail services.

THEME - ACTIVE TRAVEL ROUTES**Recommendation 8:**

Greater investment on active travel routes, with a focus on improving safety and accessibility. Specifically we would like to see:

- a greater number of bike, walking and wheeling paths
- more segregated bike lanes
- improvements to the condition of paths and pavements

Welsh Government Response:

This Autumn we celebrated 10 years since the Active Travel Act was passed. Senedd Members from all parties marked the anniversary at an event organised by the Cross Party Group on the Active Travel Act on 4 October, reconfirming their, and our, commitment to make Wales a walking and cycling nation.

We have allocated just under £55m to local authorities for active travel infrastructure through the Active Travel Fund and the Safe Routes in Communities Grant for 2023/24. This funding is available for local authorities to make improvements to walking and cycling routes and facilities.

The Welsh Government are also encouraging local authorities across Wales to introduce School Streets, which involve road closures around schools at the start and end of the school day, in order to improve conditions for walking and cycling, improve road safety and reduce air pollution.

Recommendation 9:

An increase in the amount of secure bike parking facilities in communities, and particularly in places of learning.

Welsh Government Response:

We agree with the principle of this recommendation and provide grants to local authorities to be able to develop this infrastructure. Our grant funding to local authorities is for walking, wheeling and cycling routes and facilities. Each local authority can access a set amount of money each year, which is currently at least £500,000, to make small scale improvements or do preparatory work for bigger projects. This funding can be used to install secure cycle parking where it is needed.

In addition, the Safe Routes in Communities Grant is aimed specifically at improving the conditions for walking, wheeling and cycling to and from places of learning and is frequently used to fund cycle and scooter storage.

As part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme, proposals for new or improved places of learning must include details of sufficient secure and convenient cycle storage.

THEME – SIGNAGE, TICKETING & TIMETABLING INFORMATION

Recommendation 10:

Improvements in how information regarding public and active travel is made available and communicated, making it more accessible, so that it is easier to see how various modes of travel can be used to get to the end destination.

Welsh Government response:

The Active Travel Act 2013 requires local authorities in Wales to produce maps of walking and cycling networks in their local area, known as Active Travel Network Maps (ATNMs). These maps are designed to show two main things:

1. Existing routes – those current walking and cycling routes that already meet Welsh Government active travel standards, meaning they can be readily used for everyday journeys, and
2. Future routes – new routes that the local authority proposes to create in the future, as well as current routes that are planned for improvement to bring them up to the standards.

In developing these maps local authorities must consult on these networks at the planning stage. They then should also engage with the local community during the development of each project through to construction. The approved maps can be viewed on [Datamap Wales](https://datamap.wales.gov.uk/). [Active Travel Network Maps | DataMapWales \(gov.wales\)](https://datamap.wales.gov.uk/)

Working with Transport for Wales and the Children & Young People's Advisory Group we will explore options to develop an accessible multi modal journey planner.

Recommendation 11:

Improved provision of real-time information to show the progress of and updated arrival times for public transport, on those times when there are delays

WG Response:

We agree that public transport operators should be making use of modern technologies to make sure that good information is easily available to people.

An integrated transport system, underpinned by a franchised bus network, as outlined in Llwybr Newydd will enable the Welsh Government in partnership with Transport for Wales to specify the service requirements, including features such as the provision of real-time information, in future contracts.

Transport for Wales are already providing this service on their TrawsCymru network and rails connections.

Recommendation 12:

Provide a ticketing option which enables young people to use one ticket across multiple modes of public transport.

Welsh Government Response:

We agree with the principle of this recommendation, the current system of operating buses has resulted in a complex, fragmented system of fares and ticketing on local bus services across Wales.

Our Bws Cymru strategy, and the Bus Bill, sets out a path for the provision of more simplified, affordable and accessible arrangements for fares and ticketing on bus services. Our ambition is to develop a system based on the principles of One Network, One ticket, One timetable where people can travel across Wales

We have recently introduced combined bus / rail ticketing on the Transport for Wales procured TrawsCymru bus service T1 linking Aberystwyth and Carmarthen, which is proving popular with passengers. Steps are being taken to extend this to other parts of the TrawsCymru network over the next few months.

We will be using the learning from these initiatives to help inform and realise the Welsh Government's aspirations set out in Llwybr Newydd to develop a transport system that is accessible, efficient and sustainable.

