

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Flaenoriaethau'r Chweched Senedd](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) consultation on [Sixth Senedd Priorities](#)

CYPE SP 53

Ymateb gan: Platfform

Response from: Platfform

Beth yn eich barn chi yw'r prif flaenoriaethau neu'r materion y dylai'r Pwyllgor eu hystyried yn ystod y Chweched Senedd? Os oes modd, nodwch eich barn o ran sut y gallai'r Pwyllgor fynd i'r afael â hyn.

What do you consider to be the main priorities or issues that the Committee should consider during the Sixth Senedd? Where possible, please set out your view about how the Committee could address them.

Platfform is the charity for mental health and social change.

We are a platform for connection, transformation and social change. We're driven by the belief that a strengths-based approach is the foundation to sustainable wellbeing for everyone. We do not believe that people or communities are "broken" or in need of fixing.

Our work takes a trauma informed approach to understanding mental health and emotional distress, and we see the current mental health, and wider health, social care and public sector systems as no longer fit for purpose. Based on illness and deficit models, they deny people the hope and agency to heal.

Thematic concerns for the committee to consider in all enquiries

Rather than list a series of specific issues of concern to us, we feel that it would be more useful for the committee to consider several themes that stretch across our work and the concerns we have. We suggest that these themes are explored in their own right in each inquiry the committee undertakes, as they appear to us to be relevant to a whole host of issues likely to be of interest to the C+YP committee;



(a) The over-medicalisation of stress, trauma, and responses to it within Education and young people's services

The links between trauma, the wider social environment, and Mental Health are well established now but have not yet resulted in the paradigm shift we want to see within some public services. Whilst it is obvious that many young people have suffered a great deal during the pandemic, as illustrated by statistics showing increases in referrals to services such as CAMHs and Eating Disorders, we would caution about the over-use of psychiatric labels. Many of the feelings, emotions, and behaviours that could be labelled as 'disorders' are in fact often understandable reactions to an extremely stressful and difficult time experienced by many.

Instead of medicalising the collective trauma that many have experienced, we would prefer the committee to examine how educational institutions can become trauma informed and offer genuine therapeutic environments for Children and Young People in which the experiences of the pandemic can be explored in a non-judgemental way.

(b) Crisis Provision for Young People and support for their families

Despite a lot of focus on early help and intervention, in the time that it will take to see changes in this area take effect, young people and their families are still receiving really poor responses when in a crisis or when they reach out for support.

We have recently run a session for parents with experience of crisis services, which highlighted several themes stretching across public services. These themes included; An absence of compassion, with judgmental labels applied; added distress caused by interactions with inadequate services that led to families spending energy and emotion un-necessarily navigating services; lack of support for families to have rest – with the health of those caring/supporting young people harmed by the lack of support and consideration, the lack of ability to accompany the child/young person in different care environments, and the lack of communication and involvement in care that sometimes happened. We think these are themes that carry across many settings

(c) Therapeutic environments, particularly for looked after children.

Given the well-documented links between Trauma and Mental Health, we would encourage the committee – in all relevant inquiries – to consider the extent to which public services are providing a therapeutic environment for Children and Young people.



Too often, this has not been the case, for example: the 'market' for residential social care has led to vulnerable children being placed in inadequate and trauma uninformed residential homes. This is why Platform supports the intention of the Welsh Government to phase out the profit motive in these homes. However, we believe that the committee should also look more widely at the environments that are created by institutions – be they schools, colleges, universities, psychiatric units, care homes or whatever – and examine whether they are safe environments that help heal, or whether they have processes and procedures that re-traumatise people.

We think this is a question worth considering in the majority of inquiries that will be undertaken by the committee.

(d) The financial rules and culture within public services

It has been a common theme across numerous areas of public policy that financial decisions are often based on short termism, reactive rather than pro-active, and practices of commissioning services too often involve an excessive focus on cost rather than seeing the bigger picture of how a service can contribute towards a system in both positive and negative ways. An example of this could be the historic problems parents of children with additional learning needs have faced in obtaining support. Penny pinching and denying those parents support through gatekeeping and excessive bureaucracy has only led to other public services and social security spending money as those Children have become Adults, and the failure of the 'system' as a whole to understand this is very frustrating.

It would be interesting if the committee could consider this common theme across all of its priorities, to identify the reasons why this occurs, and what the barriers to change are. It could also consider what policies could shift finance departments into thinking long term, thinking about individual services as being part of an eco-system, and valuing preventative/early intervention services more than they currently do.

(e) Equalities

The pandemic has highlighted many existing inequalities in society, and sometimes the responses to the pandemic haven't been equalities proofed. We thus believe that all committee inquiries should examine the extent to which relevant equalities issues are taken seriously and addressed within service plans rather than regarded as a tick-box exercise. Furthermore there is often a lack of an acknowledgement that racism/sexism/ableism and other forms of discrimination can themselves be traumatic, and that many children experiencing discrimination will have challenges with their Mental Health as a result.



(f) Silo thinking

It is obvious that the education system does not exist in a vacuum, and that to ensure every child achieves what they are capable of doing requires other services to support the education system. Social Services and the NHS are obvious examples of public services that contribute towards the well-being of children, but there are also other less obvious services that play a role and often make decisions that can be detrimental to the well-being of children. For example, the Planning Department of a Local Authority can make decisions that increase air pollution near schools.

We would suggest that the committee examines the extent to which existing partnerships, legislation such as the Well-Being of Future Generations act, and other policies aimed at addressing silo thinking have had the desired effect in improving matters. We think this would be a good angle for all the themes identified by the committee. Furthermore, we feel the committee would benefit from examining systems thinking in the abstract and the extent it can be used to help formulate recommendations for improvements.

