



**Response to**  
**Health and Social Care Committee consultation on**  
**its Fourth Assembly Legacy**

**Date: September 2015**

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# **MAE POB PLENTYNDOD WERTH BRWYDRO DROS EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR**

## **About the NSPCC**

We're leading the fight against child abuse in the UK and Channel Islands. We help children who've been abused to rebuild their lives, we protect children at risk, and we find the best ways of preventing child abuse from ever happening.

Abuse ruins childhood, but it can be prevented. That's why we're here. That's what drives all our work, and that's why – as long as there's abuse – we will fight for every childhood.

We help children rebuild their lives, and we find ways to prevent abuse from ruining any more. So when a child needs a helping hand, we'll be there. When parents are finding it tough, we'll help. When laws need to change, or governments need to do more, we won't give up until things improve. Abuse changes childhood. But so can we.

## Consultation questions

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Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?	On behalf of an organisation
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Your consultation response will be used to help inform and shape the Committee's approach to its work. The Committee may, therefore, wish to invite you to provide further evidence at a later date, whether in writing, a formal evidence session, or as part of informal evidence gathering.

Are you happy for the Committee to contact you for that purpose?	Yes ✓	No
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### Question 1

Thinking about the past five years, in your view:

**To what extent has the Health and Social Care Committee had an impact on health and social care in Wales?**

The work of the Health and Social Care Committee has encompassed a

wide range numbers of topical health and social care issues. This includes most notably the inquiry into residential care provision for older people and the legislative scrutiny of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014.

These two pieces of work have had an important impact on the way social care is delivered to vulnerable people in need of care and support in Wales:

- The issues raised during the inquiry into residential care for older people have strongly shaped the current draft Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Bill 2015. The Bill seeks to put in place greater safeguards to ensure that a good level of care is delivered to people who need it.
- The legislative scrutiny undertaken at Stage 2 by the Committee contributed to strengthening some of the provisions relating to safeguarding children within the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act: NSPCC Cymru/Wales particularly welcomed the amendment which placed a duty on relevant partners of local authorities to report children at risk. We also welcomed the addition of a new section to require key persons and bodies to have regard to adult and children safeguarding guidance, extending this requirement beyond local authorities.

### **What has been the Committee's biggest achievement?**

The Committee's biggest achievement in our view is its contribution to delivering the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

We believe that if the Act is properly implemented it has the potential to transform the lives of vulnerable people in Wales. Early intervention and access to preventive services can stop problems escalating and in time reduce the need for acute services. We also welcome the focus on a stronger voice to service users, and are particularly pleased that persons exercising functions under the Act are bound by a due regard duty to the UNCRC. This should help ensure that the specific needs of children are taken into account and provide a benchmark for service planning and delivery.

**If the Committee could have done one thing differently, what would it be and why?**

**Has the Committee's work struck the right balance between scrutiny of policy, finances and legislation?**

## Question 2

**Looking ahead to the next five years, in your view what will be the three biggest challenges for health and social care in in Wales?**

### **1. Delivering early support to children and families**

Despite the Welsh Government doing their best to protect spend for services for vulnerable people, we have seen a rise in demand for children's social care over the last decade. In this context we are concerned that thresholds for child protection services are rising and are increasingly forced into playing the role of "watching and waiting" for the point at which children are at risk of significant harm, acting as a service of the last resort. Not only is this approach more costly, it is also less effective.

As children are less likely to meet the threshold for children's social care until their problems are severe and entrenched, the task of turning their lives around becomes much harder and expensive. Data from the Early Intervention Foundation shows that the late intervention spend on child protection and safeguarding in 2014/15 was **£423m**.

There is significant potential to take the 'preventative' ethos that underpins 'Early Intervention' and develop it to ensure we are all doing more to fight for every childhood in Wales. We prefer the term "**Early Support**" which refers to practical ways of helping families and children

to overcome problems **before they start** and **whenever they occur**.

Child abuse is action by a parent, carer, other adult or child that results in significant harm to a child. NSPCC Cymru/Wales believes that the context in which we live, shapes all of our behaviours, including abusive behaviour and this means that, with very few exceptions, **abusers are made and not born**. Abuse can happen to any child, in any family. However certain things make abuse more likely to happen and the more risks present, the more likely that abuse will occur.