THEME – DISCRIMINATION & ABUSE**Recommendation 13:**

A co-ordinated campaign to reduce anti-social behaviour and discrimination against marginalised groups of young people, and for places of learning to support within the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales.

Welsh Government response:

Inclusion will be a key theme of our forthcoming Equality Action Plan. Wales' transport network must be inclusive of everyone who needs to travel. The action plan will also set out actions to help make the transport industry within Wales also an employer of choice, improving its representation of people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, women, LGBTQ+ and disabled people.

The Children & Young People's Advisory Group will provide an opportunity to work with delivery partners to address issues around equality and accessibility.

We have recently worked with Young Wales to undertake a consultation exercise with children and young people on their thoughts, insights and experience of travelling to school. The findings of this consultation exercise have informed the recommendations of an internal report which includes actioning a piece of work to update the Travel Behaviour Code, and associated resources for schools, to promote ownership and responsibility amongst children, young people and schools with respect to their attitudes, behaviours and values when travelling. Your research and recommendation will help inform this piece of work.

Once again, I would like to thank you all for your hard work, dedication and effort to use the platform that you have as members of the Welsh Youth Parliament to ensure that the voices of children and young people across Wales are heard and listened to by the Welsh Government.

Your work, and this report in particular, will leave a lasting legacy on the infrastructure and culture of transport provision in Wales as we deliver on our ambitions to deliver a truly integrated transport network to help deliver on our commitments to be a Net Zero Nation by 2050.

Yours sincerely



Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change

Agenda Item 7.17

Julie Morgan AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Jayne Bryant, MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament,
Cardiff Bay,
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

22 December 2023

Dear Jayne,

Ongoing work relating to Radical Reform for Care Experienced Children

Thank you for your letter of 9 October following the scrutiny session on 14 September. I was very pleased to continue the discussion with the Committee on its report and recommendations in this very important area.

The attached annex provides responses to the Committee questions outlined in your letter. You will appreciate that for some of the questions you have asked there is work currently ongoing and I would be happy to update the Committee next year on developments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie', written in a cursive style.

Julie Morgan AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Services

	Question and background	Response to Question
1	<p>The Committee would welcome further written information on this new National Service Standards for Children’s Services in Wales.</p> <p>(relevant transcript excerpts below) <i>“Work is firmly under way to deliver a national practice framework. The framework will be the first set of national standards for children’s services in Wales, sitting alongside things like the all-Wales safeguarding procedures, and we will be delivering up to five new standards of practice by the end of 2023, with further standards being co-produced. It will address the key concerns that young people have raised about practice in your report, which I’ve taken very great notice of.”</i> <i>“[...] four draft standards have now been produced. One of those is around child-inclusive practice; children and young people who go missing; manageable workloads; and continuing care.”</i></p>	<p>The National Practice Framework will be the first set of national standards for children’s services in Wales, sitting alongside other All-Wales procedures like the All-Wales safeguarding procedures. It will further strengthen and support the translation of policy intent into daily practice.</p> <p>The Framework has been developed through working with our partners to review and strengthen quality and practice to improve service delivery.</p> <p>The standards will reflect a multi-agency approach, as we recognise children who need help and protection often need the support of a number of professionals who work together as a team. The standards will better describe how services for children work driving greater transparency. We anticipate delivering up to 6 new standards by the end of March 2024 with the others being co-produced by the end of 2024.</p> <p>The first six new standards will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Child-inclusive practice standard; • The Trusted Adults standard; • Eyes on the child: the Child Safeguarding standard; • The Missing children and young people standard; • The Continuing Care standard; • The Manageable workloads standard.

CYPE Committee follow on questions following scrutiny session on 14 September 2023

Pack Page 156

<p>2</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Charter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Details of how compliance with the charter will be monitored and by who? ii. An updated list of which agencies have signed the voluntary charter to date iii. How children and young people can see which agencies have signed up? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Charter has currently been published on a voluntary sign-up basis. We are actively exploring existing legislative levers to support the Charter and create a consistent approach to corporate parenting in Wales. An example of this will be a dedicated chapter on Corporate Parenting within the Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked after and accommodated children) under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Monitoring of Compliance with the Charter will be included as part of this work. ii. We are currently finalising an engagement plan to encourage sign-up by public bodies, private bodies and third sector organisations. I would be happy to share with the Committee a list of bodies and organisations who have signed up to the Charter in Spring 2024. As of 1 December, there are 16 bodies who have signed up to the Charter including Welsh Government and Welsh Ministers. iii. As per the response above, we will share the list and organisations who have signed up to the Charter in the Spring on the Welsh Government Corporate Parenting Charter webpage.
<p>3</p>	<p>Care as a Protected Characteristic Will you include care experienced older young people and adults in your discussions? Thank you for updating us on the following:</p>	<p>Thank you for sharing the feedback you have received from older young people regarding care experience as a protected characteristic. There are differing views as you will appreciate.</p>

