

Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Venue:
Committee Room 1 – Senedd

Meeting date:
19 July 2012

Meeting time:
09:00

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



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Agenda

- 1. Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public from the meeting for items 2 and 3: (9.15)**
- 2. Discussion of the Forward Work Programme (9.15 – 9.45)**
- 3. Approach to Scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2013–14 (9.45 – 10.00)**
- 4. Introductions, apologies and substitutions**
- 5. Scrutiny Session with the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services on the Inquiry into Adoption (10.00 – 11.00)** (Pages 1 – 8)
Gwenda Thomas, Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services

Julie Rogers, Director of Children's Social Services

Debra Jenkins, Head of the Vulnerable Children Team

(Break – 11.00 – 11.05)
- 6. School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill: Stage 1 – Evidence session 6 (11.05 – 12.30)**
Leighton Andrews AM, Minister for Education and Skills
- 7. Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the**

public from the meeting for the remainder of business (12.30)

**8. School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill: Stage 1 –
Consideration of key issues (12.30 – 1.15)**

9. Papers to note

**School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill: Stage 1 – Summary of issues
raised by focus groups (Pages 9 – 22)**

Children and Young People Committee: Inquiry into Adoption Services in Wales

Purpose

This paper provides an update on adoption services in Wales and the Welsh Government's desire to establish a National Adoption Service, and to inform the Committee's Inquiry into adoption. We are exploring the remit and functions of a National Adoption Service, and working collaboratively with local government and the third sector to develop an all Wales model.

Introduction

1. The Welsh Government stands firmly by the principle underpinning the Children Act 1989 that where possible children are best cared for by their families or extended families. However, we recognise that in order to achieve better outcomes for children and young people, for some children, living away from home is the best answer.
2. In February 2011, *Sustainable Social Services Wales: A Framework for Action* was published. This made clear that some services could be more effectively delivered nationally and we wanted to pioneer this approach in exploring with stakeholders the remit and functions of a National Adoption Service. We want local authorities to act sooner to find permanency for those children for whom a return home is not in their interests and to enhance promotion of adoptions and increase the pool of adopters.
3. The Welsh Government recognises that good planning and commissioning of quality placements are essential to achieving better outcomes for our looked after children and young people. There are a range of quality placements that can do this, through identifying the needs of children and young people, whilst still ensuring their lives have the appropriate safeguards. Over three quarters of looked after children are in foster placements, for some this is a temporary arrangement, but for many children, particularly older children with a link to their birth parents, long term foster care, is the best permanent care option; Special Guardianship was introduced in 2005 as a way of giving foster carers, a relative or a family friend parental responsibility for a child without severing ties with their birth parents; teenagers in the system (37 % between the ages of 13 and 18) many of whom have higher needs requiring specialist care. For these young people a residential setting may be most suited as they are able to be cared for by professionals who have the skills and experiences to encourage them to reach their optimum potential.

Current position

4. Adoption is a complex process and requires considerable knowledge and understanding of children's needs and the many varied issues they face. Social workers involved in planning, organising, and preparing a child and their birth family for adoption undertake a considerable task often against a background of difficult and combative care proceedings which impose their own timescales and require complex reports and care plans to be produced.

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5. Historically the geographical split of local authorities provided a handful of very small agencies covering vast rural areas and only placing annually a handful of children and recruiting a small number of prospective adopters, such agencies have seen for themselves the merit of collaborating with each other to provide a more proficient and cost effective adoption service.

Children in Care

6. Children need a stable and loving family and sometimes birth parents are unable to care for their children themselves. As of the 31st March 2011, there were 5,419 Looked after Children in Wales, of these 3,635 children were subject to a Care Order, following local authorities satisfying the family court that it is in the best interest of these children to be taken into care. This category of children in care are unlikely to return to their birth family, therefore, getting the best possible care for them is one of the state's most important responsibilities.
7. Over the last 5 years, children aged 1-4 years made up the greatest proportion of adopted children. The number of children waiting 2-3 years before being adopted has risen by 46% from 65 in 2006 to 95 in 2011. In 2011, whilst there was a reduction in the average time between entry into care and adoption from 954 days (approximately 2 years 7 months) to 905 days (approximately 2 years 5 months), the Government recognises and is still concerned with delays in the adoption system and the potential lasting harm this can have on vulnerable children, robbing them of their best chance of the love and stability of a new family.
8. For Looked after Children adoption can be a positive option, particularly for younger children, but also for some older children. Adoption gives vulnerable children, including many with complex needs and history of ill-treatment, the greatest possible stability, in a permanent home with a permanent family.
9. The Welsh Government is not convinced that the current system always works in the child's best interest. As of 31st March 2011, over 2,000 children have been in care for 3 years or more; during the year to 31st March 2011 there were 252 adoptions, representing 4.7% of the total Looked after Children population – which is a statistic that does not provide an encouraging picture.