We believe that influencing factors on individual's behaviour can be identified and therefore it is **possible to prevent abuse and neglect before it occurs** and this is a thread that runs through all of our policy calls and services. <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/fighting-for-childhood/our-services/services-for-children-and-families/>.

We believe there are many quite **simple preventive measures that could be introduced**, such as mandatory and expertly delivered healthy relationship education to young people as part of the PSE curriculum which will help prevent domestic abuse and protect against child sexual exploitation. Another example is our Coping with Crying DVD which is shown to all new parents on discharge from hospital in three LHBs in Wales. The DVD gives parents advice on how to cope with babies crying and helps prevent non accidental head injuries (NAHI).

We also know that significant deprivation, not just financial, is extremely harmful in the earliest years of life and this is why we believe **issues such as inadequate housing or poor mental health or substance misuse problems need to be addressed early and that effective interventions are likely to pay significant dividends that span learning, health and parenting of the next generation**.

Child development is a dynamic process – through which a child is transformed from reacting to sensations and being dependent on carers to becoming independent and making sense of the world. The process does not simply unfold with neurological maturation but is shaped-positively or negatively- by the interactions between biological and environmental influences.

Babies, children and young people have many needs including:

- Basic care (appropriate food, clothes, shelter and personal hygiene, medical care)
- Ensuring they are supervised and kept safe
- Love and emotional warmth
- Stimulation
- Guidance and Boundaries
- Stability

Meeting these needs is crucial for optimal child development and failure to meet some or many of these needs, whether consistently or intermittently, is child neglect. Babies and children need responsive and sensitive parenting and extensive research<sup>1</sup> has found that 'beginning shortly after birth, the typical "serve and return" interactions that occur between young children and the adults who care for them actually affect the formation of neural connections and the circuitry of the developing brain' and that 'significant absence of caregiver responsiveness can cause more harm to a young child's development than overt physical abuse'. Consequently, lack of stimulation and parental responsiveness results in cognitive delays, emotional and interpersonal difficulties and poor school achievement.

Other new research<sup>2</sup> reveals how poverty, nutritional deficiencies, and a lack of responsive caregiving and learning opportunities combine to undermine childhood potential, and concludes that 'Intervention in First 1000 Days Vital to Fulfilling Childhood Potential'.

We believe that **all parents should be provided with good quality antenatal education programmes, to help them learn to care for and bond with their baby and cover the emotional aspects of parenting, relationship changes and potential mental health difficulties.** We also believe that more vulnerable parents should be provided with a targeted and more intensive ante and post natal programme similar to NSPCC Cymru/Wales' Babysteps programme which is run in our Swansea Service Centre. This programme has been evaluated and findings are extremely positive. For more information: <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/baby-steps-evidence-relationships-based-perinatal-education-programme.pdf>

Intervention within the first 1000 days of life and **supporting parents and carers to parent effectively is therefore crucial if we are to prevent neglect and abuse, to ensure children's needs are met and all children develop to achieve their full potential.** Parents and carers are supported in their parenting role by health services, programmes such as Flying Start and Families First, and, as children grow older, by nurseries and school staff. **The role of professionals in universal services to support families and identify those who need early support is central to an 'early support' approach.**

We see significant opportunities to further embed an early support approach with the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act, the Future Generations Bill and forthcoming changes to local

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<sup>1</sup> [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/inbrief\\_series/inbrief\\_neglect/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/inbrief_series/inbrief_neglect/)

<sup>2</sup> <http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/PressRelease/pressReleaseId-110267.html>

government. We see the progress so far as the groundwork for a future approach which supports parents to raise a safe, healthy and happy next generation but that gaps and blockages need to be addressed. We recommend:

- A shift towards early support to be realised by a strategically planned and sustainably funded pipeline of evidence-based services
- Enhance current service provision to embed a range of preventive services, building on the momentum of the Social Services and Well-being Act
- Provision to all parents of good quality antenatal education programmes and vulnerable parents provided with a more intensive ante and post natal programme, such as NSPCC Cymru/Wales' Babysteps.
- Support to parents throughout their journey as a parent to ensure their child's happy, healthy development.
- Universal services doing more to support children and signpost to early help services such as Families First. Families of young children in Flying Start areas already receive enhanced support, but outside Flying Start areas, universal services such as midwifery, health visiting and GPs need to be supplemented by evidence based preventive and early support services.
- A co-ordinated approach to planning and provision of services to support children and families between health, education, social care and tackling poverty programmes both locally and nationally.