	<p><i>“I’m going to be working with officials across Welsh Government to explore this further with care-experienced people and children as part of the future care experience summits with Voices from Care. So, we will be exploring this, but there are different views that have been given to us, so it’s not a united view.”</i></p> <p>We have been told by some older young people that they have changed their minds on this as they have got older. Whilst as children they may have been concern about stigma, but as they have got older, and understood what life is like beyond care. We have been asked to convey to you that whilst children may have different views on this issue, talking to care experienced adults about their views is important too.</p>	<p>I am continuing to work with officials across Welsh Government to explore this issue further with care-experienced children and young people and would welcome discussion and views with older young people and adults.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Advocacy</p> <p>Clarity on the Welsh Government’s latest position on our recommendation that care experienced children should have a statutory right to long-term, independent advocacy support on an ‘opt-out’ basis?</p> <p>In the Welsh Government’s response in July 2023 the response was ‘Reject’, however in our most recent meeting you said “[...]my response did not outrightly reject opt-out advocacy.”</p>	<p>To clarify my response to this recommendation, the Committee recommended 3 issues: the need for legislation, the assignment of an advocate; and the options to both opt-out and opt-in.</p> <p><i>Firstly, the Committee recommended that “Welsh Government should introduce legislation to provide children in care and care leavers a statutory right to long-term, independent advocacy support on an ‘opt-out’ basis.”</i></p> <p>I can confirm that children in care and care leavers have clear, unequivocal statutory rights to long-term, independent advocacy under the Social Services and Well-being Wales Act 2014. Those statutory rights are further underpinned by</p>

	<p>regulations, Codes of Practice and guidance that set out the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy.</p> <p>Our National Approach extends those statutory rights to long-term independent advocacy further than the Committee's recommendation, as the National Approach includes children experiencing or at risk of abuse, and children receiving care and support under the 2014 Act.</p> <p>I was unable to accept the Committee's Recommendation because it asks for something that we have already put in place through the 2014 Act, the associated statutory framework and the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy.</p> <p><i>Secondly, the Committee recommended "Each child should be assigned an advocate when they enter the care system to provide long-term advocacy support across a range of issues, and continue until the child ceases to be a 'care leaver'."</i></p> <p>I can confirm that this is how the National Approach has been developed and delivered, by and in partnership with, the advocacy providers, local authorities and other partners representing the voice of children and those with lived experience. The National Approach has been informed and shaped by the evidence and ideas of advocacy providers and local authorities.</p> <p>The National Approach is owned by the advocacy providers, the local authorities and the children they support.</p>
--	--

	<p>The role of the Welsh Government has been to facilitate, empower and advise advocacy providers and local authorities to build an effective National Approach for the children they support.</p> <p>Thirdly, the Committee recommended that “<i>children and young people could opt-out (and then opt back in later) if they wish, but must have an allocated advocate or provider at all times during their time in care</i>”</p> <p>My response confirmed that the ability to opt-out and opt-in is a core facet of the National Approach. My response shared the exact language of the Legacy Report to provide reassurance to the Committee that this is not my interpretation but the exact language of the independent membership of that Group. My response to you stated:-</p> <p>Opting out does not mean that the child or young person is no longer entitled to an advocate. If the child or young person decides at a later stage that they wish to access advocacy, the social worker will provide the advocacy service with their details to allow them to arrange an introductory meeting with the child or young person.”</p> <p>As I have mentioned, the Committee recommended 3 issues: the need for legislation, the assignment of an advocate; and the options to both opt-out and opt-in. I have explained how each component of the Committee’s recommendation is already in place. I hope this provides the reassurance you seek.</p>
--	---