Prospective Adopters

10. There has been a reduction in the numbers of approved adopters in the last 18 months. Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Register have identified the urgent need to recruit, assess and approve potential adopters, a process which can take between 6-8 months to complete. The lack of potential adopters obviously has a huge impact on the availability of suitable matches to meet the varied needs of children waiting to be adopted. BAAF estimate that 1 in 4 children available for adoption will not be placed primarily due to the lack of an adoptive parent resource.
11. Many prospective adopters are satisfied with the service they receive, but there are those who are not. While some prospective adopters receive welcoming reassurance and support during their initial enquiries into becoming an adoptive parent, others find that adoption agencies respond slowly to initial inquiries. Evidence suggests that prospective adopters in different parts of the country find that they are rejected or make slow progress in the assessment process because they do not meet the particular, immediate needs of the agency to which they have applied, demonstrating an overall lack of co-ordination of supply and demand. Some prospective adopters feel that the length of time the

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assessment process takes drags on far too long and a lot longer than the 8 months set out in statutory guidance. The evidence submitted to your enquiry and gathered by Welsh Government officials suggests that prospective adopters feel that the assessment process focuses on ticking boxes and the writing of long reports, rather than their capacity to parent a child. If we are to increase the number of prospective adopters, especially those who are able to meet the diverse needs of our looked after children, particularly older children, sibling groups, and children with disabilities, adoption agencies must examine the current system. Evidence also suggests that post adoption services are patchy throughout Wales; this may be due to the geographical location of the agencies or current financial restraints.

12. Some evidence suggests the matching process currently used by agencies is ineffectual, when looking at the barriers to matching, the primary problems identified by a number of sources result from the attitudes of the child's social worker, who keep looking for the 'ideal family'¹; lack of communication between the child's social worker and the prospective adopters' social worker has also resulted in social workers 'blocking' potential matches².

Consultation Responses to the Social Services (Wales) Bill: Section & Title: 6.1 – Adoption

13. The majority of all respondents supported the broad policy proposals for a National Adoption Service. Responses suggested that a National Adoption Service would:
 - highlight and alleviate inconsistencies in adoption services across Wales; and
 - enable a consistent and standardised service, addressing the issues of children and adopters having access to a varying service, which is currently dependent on the resources and skills of particular local authorities.Others suggested this was an opportunity to review adoption provisions in Wales, making sure that existing good practices and achievements are not diluted or overlooked.
14. Children and young people including looked after children, young carers and disabled children were also consulted as part of a commissioned piece of work. Children and young people unanimously supported proposals and looked after children were particularly positive about the concept of developing a National Adoption Service.
15. I do recognise, however, that both the Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services have proposed alternative means of delivering greater efficiency for example through use of regional collaborations underpinning the national arrangement and we shall consider carefully the merits of their proposal.

Family Justice

16. The length of time the courts take over decisions to award local authorities with a care order (whether an interim or full care order) was identified through the Family Justice Review as an area of concern. This process is the responsibility of the whole family justice system – which includes local court staff, judges, lawyers, local authorities, health professionals and other expert advisors, including those from the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service Cymru (CAFCASS Cymru). But at the moment, as the recent Family Justice Review confirmed, this is a process that takes far too long – an

¹ Farmer, E.; Dance, C.; Beecham, J.; Bonin, E. and Ouwejan, D. (2010) *An investigation of family finding and matching in adoption – briefing paper*.

² BAAF Maximising the use of the Adoption Register Pilot January 2011 to January 2012

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average of 55 weeks.

National Adoption Service

17. The Welsh Government's aim is to transform adoption services, to prevent unnecessary delay and duplication which has such a negative impact on the outcomes for our looked after children. We want to identify aspects of the adoption process that are best performed at a national level, whilst recognising that there are functions that should remain the responsibility of individual local authorities – achieving change without detriment.
18. Under the umbrella of a National Adoption Service, Wales will see the development of a national model that will see adoption agencies in Wales working together to advance adoption services. New powers in the Social Services (Wales) Bill will enable Welsh Ministers to require all local authorities (adoption agencies) to come together to form a single National Adoption Service for the purpose of discharging certain adoption functions. Our current thinking is that the National Adoption Service would be responsible for:
 - Providing National leadership and overview of adoption services (linking to Standards, performance and improvement);
 - A framework for adoption approvals (including panels);
 - Establishing a resource hub, to provide a gateway for potential adopters, providing - information on training programs, information on assessment process and advice line; and
 - Promoting adoption, if in best interest of the child, recruiting prospective adopters and the development of a specialist and highly skilled workforce.
19. The Welsh Government believes that a National Adoption Service will reap greater benefits enabling the concentration of such specialised skilled persons which will enhance the efficiency and quality of the assessment process, provide equity in the arrangements for adoption and encourage the pooling of prospective adopters and more efficient and effective delivery through greater collaboration and co-operation across boundaries to harness the specialist nature of the adoption service.
20. The establishment of a National Adoption Service should help to release capacity, enabling local authority child care services to concentrate more on placement arrangements for the child. This may include work around the preparation and maintenance of the adoption plan; and to focus on the thorough detailed work required by the courts for child reports and assessments, when applying for a placement/adoption order. In addition, they will be able to focus on the preventative family support side of the business; this could be about creating more opportunities for children to be placed within their own family networks and/or offering a broader range of respite care services which support children and young people remaining with birth families. Such arrangements not only result, in many circumstances, to improved outcomes for children but are also financially cost effective.
21. The 'Social Return on Investment' report (2011)³, concluded that for every successful adoption from care, where through adoption a child receives the support needed to resolve problems from their past, there could be a social return of over £1million per placement.
22. The establishment of a National Adoption Service will provide a gateway for potential adopters, this could include providing information on training programs, assessment

³ PACT Domestic Adoption and Fostering: SROI Evaluation. Evaluation carried out by Baker Tilly and Cass Business School (April 2011)

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processes and a general advice line. The intention is to provide, prospective adopters with consistent advice, ensuring that resources are available to progress applications and removing the impact of a person's postcode as a factor that may be responsible for limiting the choice of options for children.