**A shift towards prevention and early support will avoid later expensive crisis interventions, will optimise the development of children and adults which will result in thriving communities and create a stronger, resilient and more equal Wales.**



## 2. Providing support for victims of abuse and neglect.

NSPCC research has shown that 1 in 5 children have suffered severe maltreatment.<sup>3</sup>

Research clearly demonstrates the **impact of child maltreatment on children's health and life chances:**

- Child maltreatment has consequences for children, families and society which can last a lifetime (Kendall-Tackett, 2003).
- Maltreatment can inhibit the development of certain parts of the brain (Glaser, 2000). This has a negative impact on children's functioning later on in life and can cause children to become anxious, aggressive or emotionally withdrawn.
- Emotional neglect or abuse has a profound effect in early infancy. Exposing an infant or young child to chronic stress has been shown to be associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and antisocial behaviour later in life. Emotional neglect or abuse of children in the first two years of life has a strong association with later aggression. (Maguire et al, 2014)
- The impact of abuse includes mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, substance misuse, eating disorders, self-harm, anger and aggression, sexual symptoms and age inappropriate sexual behaviour (Lanktree et al, 2008).

More specifically, child sexual abuse can be associated with feelings of betrayal, powerlessness, stigmatisation, guilt and traumatic sexualisation, as well as difficulties forming and maintaining relationships, mental health-related problems resulting from trauma and physical health problems (Meadows et al, 2011).

Child maltreatment also has a **financial impact on society:** in Wales, the majority of child protection registrations and care episodes are a result of abuse and neglect. Research by the Early Intervention Foundation shows that approximately a third of the total £1.15bn spend on late intervention in Wales goes into the care system and child protection plans. This is **nearly £400m.**

In Wales, a high number of children remain victims of maltreatment:

- For the second year running Wales had the highest rate of children

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<sup>3</sup> Radford, L. et al. (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today. London: NSPCC.

on Child Protection Registers in the UK. (Source: How Safe are our children? NSPCC 2015)

- The number and rate of children in need in Wales due to abuse and neglect has also continued to increase since 2009/10. (Ibid)
- The rate of looked after children due to abuse and neglect in Wales is still higher than other UK nations. (Ibid)
- In 2013/14 police in Wales, as in the rest of the UK, recorded the highest number of sexual offences against children in the last decade.

In view of this context, it is vital to **ensure that children who are victims of abuse and neglect are given the necessary support to overcome their experiences.**

*Asking, hearing and believing*

**We call on all professionals working with children and young people to identify and respond to all forms of abuse at the earliest opportunity and to ensure those who suffer abuse receive appropriate support and treatment.**

**We urge members of the public who are concerned about a child to contact the NSPCC Helpline without delay.**

*Providing evidence-based, children-centred therapeutic services for victims of sexual abuse:*

**NSPCC Cymru/Wales would like to see strengthened provision of innovative, children-centred therapeutic services so the needs of children who have been sexually abused can be met wherever they live.**

**This must work in tandem with more research and investment into support and treatment for children who have been abused across the spectrum of need.**

*Together for Children and Young People: delivering improved support for victims of abuse.*

**We call on partners involved in the Together for Children and Young People service improvement programme to ensure that their work includes a focus on the specific needs of children and young people who have been abused and neglected.**

### **3. Implementing the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2015**

NSPCC Cymru/Wales is concerned that the assumption that the Act will be cost neutral is unrealistic. Significant investment will be needed to fund both early intervention services and the current provision of acute services.

It will also be important to ensure that training is delivered as the Act brings in a significant shift in the way social care is delivered. NSPCC Cymru/Wales looks forward to working with the Care Council for Wales to help shape the delivery of training under the Act.