



Children, Young People & Education Committee

Evidence Paper on General Scrutiny - Health and Social Care

04/03/2026

Summary

This document is a response to the Children, Young People & Education Committee's request for information to inform scrutiny of the Health and Social Services portfolio.

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Workforce Plan

The Welsh Government continues to prioritise investment in the NHS Wales workforce to ensure high-quality care for children, young people and families.

Workforce planning for the NHS is led nationally by Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW), aligned to the *10-Year Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care*. This provides a long-term framework for training, development and future workforce supply across all professions, including those involved in paediatric and child health services.

While there is no single workforce plan dedicated solely to paediatrics, several existing strategic plans include workforce actions directly relevant to child health, including:

- Perinatal Workforce Plan
- Nursing Workforce Plan
- Allied Health Professional Workforce Development Plan.

The Welsh Government has committed £294 million annually to support health professional education and training. This investment sustains commissioning numbers for healthcare professional education and training and supports multi-professional workforce growth across NHS Wales, despite significant financial pressures.

This continued commitment ensures Wales is developing a sustainable and resilient workforce capable of meeting current and future population needs, including child health.

Paediatric Continence Care

We recognise that continence conditions affect many children in Wales, and we are strengthening guidance across health and education services to ensure care is consistent, rights-based and centred on individual clinical need.

Introduction and issue statement

Continence conditions are among the most common health issues affecting children and young people. Their impact can be profound, yet they remain poorly understood and supported. Stigma and embarrassment are common; children may avoid school trips and sleepovers, withdraw socially, and experience reduced wellbeing and educational progress. In this context, strengthened guidance and consistent practice across health and education are essential, underpinned by UNCRC rights.

Scale and prevalence (Wales estimate; UK evidence)

There is no national Welsh dataset quantifying paediatric continence prevalence or the number of children receiving products/services. UK sources used for planning estimate ~900,000 affected children; pooled prevalence for functional constipation ~9.5% (with up to 32.2% reported); daytime wetting ~2.8% (6–14 yrs); bedwetting ~15.5% at 7½ yrs; with elevated prevalence in children with

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additional needs. Applying these to Wales' ≈630,000 under-18s yields ~50,000 children likely to have a bladder/bowel difficulty, ~60,000 with constipation and ~17,500 with daytime wetting (6–14). These are estimates, not official statistics.

Broader UK assessments indicate ~1.5 million children (≈1 in 9) have bladder/bowel problems, reinforcing the scale of likely need in Wales and the case for improved data and commissioning consistency.

Education alignment and new school guidance

The Welsh Government expects all maintained schools to have an intimate care policy, as referenced in the *Supporting Learners with Healthcare Needs Guidance (2017)*. The guidance also offers advice and information regarding the development of Healthcare Plans and meeting these needs within the school day.

In addition, the *School Toilets: Good practice guidance for schools in Wales* provides further guidance for governing bodies and headteachers on issues relating to the standards for learner toilets and related facilities required in schools in Wales. Through our approach to Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care, we encourage settings and schools to collaborate to strengthen the planning for transitions, particularly for the most vulnerable children.

Education settings play a critical role: hydration policies, open toilet access, privacy and individualised care planning directly influence health, dignity and learning. The updated *Managing Bladder and Bowel Issues in Schools* guidance (2022) provides practical measures for schools and clarifies the role of school nursing, health visiting and specialist continence services in co-producing care plans. Welsh Government is signposting these materials to schools and partners.

Policy background (Wales health)

WHC/2022/004 adopted Bladder and Bowel UK's 2021 consensus and aimed for consistency across Health Boards. It clarified that products should only be provided following assessment and that "four pads per 24 hours" is an indicative guide based on assessed need, and that age five is used as a general threshold to consider access to products. There is no statutory duty to provide products; the Circular sought to minimise variation by setting a national steer.

Why further change is needed

A charity organisation, through its detailed 2025 report, challenged aspects of UK and Wales guidance as potentially risking indirect discrimination and fettering of discretion where minimum age indicators and indicative product quantities were being interpreted rigidly. In response, a UK-wide stakeholder process revised the consensus guidance to Version 16 (December 2025), strengthening disclaimers and repeatedly emphasising that decisions must be based on individual clinical need; however, V16 still retains residual age references, which the charity argues may remain ambiguous or contradictory without further clarification and editing.

Current position and intent

- Ministers have previously written to CYPE confirming a rights-based, UK-wide approach, reinforcing that “four pads” is a benchmark, not a cap, and committing to clearer, user-friendly guidance.
- Officials have engaged with BBUK, Welsh clinical leads and stakeholders to develop V16 and prepare a replacement Circular in 2026 for Wales, subject to Legal Services advice.
- Clarity in wording: Consolidate all age/quantity statements into a single “Practice Principles” section: *individual clinical assessment first; age and number references are illustrative, not limits; clinicians must depart where assessed need requires, recording rationale*
- Strengthening the education interface: Promote current schools’ guidance and care planning approached to ensure access to drinks and toilets, privacy and dignity, and consistent liaison with health professionals.