23. The National model will need to examine the pooling of budgets across Wales, to eliminate the competitive market between local authorities when dealing with adoption placements. This should in turn significantly reduce delays in the process for both the children and prospective adopter. The legal framework for pooled budgets is well established and we have made considerable investment in building an understanding of how this approach can be managed in reality.

Key Dependencies

24. Whilst the adoption agency panel and 'Decision Maker' considers a child's suitability for adoption, it is for the courts to make a ruling on whether adoption is in the best interest of the child and whether to award a Placement Order/Adoption Order, a non-devolved process and under the remit of the Ministry of Justice (*Figure 1 refers*).
25. In February 2012, I advised members through a Ministerial Statement of the publication of the Welsh Government/UK Government joint response to the Family Justice Review which covers both devolved and non-devolved matters. The Review sets out plans for major reforms to the family justice system aimed at tackling delays, simplifying the system and strengthening parenting.
26. The creation of a Family Justice Board for England and Wales will provide greater leadership and co-ordination across delivery agencies nationally and locally, when preparing for any system changes to follow. To ensure proper and due consideration of issues in Wales the Family Justice Board includes representation from the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) and CAFCASS Cymru, as well as a senior Welsh Government official. These representatives, will advise on the specific Welsh context and key devolved aspects of the family justice system, ensuring that the rights and voices of children are at the heart of the process in Wales. In addition I have established a Family Justice Network in Wales to bring together key players within the family justice system at an all-Wales level, providing a local community of understanding and common purpose to improve services and outcomes for children and families in Wales. The Family Justice Network will ensure adequate support to the Welsh representatives on the Family Justice Board in order that Welsh issues are considered within the national context.
27. Social workers cannot and should not work in isolation when making difficult decisions about adoption. They need a regulatory framework that provides the checks and safeguards that allow them to work confidently, but which avoids duplication and unnecessary delay. With this in mind the Welsh Government recently accepted the Family Justice Review's recommendation that one of the functions of adoption panels will be removed. The regulatory framework requires local authorities to establish adoption panels, whose role is to advise on certain decisions made by adoption agencies. One of the roles of adoption panels is to advise local authorities on the decision as to whether adoption is the best option for a particular child. However, in most cases the local authority can only act on that decision and place a child for adoption if a family court agrees to make a placement order. In these cases, the Family Justice Review argued it was unnecessary for the adoption panel to duplicate the court's role in providing independent scrutiny of the evidence in each individual case. The Government will implement the recommendation that this role of adoption panels be removed through changes to regulations that will come into force on 1st September 2012. Where the court is not involved, this function of the

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adoption panel will remain in place.

28. The Review also makes recommendations for the professional development of social workers, placing more emphasis on child development and training to improve the content of assessments that meet the requirements of the courts when making decisions about children. The Review suggests that new legislation should set a time limit on care proceedings - this should be no more than six months for all but the most complex and difficult cases. It also recommends changing the renewal requirements for interim care orders so that people do not have to keep going back to court when care proceedings are on-going⁴. Judges would be responsible for timetabling and case management, in line with the proposed legislation to set time limits for care proceedings. The Review recommends that, in future, courts should not scrutinise the detail of the child's care plan as set out by the local authority. It should only look at the essential issues which are where the child should live at the end of care proceedings and what level of contact there should be with family members if the child does not return home. There are several recommendations on improving training for judges and ensuring judicial continuity in children's cases. The Review also recommends replacing the current three tiers of court with a single family court.
29. In addition to the removal of this specific panel function and in light of further changes to the adoption service in Wales through the establishment of a national adoption service, the Welsh Government is considering the removal of the regulation that limits the establishment of joint adoption panel's by any two but no more than three local authorities.

Legal Framework

30. The National Adoption Service will not operate as an "adoption agency" as referred to in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and in the Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005 made under section 9 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The new body will, however, be inspected under the Care Standards Act 2000. Arrangements for the inspection of the National Adoption Service will be set out in regulations.

Closing remarks

31. The aim and objective of the National Adoption Service is to achieve excellence for adoption through securing high quality, forever family placements for looked after children for whom adoption is in their best interests. The new service will need to become a single reference point for all children with an adoption plan, through the establishment and maintenance of a single register.
32. Ownership of these reforms can only be delivered through a local government and voluntary sector that values and maximises the benefits through delivery of quality services and effective partnership working to amplify collective action.
33. The Welsh Government believes this programme for change is best achieved through strong partnership and collaborative working with local authorities, independent and the voluntary sector. An Adoption Expert Advisory Group has been established to oversee the development of a National Adoption Service that will drive performance improvements across Wales in relation to specific adoption services in Wales.
34. The Group brings together representatives from within the adoption system in Wales to provide a community of understanding and common purpose in overseeing, coordinating

