



Action for Children

Response to:
**National Assembly for Wales Finance Committee
call for information ahead of 2012-13 budget**

Action for Children supports the most vulnerable children, young people and their families. 2011 marks our 100th anniversary in Wales. From humble beginnings, we are now the largest deliverer of children's services in Wales.

Action for Children believes no child in Wales should be neglected, feel unloved or unwanted.

We welcome the Finance Committee's invitation to provide information ahead of the draft budget for 2012/13. Our approach is underpinned by the principle of protecting and improving the lives of the most disadvantaged and neglected children, young people and families in our society.

Action for Children recognises the fiscal pressure under which budgets are being set, as a result of circumstances outside Wales' control. We also recognise the opportunities, using available resources, for Welsh Government to continue to work with Local Government, other agencies and partners to reform and redesign services to make them fit for the future.

Action for Children believes Welsh Government should continue to prioritise spending which delivers improved outcomes for children and young people, building a healthier society and more sustainable future for Wales.

Spending priorities should include an increased focus on:

Transforming lives through early intervention services

Intervening early in a child's life has been proved to be more cost-effective and more successful in the long term than reliance on expensive, remedial services. (See **Annex A Backing the Future**). To achieve successful early intervention, a stronger focus is needed around universal early assessment of the health and emotional well-being of children and young people and the commissioning of services to support need.

We believe funding should be prioritised to enable every area of Wales to have in place mechanisms for early identification of children at risk of neglect and those being neglected, to enable effective commissioning of early intervention services to end intergenerational cycles of deprivation and neglect.

For example, we welcome the proposed expansion of the Flying Start programme and call for resources to properly support this.

Whilst it is essential that the rights of the child as an individual remain central to policy for children and young people, we welcome the focus on family given in recent budgets and programmes such as Families First.

Parents and families, of all configurations, are at the heart of children and young people attaining health, happiness and general wellbeing. They deserve support at the earliest opportunity to ensure families are given every opportunity to thrive. More must be done to develop universal access to services which help parents to feel confident their children are getting the best possible start in life, whatever their financial situation.

as long as it takes

Maintaining and developing community infrastructure to enable resources to go further

Capital and revenue spending must facilitate the improvement of community infrastructure, (such as integrated children's centres, community centres, community-focused schools, youth and leisure centres) to make health, social care and other family support services fit for purpose and fully accessible to all.

Stable services operating at the heart of communities, easily accessible by all, are key to improving outcomes, enabling innovative work, often considered higher risk by services surviving on a short-term basis.

Designing public services fit for the future

Commissioning of services must incentivise long term impact. We welcome moves by programmes such as Families First to deliver five year funding streams.

However, grant funding must consider practicalities of programme change to ensure smooth transition as part of the drive to implement policy. Service users value consistency in relationships and this needs to be recognised during periods of change. (See **Annex B** *Developing Effective Professional Relationships*)

Services must also be required to demonstrate impact, allowing commissioners to identify where to make savings by investing and reinvestment of savings in early interventions services which make a difference, improving lives and avoiding costly late-on interventions.

Focus on Outcomes

Local authorities and statutory agencies must be accountable for identifying need and providing early intervention services which work.

We welcome the commitment towards an outcomes-based approach. Action for Children operates an outcomes-based framework using the Results Based Accountability (RBA) methodology (reflecting the Seven Core Aims in Wales) to demonstrate the difference its services make to the lives and life chances of children and young people. A copy of this framework can be found at **Annex C** and a report on the impact of our services is at **Annex D**.

Welsh Government must ensure development of a coherent and comprehensive outcomes framework to facilitate implementation of policy and drive public service delivery across all departments of Government, Local Government and other statutory agencies. A number of local authorities are already employing RBA to deliver on local population outcomes and so the Government's proposed use of this methodology is also welcomed.

Wales-level population outcomes should be supported by a clear and comprehensive set of both population indicators, to facilitate collaborative working towards common goals, and performance measurements to enable services to understand how well they are working towards those goals.

It is essential that the framework contains the right outcomes for Children and Young People. The Seven Core Aims provide a basis for the framework, as it relates to children and young people, which must address health, happiness and emotional well being, safety, educational achievement and skills for life, positive relationships and the rights of the child. In addition to this no child in Wales should be neglected and no child in Wales should live in poverty.

Collaborative ownership of population outcomes and indicators is key to driving delivery, as is accountability. There should be collective and individual organisational responsibility for delivery and accountability to this duty, particularly in relation to the delivery of early intervention services.

Supporting collaborative working

Action for Children has long recognised the benefits of working collaboratively with colleagues in the third sector, with local government and with other agencies.

Currently, further clarity is needed over how, where and when local authorities and other agencies should be working together across geographic and organisational boundaries, to enable partners to engage and support this process. The complexities increase when considering non-devolved issues such as crime and justice.

Collaborative working is best supported by clear messaging around outcomes and the intended aims of collaboration – whilst savings may be deliverable, the key question must be whether services will be improved.

Welsh Government can assist smooth implementation of collaborative working by providing an outcomes framework which allows organisations to address who should be working together, to achieve which outcomes (including savings and improvement of services).

We believe local agencies in every area should be able to conduct joint-strategic needs assessments, supported by mechanisms to ensure budgets can be pooled for joint-strategic commissioning of services to meet need.

However, underpinning structures are required to support strategic decisions and whilst we welcome moves to align and streamline partnership working, there are questions raised around the future of Children and Young People's partnerships as part of current rationalisation. How and with whom will strategic leaders engage to inform decision-making? What will the new infrastructure underpinning LSBs look like and how can partners, such as the third sector, engage?

Consideration of these issues, appropriate resourcing (including short-term costs related to organisational reform and reconfiguration) and sensible timescales will allow all partners in Wales to work together to improve delivery of our public services, moving towards a society where no child or young person from Wales suffers the consequences of neglect.