

CYPE(6)-18-23- Paper to note 2

Jayne Bryant MS,
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Seneddchildren@senedd.wales



25th May 2023

Dear Jayne,

Thank you for meeting with my colleague Jonathan Kelly and I last year and for sharing the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing's letter updating the committee on eating disorder services in Wales.

As agreed, we have outlined our thoughts in relation to the Deputy Minister's response below and have highlighted several areas of concern. We would be grateful if the committee could consider our response and seek clarification from the Welsh Government in relation to our questions. I am sorry that we were unable to compile and send this to you sooner. Unfortunately, we continue to hold many of the same concerns detailed in our '[3 Years on](#)' report that we published in January 2022.

The Deputy Minister's letter referenced pre-pandemic investment that the Welsh Government provided to support health boards to improve eating disorder services and implement improvement plans informed by the 2018 Eating Disorder Service Review. Clinicians working in eating disorder services have told us that the investment provided pre-pandemic varied widely across Wales, due to some Health Boards being more engaged and inclined to see eating disorders as a priority. This approach has perpetuated the postcode lottery described by the 2018 Eating Disorder Service Review and evidenced in Beat's 3 Years On report. **Could the committee ask the Welsh Government how it will ensure that consistent early intervention and high-quality treatment and support are available in every part of Wales?**

The Deputy Minister's letter went on to note that eating disorder services were significantly impacted by the pandemic, experiencing "an increase in demand of over 20% in some areas". It is crucially important that the Government and the NHS are aware of the true scale of the impact that the pandemic has had on eating disorders in Wales. Although there are serious gaps in the data collected by health boards, Beat's '3 Years on' report presents evidence obtained via freedom of information requests and from the testimony of clinicians, showing that several areas experienced a far greater increase in demand than 20%. For example, eating disorder referrals to Cardiff and Vale UHB CAMHS more than doubled between 2019/20 to 2020/21. Nationally CAMHS inpatient admissions for under 18s with a primary diagnosis of an eating disorder increased by 60% from 2019/20 to 2020/21.

The Deputy Minister's response explained that routine reporting against mental health performance times does not currently disaggregate by condition (e.g. eating disorders). We welcome the Deputy Minister's commitment to improving reporting against the 4 week wait target, and we are pleased to read that the Welsh Government continues to request operational information from services to demonstrate progress towards reduced wait times in the interim. **Could the committee ask the Welsh Government to share the 'informal aggregated data' it referred to and confirm whether these figures are based on the waiting time for an assessment or the start of treatment? Could the committee also ask the Welsh Government to share its assessment of the quality of data collected on waiting times and the progress that it has made towards ensuring that waiting times are consistently measured in a way that makes sense to patients and clinicians?**

The letter from the Deputy Minister referenced the difficulties that Health Boards have experienced in recruiting into several specialist roles within the eating disorder services, and that they are continuing to review and consider alternative interim solutions to provide adequate services. **Could the committee ask the Welsh Government to outline the specialist roles that Health Boards are having difficulty in recruiting for, and what 'alternative interim solutions' they have been pursuing? Could the committee ask the Welsh Government to clarify whether this includes**

Unit 1 Chalk Hill House, 19 Rosary Road, Norwich, NR1 1SZ

Admin T: 0300 123 3355 Press Office: 0300 123 7061 Email: info@beateatingdisorders.org.uk Website: beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Looking for support? Helpline: 0808 801 0677 help@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Youthline: 0808 801 0711 fyp@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

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making use of new roles within multidisciplinary teams and the use of non-clinical staff (potentially through partnership with the Voluntary sector)?

We were pleased to read the Deputy Minister's commitment to "drive progress" for eating disorder services and of the additional recurrent investment of £2.5 million from 2022/23 to improve eating disorders services. However, we are concerned that there appears to be a lack of transparency around spending by Health Boards. **Could the Committee ask the Welsh Government :**

- Whether the Government has been able to quantify total spending on eating disorders by Health Boards in 2021/22, and 2022/23 to act as baselines for this new investment?
- How it will ensure that Health Boards spend this additional recurrent investment for eating disorders as intended, rather than displacing previous un-restricted funding?
- To forward copies of the letters it sent to Health Boards setting out the specifications for bids to access both the new eating disorders funding and Service Improvement Funding (SIF) in 2022/23 and 2023/24?

It was positive to see the Deputy Minister reference that a condition of the recurrent funding from the Welsh Government will be "to reset trajectories and milestones to achieve the 4 week waiting time and to meet the NICE guidance". **Could the Committee ask the Welsh Government to disclose the current trajectories and milestones for Health Boards to achieve the 4 week waiting time standard and to meet NICE guidance, and clarify why this information is not currently in the public domain?**

We were interested to note in the Deputy Minister's response that 90% of young people needing inpatient treatment for an eating disorder are being treated in Wales. **Could the committee ask the Welsh Government to provide an update on the equivalent figure for adult patients?**

The progress outlined by the Deputy Minister in Annex A was encouraging. However, a more detailed appraisal of progress would be useful. For example, in several places the summary refers to staff recruitment or an increase in the number of patients accessing treatment without detailing the numbers involved. **Could the committee ask the Welsh Government to provide a detailed appraisal of progress including full figures?**

The section for Hywel Dda UHB refers mainly to 'proposals' for change rather than progress. **Could the committee ask the Welsh Government whether this means that previous proposals to expand and improve service provision in that health board have not been funded?**

In January 2021 Powys THB had plans to develop an all-age eating disorder service. There is no mention of this in Annex A. **Could the committee ask the Welsh Government to provide an update on the progress made towards this?**

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with us and for your continued support in this area.

Yours sincerely,



Jo Whitfield
National Lead, Wales