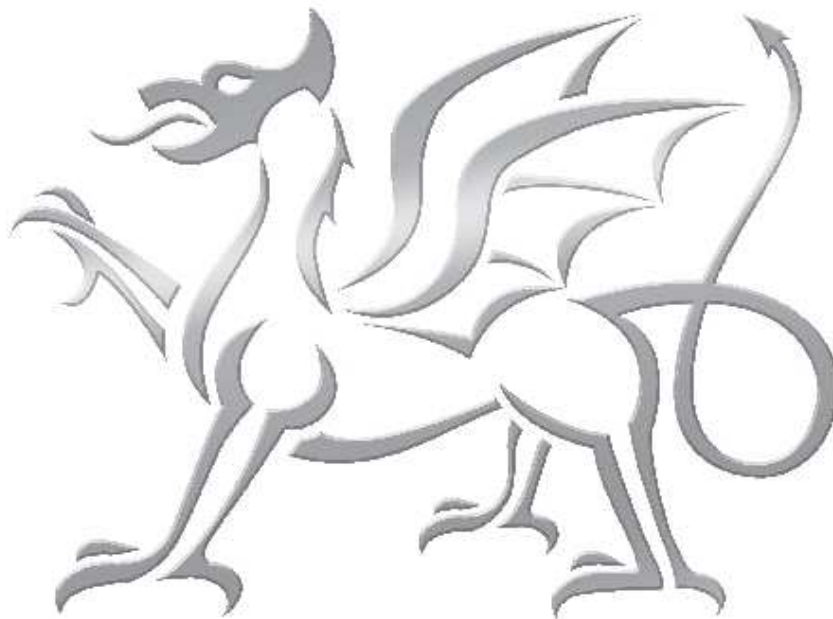
⁴ Family Justice Review Final Report – November 2011

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and delivering improvement of services and outcomes for children and young people in Wales for whom adoption is in their best interest and to offer a service that encourages and welcomes a broad range of prospective adopters; it needs to prepare them thoroughly for the many challenges and joys involved in giving a loving home to a child; and to maximise the numbers that go on to adopt successfully.

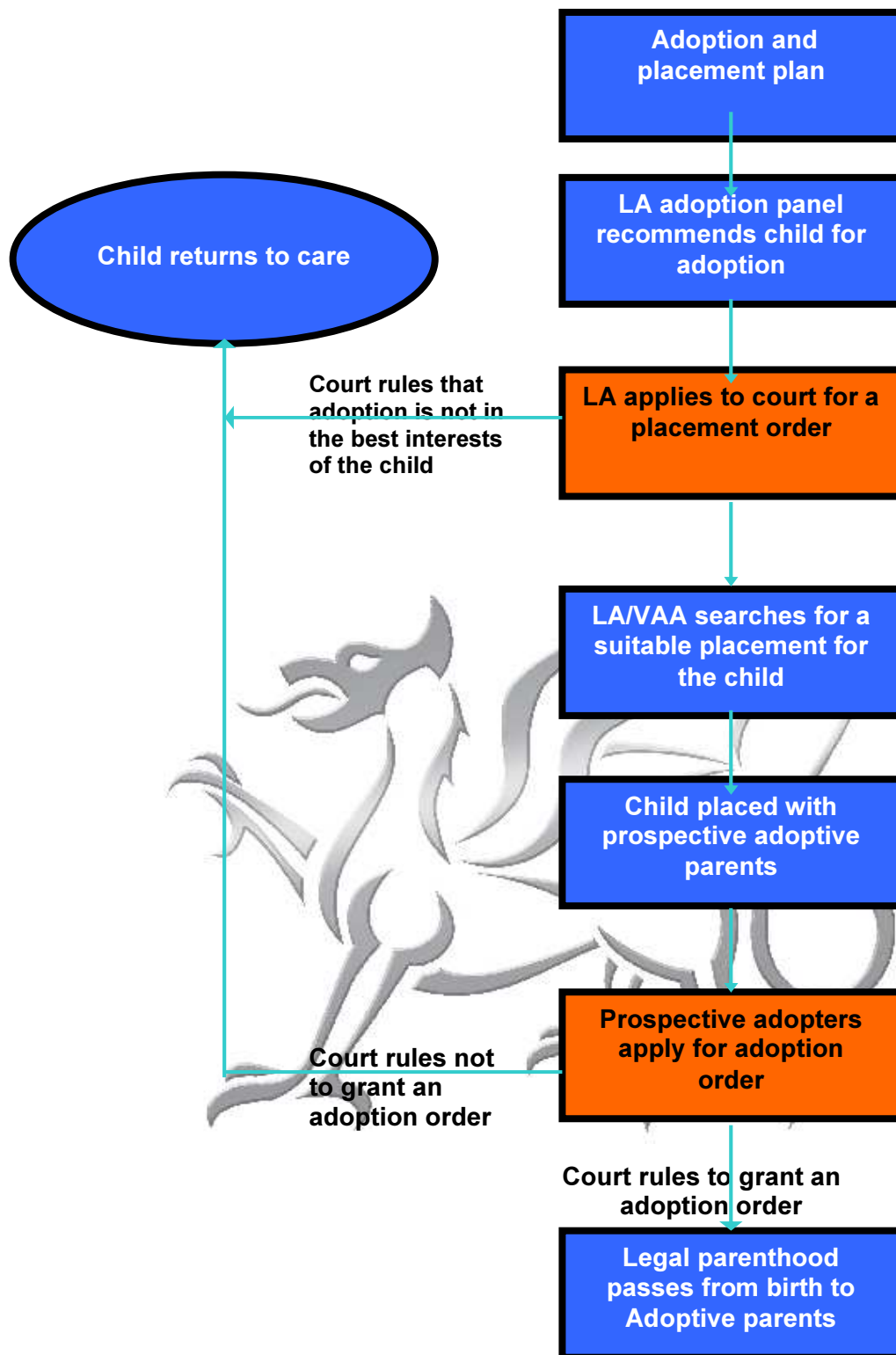
35. The remit of this Group is to consider proposals drawn up by local authorities and their partners when developing a framework for a national service model, operating under a two tier system (local and national) and one which addresses current concerns, without losing the undeniable strengths of the existing system – achieving change without detriment.

**Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services
June 2012**



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Figure 1: Procedures split between the Local Authority's and the Courts



Key

- Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Responsibility
- Local Authority (LA) Responsibility

Children and Young People Committee – School Standards and Organisations (Wales) Bill

This document outlines the contributions of the groups and participants that the Outreach Team has conducted focus groups with. The group's details were provided by networks such as ESTYN, Governors Wales and PTA UK.

Summary

Groups worked with

English medium primary
Welsh medium primary
English medium Secondary
Welsh medium Secondary
Faith
Special Education

Total number of participants

45

Total number of schools represented

34

School organisation

Group name	Does the current process for determining school organisation proposals need to be reformed?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit - Vale of Glamorgan	Yes. The current process is too long. Three months for the promoter to make a decision following the opportunity to object is too long.
Cartref Bontnewydd	Yes- even though the group weren't really informed on the process before hand when explained to them they thought proposals should be reformed.
Swansea Association of Governing Bodies	Yes. Many individuals within the group are aware of this process and have dealt with it in the past.
Bridgend Governors Association	A few of the group had been involved and were aware of the process, but didn't suggest it needed changing.

Group name	What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of the current process?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit - Vale of Glamorgan	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It gives people who are disconnected from the local issues (WG) the ability to make the decision, so in theory they would be more likely to be impartial. • It gives local people the ability to contribute during the proposer's consultation period at public meetings. <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation processes are not mandatory. • The WG may not know enough about the school and the issues attached. Being detached from local issues was seen as both a positive and a negative. • Process for local councillors, parents, school governors, teachers and headmaster to be involved doesn't seem to be mandatory. • School governors, the headmaster and parents should be involved in the final decision, not just the WG.
Cartref Bontnewydd	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if the proposal only receives 1 objection- it is taken seriously (even though the group did question the resource/ cost implication of this method). <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group felt that the 'proposer' had a lot of influence in the early stages- undertaking consultation, analysing responses and decide whether to proceed. They questioned if this was done in an impartial manner, for example who decides who is consulted, how is the decision made as the 'proposer' has an obvious interest in the matter.
Swansea Association of Governing Bodies	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guidance outlining the need to consult. Consultation with local people is usually difficult and passionate, but necessary

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot to be said about the final decision being made by someone detached from local issues. <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many didn't like the fact that local authorities and other bodies have strict and tight deadlines to reach within the process, but the same didn't seem to apply to the Welsh Ministers. • The group thought that 4–6 months was too long a time to wait for the Welsh Ministers to issue their decision. One of the main reasons for this was that individuals who may be affected by any change would be very anxious for a decision, and would want it as soon as possible. Ministers dragging their heels makes this period very tense for all involved. • Some individuals within the group raised concerns that the final decision is made by a person/body who are not aware of local feeling, and do not take such factors into consideration. However others later saw this as a benefit. • Consultation period is perceived by many as a box ticking exercise. Many of the group felt that once it has got to a stage where they are consulting on the matter that the decision had already been made, regardless of people feelings.
Bridgend Governors Association	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None mentioned <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person objecting is too small a threshold • Clarification over what an objection actually constitutes is needed. In one past instance, one of the group wanted clarification on a proposer's plans, but it was seen as an objection. As a result this triggered a consultation process, when all he wanted was more information. • Consultation is done without considering those who will be affected in the future, i.e. parents at a local primary school, if the proposal relates to a secondary school in the area. • At the moment the process isn't transparent. Though it states that the Minister makes the final decision, it doesn't give any real detail on how he or she may reach that decision. The group felt that it may not be the Minister but some of his supporting team that actually make these decisions.

Group name	Is it appropriate that an objection to a proposal from a single objector without a direct interest in a school causes a referral to Welsh Ministers?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit – Vale of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No – the WG shouldn't have to deal with objections just because one person has objected. • The whole group said that the threshold for objectors

Glamorgan	should be a number or percentage (whichever is lower), as is proposed with parents meetings. This would mean that smaller schools would not be at a disadvantage.
Cartref Bontnewydd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No –this was seen as an unnecessary and wasteful way of dealing with objections.
Swansea Association of Governing Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group felt that this would take up a lot of the Ministers time. The group did feel that there should be a percentage and number associated with the proposed threshold, as is the case with annual parents’ meetings proposals.
Bridgend Governors Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No, should be more.

Group name	What are your views on the introduction of a statutory Code on School Organisation?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit – Vale of Glamorgan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group liked the idea of there being more formal process in place rather than just referring to guidance. They did feel however that it would be difficult to say if it’s a good idea or not until they knew exactly what the Code would say, and how it would differ to the guidance. They also said that understanding what sanctions would be imposed are important – hard to say one way or another without this detail being available. Felt that maybe there should be some reference to the principles of the code at this stage.
Cartref Bontnewydd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group felt strongly that there should be consistency across regions and Wales and having statutory code would ensure this would be adhered to. Without being able to see the code they felt that they couldn’t really comment further on this.
Swansea Association of Governing Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liked the idea of a consistent approach in consultation Many who have been involved in the process felt that introducing the code wouldn’t actually change a great deal. Because the WG guidance is seen as such an important document to refer to already and those who are proposing changes are aware that changes to school organisation are very contentious issues. As a result they follow the guidance very closely already. Overall, they were in favour of any code that would promote consistency across the country, but were slightly weary as they don’t know what the code would include at this stage. Stressed that the code should promote the importance of the consultation process, and the process shouldn’t be a box ticking exercise, and that peoples thoughts and feelings should carry real weight.
Bridgend Governors Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good idea. Should lead to a more consistent approach, especially with regards to those who should be consulted with.

