

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 73

Ymateb gan: Ross Walmsley, Cynorthwy-ydd Polisi a Materion Cyhoeddus, NSPCC Cymru

Response from: Ross Walmsley, Policy and Public Affairs Assistant, NSPCC Wales/Cymru

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.

NSPCC Cymru are calling on the Committee to scrutinise how Welsh Government have enabled babies, children and young people to recover from the many impacts of Covid-19. Children living in homes with domestic abuse, sexual abuse, substance misuse, parental mental health needs or other adversities have experienced increased exposure to harms, compounded by the challenges facing safeguarding professionals to protect them.

Thema 1: Addysg oedran ysgol | Theme 1: School-age education

RSE

We support Welsh Government's vision to introduce mandatory RSE within the new curriculum, and the commitment to produce additional guidance (the RSE Code and Guidance document) for schools to support inclusive, high-quality RSE. We strongly recommend that the Committee allocates some time in its work programme to monitor the development and implementation of RSE.

There is an important role for the Committee to investigate whether schools are ready to design and deliver the new RSE curriculum. The committee could launch an inquiry that assesses how confident primary and secondary schools feel about co-producing RSE content, including;

- What training and resources are necessary to support them;



- What schools need to be ready for the implementation of the new RSE curriculum in September 2022.
- Once the new curriculum is implemented, we also feel the Committee should focus on whether RSE is meeting the needs of all children and young people, including those who are LGBTQ+.

Thema 2: Addysg bellach ac addysg uwch | Theme 2: Further and higher education

Thema 3: Iechyd a lles, gan gynnwys gofal cymdeithasol (i'r graddau y maent yn ymwneud â phlant a phobl ifanc) | Theme 3: Health and well-being, including social care (as they relate to children and young people)

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Almost 9% of adults in Wales experienced a form of sexual abuse before the age of 16.¹ It is devastating with both short and long-term effects which can last a lifetime. The lockdowns in response to COVID-19 and subsequent isolation from support heightened the risk of CSA for some children. The NSPCC helpline saw a 15% increase in referrals to Welsh outside agencies in 2020/21, demonstrating a rise in complexity and risk. Currently, children who experience sexual abuse do not always receive the support they need in a timely manner.³ Readily available, integrated, child centred, specialist sexual abuse services, such as those delivered under a Child House model⁴ are crucial to a child's ability to recover from the trauma of CSA.

We welcomed Welsh Government's National Action Plan on Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse. However, as we enter the final year of the Action Plan, we urge the Committee to consider the gaps still to be addressed and undertake an inquiry into the response to CSA and what a service standard for Wales should look like. This must consider;

- What preventative and early intervention is available?
- Can children access crisis support in a timely manner?
- Are funding arrangements sustainable?
- What building blocks are needed to enable the roll out of the Child House model in Wales?

¹ Estimated number and proportion of adults aged 18 to 74 in Wales who experienced abuse before the age of 16, year ending March 2019 CSEW - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

² Any statistics on child sexual abuse are likely to be a conservative estimate, as it is a hidden crime. Some studies suggest it can take almost eight years to disclose abuse and some children never feel able to tell anybody about it.

³ <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/documents/responding-to-csa-childrens-services-wales/>

⁴ [Child House: local partnerships guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/848447/child-house-in-a-box-toolkit-final_v1.pdf)
[child-house-in-a-box-toolkit-final v1.pdf \(london.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/848447/child-house-in-a-box-toolkit-final_v1.pdf)



As part of the scrutiny of the response to CSA, the Committee should examine Welsh Government commitments to the Child House model, especially in light of the Scottish Government recently committing to ensuring all children have access to a Child House by 2025.

Domestic Abuse

Our priorities for the new term align with the previous Committee's report⁵, to prioritise well-being, highlight children's rights and hear their voices.