		<p>My Officials have already spoken with both the providers and local authorities to ensure my expectations of them to deliver these are met.</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Children in unregistered placements What is the current number of children in the care of Welsh local authorities living in unregistered accommodation as of 11 November 2023?</p> <p>We were particularly concerned to hear that as of 11 September there were 30 children who are legally within the care of Welsh local authorities but who are living in unregistered placements. Whilst we appreciate the significant pressures on accommodation, having such a significant number of children in what are essentially 'illegal placements' is clearly of grave concern. You'll be aware that in July 2023, you rejected our recommendation to publish an action plan to reduce the number of children in unregistered placements by December 2023.</p>	<p>As of 11 November 2023, there were 29 children confirmed in unregistered settings across Wales.</p> <p>Working towards the minimal use of unregistered placements is about reducing the demand for placements – the rate of children looked after in Wales is widely regarded as being far too high - increasing capacity and building resilience into arrangements for the provision of suitable placements. These issues are being considered in the context of our wider transformation agenda for children's services and the range of work currently underway to ensure the development of stable, integrated and locally accountable provision.</p> <p>Developing alternative provision for children with particularly complex behaviours and needs has been the focus of funding over recent years with £4.8m made available to regions in Wales in 2021/22 to develop 'safe accommodation' for children and young people with complex needs. Additional funding is also available throughout this Senedd term via the Regional Integration Fund to provide additional specialist support for children with complex needs who may be on the edge of care. Approximately £14.5m has been allocated to 13 projects where therapeutic support for care experienced children' is the primary model of care to support families to stay together safely.</p>

CYPE Committee follow on questions following scrutiny session on 14 September 2023

<p>6</p>	<p>Children subject to Deprivation of liberty orders What is the current number of children in the care of Welsh local authorities as of 11 November 2023?</p> <p>Again we were concerned to hear that there were six children subject to Deprivation of Liberty orders as of 11 September.</p>	<p>The latest published figure (as of 31 March 2022 on the Stats Wales website) for the number of children in the care of Welsh local authorities is: 7,080.</p> <p>I appreciate the Committee’s concern, as I stated in the scrutiny session on 14 September, Welsh Government officials will be undertaking an analysis exercise to establish the number of Deprivation of Liberty Orders that have been used over the last 24 months. The results of the analysis will feed into the Welsh Government’s wider Transformation Programme for Children’s Services.</p>										
<p>7</p>	<p>Eliminate Profit Although the Eliminate Profit work was not directly within our Inquiry Terms of Reference, we recognise that it is a Welsh Government priority and that you have emphasised to us at the scrutiny session that it is being taken forward “because young people said that that was what they wanted”.</p> <p>As part of our forthcoming scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2024-25, we will be asking for some financial information in respect of how the £68 million allocation over three-years has been allocated, as part of our broader budget request.</p> <p>In terms of delivering this commitment, we would be grateful for</p> <p>The current estimate of the number of children from Welsh local authorities placed in independent/ private placements in Wales.</p>	<p>The current estimate of the number of children placed by Welsh local authorities in independent/private sector placements in Wales is as follows:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1111 751 2002 1038"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Placed with independent foster agencies</th> <th>Placed with independent residential providers</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Reported @30.06.23</td> <td>1284</td> <td>596</td> <td>1880</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>A workstream has been established under the Eliminating Profit Programme Board on planning transition for individual children and young people. The workstream will consider the actions needed to support a smooth transition from the current market arrangements to the new not-for-profit arrangements which will come into effect from April 2026.</p>				Placed with independent foster agencies	Placed with independent residential providers	Total	Reported @30.06.23	1284	596	1880
	Placed with independent foster agencies	Placed with independent residential providers	Total									
Reported @30.06.23	1284	596	1880									