Group name	What are your views on the requirement on the Welsh Ministers to consult on the Code? Are there any groups that the Welsh Ministers should be required to consult before issuing the Code, e.g. local authorities, governing bodies etc.?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit – Vale of Glamorgan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think its essential the consult before issuing the code. • Parents, teachers, community representatives, governing body, local councillors and residents should be consulted before issuing the code.
Cartref Bontnewydd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of course, everybody involved with schools should have the opportunity to be consulted on the code. Informal focus groups were deemed to be very popular consultation method for this type of work.
Swansea Association of Governing Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group felt that the WG should consult with the following: SNAPcharity, WLGA, Governors Wales, PTA UK, head teachers unions, Children’s Commissioner, local authority representatives and the twenty two local authority budget forums.
Bridgend Governors Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities, governors, senior staff and management teams. • It’s important that the WG consults with individuals and groups who have experience of using the process. That experience is vital.

Group name	What are your views on the procedure for adopting the draft Code? Is there an appropriate level of involvement of the National Assembly?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit – Vale of Glamorgan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No comment.
Cartref Bontnewydd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No comment.
Swansea Association of Governing Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seemed reasonable.
Bridgend Governors Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No comment.

Group name	What are your views on the ‘Categories of objectors’ (attached at Annexe 1)? Are the categories appropriate; in particular, is the weighting of objectors appropriate?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit – Vale of Glamorgan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Category 1 is fair • PTA’s, parents and staff should be in Category 2 • Some of the group felt that the categories should depend on the issue, and the categories should vary

	between different types of reform
Cartref Bontnewydd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Category 1 received a unanimous agreement. • It was felt that maybe the school council should be included in Category 2 • Category 3- felt that it was important that the pupils were made fully aware of any proposals so that they could form their opinion.
Swansea Association of Governing Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No real comments regarding how they were grouped. • Some felt that finding the required number of objectors would be easy, and depending on your point of view, that could be a good thing or a bad thing. • If the purpose of this is to make it more difficult for objections to be made, this wouldn't achieve it. • The group wanted changes to result in a quicker decision making process once the threshold was met.
Bridgend Governors Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If one person held multiple roles (i.e. a parent that was also a member of staff at a school), they should be restricted to having one vote, rather than one as a representative of each role. • Happy with 10 objectors from category three. • The % mechanism that is used along with the figure for annual parents meetings should be adopted here as well. • Those who make up each category are fine. No changes were suggested.

Group name	What are your views on the constitution of the local determination panels, including those who are disqualified from membership of the panel?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit - Vale of Glamorgan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many felt that it was unrealistic that the local authority would be able to find panel members who has had no connection with the appointing authority, the proposer or the school • A few of the group thought that 5 panel members wouldn't be enough, and rather than only having local people as part of the panel, that there should be a mix of local people and people from outside the area (maybe from a neighbouring authority or WG) to provide balance and a more objective view as well as appreciating local issues.
Cartref Bontnewydd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of discussion on the impartiality of this group. • It was felt that maybe having an official from the WG to chair would be appropriate. • Also questions were raised on how this panel would be chosen? Parents/ schools to have a say on this maybe. • Agreement that Members of the local authority's executive should not be on the panels. • Questions were raised over whether or not there would be difficulty with finding people to sit on these panels who did not have any connections with the appointing authority/ proposer etc.
Swansea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole group were very dubious about the local

<p>Association of Governing Bodies</p>	<p>determination panels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerned those members of the local authority who are not cabinet members could be from the same party as those on the cabinet, which would affect their attitude and behaviour on a panel. • Some suggested ideas such as tapping into regional consortiums, so that decision making panels are made up of truly objective voices, which don't have a connection to any interested parties. • To expect a local authority to act as judge, jury and executioner in these matter puts major doubts over the legitimacy of the panel, and the decision making process. • More clarity is needed over what a "connection" to the local authority actually means. • Some parts of the group saw the establishment of a LDP as a quango, and a major cop out. Seen as a badly thought out idea as these panels will never be able to be truly independent. • Large consensus that these plans would cause more problems than it would solve, adding complexities to the process, and potentially making the process longer, which the group were very much against. • The buck should stop with the Minister, potentially a role for Assembly Members in the process as well (those who do not represent the constituency/region). • They don't see the problem being that the Minister is the one responsible for making the decision. The major problem with the current system is the time it takes for the Minister to reach a decision, and the impact that has on all involved. They felt that these proposals do not fix that. • Decision should be made by an independent person/body.
<p>Bridgend Governors Association</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree with the idea in principle • Local authority members should not be involved; it needs to be totally independent. Local authority representation should come from a different authority than the one in which the school is based to ensure that independence. • The panel should be made up of: someone with local authority experience, a director of education or assistant director who has experience of education management, a school governor (or chair of governors, and a lay governor. Strong feeling that school governors should be a required presence on these panels. • Training would need to be provided for people to enable them to take part effectively in this process if they are expected to be on a panel. Suggestion of a training module on LDP, which would include how to feed the information back to the Minister. • Like the fact that LDP's could aid transparency of the

	<p>decision making process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group were not clear if the LDP's decision was final, or if they were responsible for reporting back to the Minister who would then make the decision. They felt that the LDP should report back, but ultimately the decision would be made by the Minister.
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Annual parents meeting