Childhood Obesity and Overweight

The new 2-year Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales (HWHW) Delivery plan was published in September 2025 with cross Cabinet agreement. The plan targets action and resources towards children and young people and reducing health inequalities.

The plan has 6 sections, focusing on priority themes. The themes are:

- embedding a whole system approach
- supporting families and the foundations for lifelong health
- schools and settings that support good health
- creating healthier food environments
- active lives
- treatment pathways

Actions and commitments across each theme within the Delivery Plan focus on providing the support for babies, children, and young people to get the best start in life.

Welsh Government has committed to provide over £4 million funding in 2026-2027 towards the continued delivery and implementation of the following Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales Strategy programmes:

- All Wales Diabetes Prevention Programme
- Healthy Weight Healthy You
- Whole System Approach to a Healthy Weight
- PIPYN (children and family weight management pilots)
- 60 plus Active Leisure Scheme
- Fit Fans

Young Carers

While the role of young carers should be recognised and valued, collectively we must ensure this is not to the detriment of their education or other aspects of their young lives.

Young carers in education

We are committed to equality of opportunity and equity of provision in education and supporting young carers is integral to our priorities of raising standards and improving attendance and attainment for all learners.

While some schools have well-developed systems of support for young carers, data collection on young carers in Wales is currently inconsistent, making it difficult to provide targeted support where it is needed most. We have initiated a three phased approach to improving data collection which will be taken forward over a two-year period.

The first phase will be completed in the first half of 2026 and will collate data from the School Health Research Network (SHRN), providing a snapshot of a young carers' experience in school and their wellbeing. Phase two will link this information with Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) data and enable comparison of educational attainment of young carers compared to their peers. We are also exploring a further long-term reliable method of data collection, including consideration of making legislative changes to the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) to include young carers.

We have worked with Carers Trust Wales to develop revised materials for education staff to understand more about young carers and engage with pupils. This information is available now via the carers trust Wales website and is due to be uploaded onto the relevant education platform.

Our Targeted Employability Support Scheme enables Higher Education providers to support the employability of students from under-represented groups, including young carers and young adult carers. Young carers and young adult carers from low-income households can access the Education Maintenance Allowance, the Welsh Government Learning Grant and the Financial Contingency Fund where they meet eligibility criteria.

Medr funds and regulates tertiary education in Wales and expects colleges and universities to remove barriers to participation, retention, success and progression. We ensure Welsh universities include young adult carers in their programmes to provide financial and pastoral support.

Young carer identification cards

We worked with Carers Trust Wales in 2022 to develop the Young Carer identification card and local authorities have operated card schemes independently from 2023. The identification cards are a key tool to help young carers identify in schools, colleges and pharmacies.

We sent out new materials in December 2024 to enable all local authorities to promote their card scheme and have engaged with local authorities about further action to maximise uptake, which are currently being explored.

Other forms of support

Young carers can access our Short Breaks scheme and Carers Support Fund. Up to a quarter of recipients of short breaks and 18% of those accessing the Carers Support Fund are young carers.

We continue to support the annual Wales Young Carers Festival and have agreed funding of £54,000 to support the next event in August 2026. The festival provides a three-day break for over 300 young carers, with important opportunities for them to receive information and support.

Representation of young carers

Our Young Carers Advisory Board is hosted by Carers Trust Wales and is made up entirely of young carers. This valuable resource scrutinises and informs our work. Young carers are also active members of the Ministerial Advisory Group.

We have established a young carers sub-group of the Ministerial Advisory Group to support policy development and promote dissemination of best practice.

We engage Carers Trust Wales to facilitate the All-Wales Young Carers Professional Network of local authority and third sector young carer officers.

Welsh Government became a signatory to the Young Carers Covenant in November 2025. The Covenant sets out ten key outcomes that young carers have said are key to improving their lives. We want local authorities, schools and other organisations to become individual signatories, which will promote a shared vision for young carers across Wales.

Removing Profit from the care of looked after children

The Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025 makes Wales the first UK nation to legislate to remove profit from children's residential and foster care, laying the foundation for the broader transformation of children's services.

Implementation of the commitment is progressing at pace. From 1 April 2026 new for-profit providers will be unable to register with Care Inspectorate Wales and existing for-profit providers will be unable to add new services or places. Further restrictions are planned to come into effect in 2027 and 2030, continuing the phased approach to implementation to reduce any risk of placement disruption

Development of the secondary legislation to support implementation continues. We recently launched a consultation on the requirement for local authorities to produce annual sufficiency plans. These will strengthen strategic planning and promote a more coherent, transparent and sustainable approach to meeting the needs of children and young people as local authorities move forward with implementation. Officials worked closely with local authorities in developing proposals and we are grateful for their positive engagement.

We have and will continue to provide significant financial support to support delivery of this agenda. We committed £68m revenue to local authorities and regions over the three years to 2024-25 and a

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further £75m up to 2027-28. Separate capital funding is also available through the Integration and Rebalancing Capital Fund and the Housing with Care fund. Collectively this supports local authorities in developing the services needed to implement this commitment.

Alongside the support to individual authorities and regions we have also provided grant funding to the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru to support local authority planning and implementation at a national level.