Pack Page 161

<p>Details of the transition plan / timelines to move these children or to transition the placements to local authorities / third sector providers.</p> <p>How many children from England are placed in independent/ private placements in Wales? Plans to mitigate the unintended consequences of pressures on Welsh local authorities and health boards which could arise if more children from outside Wales move into these placements from 2027 onwards when they can no longer be used to place children from Wales.</p>	<p>We have listened carefully to the responses to the consultation particularly those around the complexities of moving from the current arrangements to the new requirements and it was always my intention to give detailed consideration to the transition to the new arrangements in order to prevent or mitigate any adverse consequences for children and young people as far as possible and to ensure that actions continue to be taken in their best interest. Provisions to support this will be included in our forthcoming Social Care Bill.</p> <p>The number of cross border placements into Wales is harder to reliably report as there is no requirement currently for the placing authority in England to inform the host authority in Wales. Live data as of 13/11/23 is below although this is likely to be under reported:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1108 774 2004 981"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Foster Care</th> <th>Residential Care</th> <th>Supported Living</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Total Notifications</td> <td>76</td> <td>90</td> <td>1</td> <td>167</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>From April 2027, unless a provider is not-for-profit, the default position is they will no longer be able to be registered in Wales and it will not therefore be possible for English local authorities to place children with independent/private providers in Wales.</p>		Foster Care	Residential Care	Supported Living	Total	Total Notifications	76	90	1	167
	Foster Care	Residential Care	Supported Living	Total							
Total Notifications	76	90	1	167							

CYPE Committee follow on questions following scrutiny session on 14 September 2023

<p>8</p>	<p>Data</p> <p>Ahead of the scrutiny session on 14 September as part of a wider request for information, we asked for specific information in relation to each point of data not currently routinely collected and published in Wales (as set out on pages 50 to 52 of our report and the WCPP report), and a narrative on the Welsh Government's rationale for this not being necessary / possible / helpful to shape policy response in Wales. The response to this specific request did not go into the level of detail we had asked, and I would be grateful if your officials could relook at the response provided and provide a more detailed response</p>	<p>As I said in my correspondence prior to the scrutiny session, we accept the important role that data on demonstrating outcomes for care experienced children and young people has in developing policy and service design. The Transforming Children's Services Delivery Group is establishing a work programme focusing on data collation and metrics. This work will consider the data referred to in the Committee's report on pages 50-52 and will provide recommendations to the Delivery Group.</p>
-----------------	--	--

Agenda Item 7.18

Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol

Equality and Social Justice Committee

Jayne Bryant MS

Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Dear Jayne,

3 January 2024

Follow-up inquiry into childcare and parental employment

Our recent work on the Welsh Government's Draft Child Poverty Strategy benefitted greatly from your participation and it is likely that our approaches to several cross-cutting issues were strengthened as a result of our collaboration. The report indicated our intention to follow-up on the issue and we are now in a position to provide you with details.

We plan to follow-up on 'Minding the future: the childcare barrier facing working parents' our 2022 report on childcare and parental employment in the Spring of 2024. As well as examining progress in implementing the recommendations of that report, we will explore the extent to which childcare meets the varying needs of families across Wales. This will include how inequalities in accessing childcare faced by particular demographic groups and across different parts of the country can be addressed. You will find the full terms of reference in the Annex.

Subject to the availability of witnesses etc. we plan to undertake this work on the following dates:

26 February 2024	2 x panels of oral evidence
4 March 2024	1 x panel of oral evidence
11 March 2024	Morning: stakeholder session in the Senedd Afternoon: evidence session with the Deputy Minister for Social Services

We would like to invite you and the other Members of your Committee under Standing Order 17.49 to attend the oral evidence sessions and other planned activities, on the above dates and to any other meetings where substantive discussions as part of the inquiry may take place. If this would be of interest to you or any of your Members, I would be grateful if you could please confirm by 31 January 2024. I will also ask our Clerk to liaise with your Clerks as arrangements for the inquiry progress and so that all necessary practical considerations can be made.



I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Rathbone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'J'.

Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

Annex: Terms of Reference for the inquiry

- What progress has been made in implementing the recommendations in the Committee's report from early 2022 - [Minding the future – the childcare barrier facing working parents](#).
- The extent to which childcare provision in Wales provides high-quality provision which supports child development, tackles child poverty and supports parental employment. What changes might be needed to deliver these outcomes.
- What progress is being made towards achieving the Co-Operation Agreement commitment to expand 12.5 hours free childcare per week to all two-year-olds, with an emphasis on strengthening Welsh-medium provision.
- To what extent there is sufficient childcare available to meet the varying needs of families across Wales, and how inequalities in access to childcare faced by particular demographic groups and across different parts of Wales can be addressed.
- What approaches exist to integrate delivery of childcare provision in Wales, and how can best practice be spread widely.
- How childcare providers and the workforce have been impacted by cost-of-living pressures, and what effects these have had on the sector.
- What lessons can be learnt from other parts of the UK and international best practice to improve childcare policy in Wales.
- How financial and practical barriers need to be considered in developing future childcare policy.