Group name	Do the current arrangements for holding annual parents' meetings need reforming?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit - Vale of Glamorgan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participants had differing opinions on this matter. Many of them were in favour of keeping one annual meeting in order for there to be a forum to discuss things such as the School Development Plan However only one of the nine currently attends the meeting at the moment.
Catref Bontnewydd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 out of the 9 in the focus group had attended a Parents Evening (however not on a regular basis). One parent noted that there had been a parents evening the previous night in her child's primary school and she was the only one that attended. One of the main concerns with the current arrangements was that it was not well publicised. A lot of schools depended on the child bringing a letter home to the parents. However some that had children in secondary school reported that the school was starting to use text/ email to publicise, which was seen as a positive move. Some felt that the schools deliberately didn't them inform them in advance of meetings and didn't fully explain the purpose so that they didn't attend.
Swansea Association of School Governors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current attendance levels are a joke. The average attendance of most AGM's is between 0 - 3 parents (discounting those who are governors). There were two exceptions to this general rule where one school had 10 in their last one, and another had around 20. Meeting is seen as a waste of time.
Bridgend Governors Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absolutely. It's not needed, parents don't attend and it's a waste of time. One of the group said she has been a governor for over 30 years, and she has yet to have a single parent (other than those who are governors) attend. In general the group felt that unless parents have a concern, they will not attend such meetings. In the most cases parents' issues can be resolved by speaking with the headmaster. In most schools in their area, the headmaster's door is always open, though they acknowledged that this may not be the case everywhere in Wales, so there does need to be a process in place to allow parents to raise their

	concerns.
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Group name	What are the advantages and disadvantages of the current arrangements?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit – Vale of Glamorgan	<p>Advantage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A forum to discuss school performance and update parents <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings are poorly attended, are not publicised well, and are not inviting for the majority of parents • It doesn't give parents the ability to raise concerns throughout the year
Catref Bontnewydd	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a definite purpose– parents know what to expect. <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No opportunity to put views forward in current annual meetings– most of it is the school reporting back on things. • A lot of discussions on how well the school is doing/ stats etc that the group felt that they didn't really understand and could not put into context. • Some felt that they weren't welcomed
Swansea Association of School Governors	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information should be shared to parents and this is a place where this can be done <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The WG sets tight guidance on what the report should include and how it should be laid out. Schools/governing bodies do not have the freedom to produce it in a format in which they feel is suitable. As a result most parents don't understand the document. The report is very boring to read, too bureaucratic, there is far too much guidance to follow, and as a result it is not an effective way of communicating with stakeholders. • In general, turnout is extremely low, so annual meetings do not achieve what it sets out to do. • Annual meetings were seen as quite out dated methods of informing parents by some of the group – highlighting other communication methods, such as stakeholder days and updating information on their websites. If other communication methods are used effectively it reduces the need of an annual meeting.
Bridgend Governors Association	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no advantages to the current system, other than the necessity to produce a report, which the group felt was important to keep. <p>Disadvantages</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regardless of when or where the meeting is held, no one shows up. This is true for primary and secondary schools. • If parents have a big concern they wouldn't wait for an annual meeting to raise it, they would act upon it quicker. • In the very rare instances parents have turned up it was to discuss things outside of the annual report. The meeting is not an effective way of sharing that information with parents.
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Group name	What are your views on the four conditions that need to be met before a parents' meeting is held?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit – Vale of Glamorgan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy with all of the conditions other than condition three. • Some felt that there shouldn't be a limit on the number of meetings they can request. • Others felt that three were more than enough.
Catref Bontnewydd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second condition– the group felt that strict guidelines were needed to explain what could be discussed in these meetings and what couldn't i.e. could an issue with a specific teacher is a “matter relating to the school”. • Third condition– group raised concerns with limiting to 3 a year– what if an urgent/ important matter was raised after the third meeting was held– some flexibility was needed on this. Also some parents could work together to ensure that they get the subjects that mattered to them discussed in the 3 meetings. • Third condition– the group thought that pencilling in 3 dates at the beginning of the school year as dates for the meeting should be considered (however they did understand that this doesn't really go with the ethos of the petitioning and reacting to urgent matters)
Swansea Association of School Governors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be a cap on the number of meetings. Although some suggested that in reality, a school would never object to another meeting – and that may then be done more informally outside this process. Some felt that three was too much, and that 2 was an appropriate amount.
Bridgend Governors Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First condition– liked the fact that the threshold was a figure and a percentage, and happy with the other aspects of the criteria. • Second condition– seemed fine on the face of things; however it should also specify rules over who should attend. Should there be a requirement for certain post holders to attend, i.e. head teacher, chair of governing body, or would it be up to the petitioner to decide who is required at the meeting? What if the meeting is

	<p>called to discuss an individual? Should that individual have to attend? Some thought needs to be put into this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third condition– a minimum of four meetings (one a term) was preferred by the group. The group also questioned if a meeting would be required to follow up on a previous meeting. For example if a meeting is requested, and the issues are discussed, would the petitioner need to request another meeting to be updated on any actions/progress from the initial meeting? • Fourth condition– seemed fine, the Bill should specify 20 school days not calendar days.
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Group name	Are the minimum numbers for signatories on a petition appropriate and/or reasonable?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit – Vale of Glamorgan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally happy with the number of signatures, and thought the mix between percentages or numbers of signatures depending on type and size of school was a good idea. • They raised concerns that some parents have more than one registered pupil at schools, so effectively they would have more influence than another parent who may only have one registered child at the school.
Catref Bontnewydd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of signatures was deemed fair enough by the group. • However the group felt that lines of communication needed to be opened for parents to be able to communicate and collect signatories. An email forum (or similar) was suggested as otherwise some parents could be left out or could struggle to get the minimum number (resource implications).
Swansea Association of School Governors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group seemed happy with this and felt that the figure and percentage system worked well.
Bridgend Governors Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The numbers required to obtain seemed fair.

