

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Y 1,000 diwrnod cyntaf| First 1,000 Days

FTD 13

Ymateb gan : Plant yng Nghymru

Response from : Children in Wales

1. Children In Wales is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee's consultation on the First 1,000 Days – the extent to which Welsh Government policies and programmes support the early parent role, before birth and during the first 2 years of a child's life, and how effective these are in supporting children's emotional and social capabilities and development.
2. Children in Wales is the national umbrella body for organisations and individuals who work with children, young people and their families in Wales. We are a membership body, and our members are drawn from the voluntary, statutory and professional sectors. We work with and for our members to promote their interests and meet their needs. The networks we support include the national Parenting Coordinators' Network whose members are local authority strategic leads for parenting, and the national Flying Start Coordinators' network. In addition, we facilitate a range of seminars and conferences relating to family support and early years' services and we engage with practitioners from local authorities, Health, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector to share research and practical knowledge about what works in supporting families.
3. We have chosen to focus our consultation feedback on the strengths and challenges relating to the provision of services and support to parents. Comments include those of members of the national Parenting Coordinators' Network. We also include recommendations made by participants at our last parenting conference which focused on how we should be supporting the mental and emotional wellbeing, including relationships, of children, parents and carers. Parents play a central role in relation to outcomes for children. We know that positive outcomes for children are more likely when parents provide positive guidance and care for their children based on the principles set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child UNCRC. We consider that the Flying Start and Families First programmes have contributed to

improved outcomes for many families in Wales. They have also helped to develop more effective multi-agency approaches to promoting and protecting the health and wellbeing of children. We suggest that the lessons learned from national and local evaluations of Families First and Flying Start will point towards how partnership working can be strengthened. We consider that ground has been lost in recent years in regards to partnership working to support children and their families due to the demise of Children and Young People's Partnerships which had a broad remit for addressing children's rights under the 7 core aims and for making connections across all policies and their implementation.

4. We welcome the focus of the First 1000 days programme and commend its aim of bringing together agencies to work collaboratively. We recognise the findings of the mapping of the current 'system' around pregnancy and early childhood that was completed in the trial sites of Wrexham and Torfaen. We consider that these findings are likely to be reflected in all counties, particularly the need for services to operate as a whole system, and to reduce variation in access to and delivery of services both within and between different areas.
5. In regards to supporting parents to be better parents we agree that the Welsh Government's positive parenting campaign is the right way to promote positive parenting behaviour and offer information and practical advice and support about alternatives to 'smacking'. We expect that this will work well when the promised legal change of the law to ensure that children and young people have the same protection from being hit as adults is enacted.
6. There needs to be a focus on how best to develop an appropriately qualified and competent workforce in family support and a local focus on developing quality, consistency, and competency. We suggest that we all need to work together to promote the value of National Occupational Standards and frameworks with reference to UK, European & international initiatives. Children In Wales will be focusing on this topic at our next parenting conference on 15th February and recommendations will be available soon afterwards. The details of the conference programme are here <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/item/parenting-conference-2017/>

7. The FIS is a statutory provision in each Local Authority is a valued resource, offering free and impartial advice on issues such as childcare, including help with the cost of childcare, education and training, health and leisure services. Family Information Services also act as point of contact to a range of experts who will provide free help and support tailored to individual needs. Family Information Services make their information available on websites, through a range of social media and at a wide range of public events. The services are also accessible by telephone and public access.
8. We welcome the support provided to Family Information Services through a Welsh Government support contract, and are keen to ensure that the Family Information Service “brand” remains active and visible to the public, alongside the development of advice, information and assistance services in Wales. Parents, particularly new parents who are balancing the needs of a young family with work or training demands must be able to find the appropriate advice and guidance easily and directly, from experienced and knowledgeable staff.
9. Helping parents with their relationships matters. Evidence shows strong associations between couple relationships, parenting, and children’s outcomes. We suggest that parenting support could be improved in Wales, even in these times of austerity, through normalising of access to support through integration and signposting of family and parenting support at known regular touch-points. This would serve to break down of the stigma of talking to professionals. When considering the development of Children’s Hubs, the successful approach in Australia of family relationship centres should be considered. Such community based provision would provide opportunities to deliver universal and targeted support and also allow for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector partners to add to the mix.
10. Routine measurement of family/relationship functioning is important and policymakers might take these matters into account when developing policy. Measurement of family functioning and positive family dynamics, including parental relationship quality, could take place at the local level. We suggest, however, that the way in which assessments of probability of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are undertaken will be critical. While training of Health Visitors in undertaking assessments would be a positive development, we suggest that the skills of parenting practitioners in having ‘difficult

conversations' with a parent should be recognised and collaborative approaches prioritised.

11. Training for frontline family work practitioners in working with relationships is imperative and there is a wide range of resources available to support this. We welcome the decision to include a focus on improving parent-child relationships and parent-parent relationships in Families First guidance and the Welsh Government non-statutory guidance *Parenting in Wales: Guidance on engagement and support*. We suggest that this guidance, and that for Flying Start, should include specific recommendations about programmes and approaches for couple work. Provision should be made to evaluate good practise, existing and evolving, that takes into account the unique features of the context. We need to have greater working relationships with schools including addressing the skills of school staff who work with families.
12. In regards to child poverty, the *End Child Poverty Network Cymru* (ECPN) is a coalition of concern focused on the eradication of child poverty in Wales, co-ordinated and managed on a day-to-day basis by Children in Wales. Its steering group includes representation from across the voluntary and statutory sectors and the Network has an increasing supporting membership from a broad cross-section of agencies. The *End Child Poverty Network's* manifesto asks the Welsh Government to ensure that tackling child poverty remains a priority within new arrangements under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Welsh Government should also ensure that clear accountability measures are in place.
13. We support the recommendations made in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 2016 report *Poverty: causes, costs and solutions* <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-causes-costs-and-solutions>  
We are pleased that the Welsh Government's approach is in line with many of the recommendations e.g. improving perinatal mental health services, working in community based children's hubs, support for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector to play a part in local provision, funding for relationship support. However, additional funding is required if effective early intervention networks in every area are to be realised. Responses to our recent child and family poverty survey (forthcoming) included reflections from frontline practitioners in Flying Start areas where they consider they are making a significant difference in helping to improve the lives of young children and their families. It has been suggested, however, that more resources are needed to ensure there is

sufficient support at antenatal/perinatal stages to ensure the earliest possible intervention. This would include extra support workers, midwives, psychotherapists etc. to ensure multi-agency support and expertise are available for families who are vulnerable and living in challenging situations.

14. In Wales, as in the rest of the UK, unintentional injuries are a major public health issue. They are a leading cause of fatal, serious and disabling injuries for children and are well documented as the leading cause of health inequity. Child deaths from house fires is the largest of all documented health inequalities with children from less affluent families being 37 times more likely to die in a house fire. When compared to other UK nations, Wales has the highest injury death rate for children. Wales also compares relatively poorly with other European countries. In a 2012 European assessment of 31 countries, Wales was ranked 23rd in efforts to prevent unintentional injuries, with England rated as 8th and Scotland 11th. The impacts of unintentional injuries are far reaching and place a significant social and economic burden on children, their families, the wider population and the services in Wales. Welsh Government has recognised this significant impact and in Our Healthy Future, made the reduction of accidents and injuries one of their ten priorities for action. This is further supported through their early years and childcare plan, Building a Brighter Future (2013). However, this aspiration will not be realised without having a strategic lead on unintentional injuries. There is no such post currently within Welsh Government or Public Health Wales. We suggest also that there is a need for mandatory training in unintentional injury prevention for health visitors and midwives.