Despite the ground-breaking Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Wales Act, slow implementation has seen a gap between the policy intent and the reality on the ground. NSPCC has found that 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse⁶. Despite the VAWDASV Act and the Domestic Abuse Act recognising children experiencing domestic abuse, support for children and young people across Wales is inconsistent and mapping of services have demonstrated the urgent need for better funding and resources to meet need. COVID-19 only intensified this; calls to helplines increased⁷ during the national lockdowns and specialist services reported increased pressure on already stretched provision.

Our key asks of the new Welsh Government are;

- For the shortfall in service provision for children to be addressed and sustainable funding secured.
- That regional strategies must provide services for children and young people and that in developing strategies, designing services and evaluating the success of interventions, children and young people are consulted.
- That early intervention work is prioritised.

We therefore urge the Committee to spotlight the gap in specialist VAWDASV service provision for children and young people in Wales, especially as we come to understand the impact of the past 18 months on this cohort of children.

Poverty

Whilst the economic impact of the pandemic has hit people across Welsh society, it is the poorest households, and especially those with children, who have been hardest hit. The Bevan Foundation's 'Snapshot of poverty in Winter 2020'⁸ showed nearly a quarter of Welsh households have seen their income fall. This will only be compounded by the end of furlough and the removal of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit.

⁵ <https://senedd.wales/media/ixzpwqr5/cr-ld14286-e.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/domestic-abuse/>

⁷ The NSPCC Helpline saw 1500 contacts from adults during the national UK lockdown, while Childline delivered over 500 sessions to children worried about domestic abuse.

⁸ <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-snapshot-of-poverty-in-winter-2020.pdf>



In our manifesto for the 6th Senedd, we welcomed the planned expansion of Flying Start but called for an enhanced service for all parents of 0-4-year old across Wales, as well as training for practitioners on the impact poverty can have on families, so support can be provided in a non-stigmatising way.

We also welcome the planned UBI pilot in Wales, but it is essential the effects of this on children is considered. We echo the End Child Poverty Network's (of which we are a member) submission which asks the committee to undertake an inquiry into child poverty in Wales, taking into account the ECPN 10 point manifesto for the sixth Senedd. The manifesto calls included a renewed and robust strategy to end child poverty.

Perinatal Mental Health

As COVID-19 has heightened the risk of new mothers experiencing perinatal mental health problems⁹, and has delayed progress in improving support for those affected in Wales¹⁰, it is more important than ever to address gaps in support and ensure that women and their families across Wales have equal access to constant and quality perinatal mental health care. We strongly suggest that the Committee:

- Monitor the recommendations from the perinatal mental health inquiry
- Ensure teams in specialist perinatal mental health services are fully resourced to meet national quality standards
- Scope timelines for the permanent MBU in South Wales, and for a MBU to be accessible for families in North Wales. Provision of MBU should cater for Welsh speakers so they can feel confident in accessing this vital service.
- Investigate how the pandemic has impacted perinatal mental health and the services that support families in Wales.

Infant Mental Health

An infant's mental health is vitally important because it lays the foundations for all future health and wellbeing¹¹. While the evidence is clear that investing in the early

⁹ See: Brophy S, Todd C, Toomey S. (2020) Early findings from first 100+women in Born in Wales <https://ncphwr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Born-In-Wales-Newsletter-Sep2020-1.pdf>; Brophy S, Todd C, Toomey S. (2020) Early findings from first 200+women in Born in Wales Newsletter 2: <https://ncphwr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Born-in-Wales-Newsletter-Dec-2020.pdf>; Davenport, M.H., Meyer, S., Meah, V. L., Strynadka, M.C and Khurana, R (2020) Moms Are Not OK: COVID-19 and Maternal Mental Health. *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*. 1 (1): 1-6; Hessami K, Romanelli C, Chiurazzi M, Cozzolino M. (2020) COVID-19 pandemic and maternal mental health: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Matern Fetal Neonatal Med*. Nov 1:1-8; Papworth, P., Harris, A., Durcan, G., Wilton, J and Sinclair, C (2021) Maternal mental health during a pandemic: A rapid evidence review of Covid-19's impact. Centre for Mental Health and Maternal Mental Health Alliance; Saunders, B and Hogg, S (2020) Babies in Lockdown: listening to parents to build back better. Best Beginnings, Home-Start UK, and the Parent-Infant Foundation; Thapa, S. B., Mainali, A., Schwank, S. E and Acharya, G (2020) Maternal mental health in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand*. 99 (7): 817-818