Group name	Is it appropriate that the onus will be on parents to have to request a parents' meeting with governors?
	What are the implications for parents of having to organise a petition and how would this work in practice?
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit – Vale of Glamorgan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No consensus on this issue. Half of the group felt they would only go if they had an issue they wanted to raise, or if they were concerned about something. The other half felt they would go to annual meetings if they were better publicised, and were less intimidating. One of the group was a part of the school PTA and didn't know when the annual meeting took place. Another member of the group said that she goes to all meetings regarding the school that she is

	<p>made aware of, and hasn't been to an annual parents meeting in five years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group didn't raise any concerns over how the process of petitioning would work in practice. • They felt that any new proposals should keep the annual meeting, but liked the idea of parents being able to petition to raise concerns in addition to this.
Catref Bontnewydd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was great concern over this being the only forum for parent's to have a meeting with governors. • They thought that the Annual Parents meeting should continue as this was an annual event where parents were able to hear about school progress/ development etc. They felt that this should be put forward by the school's management and that parents shouldn't have to request this. • The group also felt that some parents would not be comfortable writing a petition and that a template should be available for parents to use. • The group also expressed concern over the petitioning process- in principle the idea was welcomed as a forum for parent to be able to ask the school to discuss a matter with them, however some did have concerns over the schools response to the petition and the quality of the answers that they would get. • There was also a great concern among the parents that 'the usual suspects' would be the ones who use the petitions system. There was also a concern over some schools being 'clicky'- with a group of parents dominating things. • Some parents also felt that they wouldn't be approached to sign the petition, and that they also wouldn't feel comfortable asking some 'groups of parents' for their signatures. • Some parents also don't actually go to the school gates so there would be resource implications in terms of collecting signatures. • They also felt that they could be seen as 'trouble makers' if they regularly present a petition asking for meetings.
Swansea Association of School Governors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of the word petition has a negative connotation. Implies anger and outcry. • A different phrase should be used such as apply, seek, request. The word petition is likely to put people off. • Any guidance to those who can petition a meeting needs to be easily understandable, clear and without use the use of jargon, to ensure that parents buy into the system. • The group stated that parents should have to state what the purpose of the meeting was. And what is to stop people requesting meetings over the same issue three times a year? • Some concerns that parents do not get together in this way at the moment. Unrealistic to think that many

	<p>parents would come together to petition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This petitioning system could cause confusion with the complaints procedure. This could cause major problems and jeopardise any complaints investigations that are on-going if there was a public meeting discussing it. • The group felt that in the majority of cases the head master would be able to deal with circumstances before it got to this stage. Effective dialogue and communication is key to this.
Bridgend Governors Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitely. They did stress however that the guidance for parents needs to be clearly understandable and jargon free. • In many cases schools will be able to deal with issues without the need for a meeting, so contacting the head master directly should always be the first action. • The group didn't see any potential practical issues to a petitioning process. There should be the opportunity to petition online, and through other means such as a notice boards etc. • The group did see this system as more of a grievance process than a means of sharing information. Parents are unlikely to request a meeting to discuss what is within the annual report.

Group name	Other comments
Eagleswell Primary School and Nursery Unit – Vale of Glamorgan	<p>Annual meeting/report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They felt strongly that parents meetings are not promoted effectively, the perception amongst parents is that they are intimidating, and they don't understand what is being spoken about. More should be done to make the process more accessible to parents.
Catref Bontnewydd	<p>Petitioning system/Annual meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The general feeling among the group was that the petitioning system was an excellent idea for parent to be able to request meetings with the school governing body, however it was strongly felt that the current annual meeting should also be kept as this has a specific purpose (annual school progress/ stats etc) that is separate to the petitioning system.
Swansea Association of School Governors	<p>Annual report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling that producing annual reports is getting difficult, is tedious and they are very restricted with regards to how they can produce them. Consensus that the school should have the ability to write the report in their own format – and the WG should put regulations in place where they list what needs to be included in general, and let the school get on with producing it in the way it sees fit. • Many saw updating termly newsletters and websites as a more modern and effective way of communicating

	<p>messages from the report (although acknowledging that many stakeholders don't have internet access).</p>
<p>Bridgend Governors Association</p>	<p>Annual report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the group felt that there should be a standardised way of producing the report, others felt there should be freedom to present it how they feel fit, as long as some mandatory points are covered. • Needs to be kept simple, less acronyms, less jargon. • If you're in the clique, and are used to producing and reading information in this style, then you can understand it. Parents who don't do not understand what is being said. • Some parents may not be very literate themselves, so the language used needs to be simplified, and kept as concise as possible. • Comments that educationalists are poor communicators - training needs to be provided to those producing materials to ensure that it is suitable for the audience. At the moment there is not enough of an effort made to make it more understandable. • There are big restrictions in place at the moment, which don't allow reports to be written in a way that the school/governing body wants. <p>Communication methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An annual meeting is not the most appropriate way to communicate with parents. Other methods need to be looked at, such as leaflets, online etc. • Local authorities/governing bodies/schools should seek to find the preferred communication method of each parent so materials produced are not wasted, and that information is fed through in the most effective way possible. <p>Value of consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group suggested that because LA's come under pressure from the WG to reduce costs etc, that when a LA proposes to make changes (which may be as a result of the WG's pressure) that people feel that the consultation period is meaningless, as the pressure in the first place, and the final decision is made by the same person (WG).