¹⁰ See: [Fich cyf \(senedd.wales\)](https://www.senedd.wales)

¹¹ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). Young children develop in an environment of relationships. Working Paper No. 1. Retrieved from <http://www.developingchild.net>



years is the most efficient and cost-effective way of transforming outcomes for children, the specific emotional developmental needs of babies often go unrecognised and there is very little specialist provision to support this.

We would like to see the Committee:

- Carry out an inquiry into the support that is available for babies and their families in the first 1000 days, including mapping out existing services that support parent-infant relationships across local authorities and Welsh health boards.
- Mapping children's social care and health workforce competencies around infant mental health.
- Articulate its commitment to recognising the specific emotional and developmental needs of babies and infants, by the language it uses around children's mental health.
- Use the term babies/infants, children and young people in its work and communications where appropriate.

In response to the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory studies 'Born into care'¹² that found that between 2015 and 2018 the rate of newborns entering care doubled to 83 cases per 10,000 live births in Wales, we would like the Committee to scrutinise the pre-birth support offered to vulnerable parents and how effective the joint working is between social care and health in delivering this support.

Thema 4: Plant a phobl Ifanc | Theme 4: Children and young people Online Threat to Children

The internet is an extremely valuable tool for children but the scale and complexity of the online threat is growing. Existing problems have been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic:¹³

- Online grooming crimes increased by around 70% in the last three years to an all-time high¹⁴

¹² [Born into care Wales - main report English final.pdf \(cfj-lancaster.org.uk\)](#)

¹³ Europol (2020) Catching the virus: cybercrime, disinformation and the Covid-19 pandemic. Lyon: Europol

¹⁴ The true scale of this crisis is likely higher as Facebook tech failures halved the removal of abuse material during the pandemic. The NSPCC asked all 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales the number of recorded offences of Sexual Communication with a Child between April 1st 2020 and March 31st 2021, and the platform used to commit these crimes. All 43 forces responded and the data provided showed there were 5,464 offences. However, we queried Gwent Police's data due to inconsistencies, we are in the process of verifying this with Gwent and therefore their figures were not included in the report. Therefore, 42 police forces reported 5,441 recorded offences in 2020/21. We will send Wales specific figures when they are released.



Social networks create new opportunities to initiate, maintain and escalate online child abuse, exacerbated by plans for [end-to-end encryption](#). Platforms haven't invested in or prioritised child safeguarding, treating it as an optional extra. This leaves children exposed to risks including:

- Production and distribution of child abuse images;
- Harm of exposure to inappropriate content;
- Online grooming.

UK-wide regulation and National prevention efforts must work in tandem. The Committee should scrutinise to ensure Welsh Government is pressing for legislation, within the Online Safety Bill, to put child protection front and centre and to deliver tougher measures to identify and disrupt abuse in line with our '[six tests for success](#)'.

The scale of the threat means that prevention efforts must be reviewed and redoubled.¹⁵ Strong and comprehensive National Online Safety Action Plans are crucial to coordinate prevention and complement UK Legislation. The Committee should recommend a Welsh Government Online Safety Plan exclusively focused on children and young people that connects all partners¹⁶ in a pan-Wales protection and prevention approach.

¹⁵ More information about the [NSPCC's Child Safety Online prevention work](#) including our [Report Remove](#) tool.

¹⁶ This should foster a cross-sector approach spanning: health, education, law enforcement, social services, youth services, education, industry and the third sector.

