



22<sup>nd</sup> January 2019

Dear David Rowlands AM,

**Ref: Petition number P-05-857 calling for a National Task force for Children's Mental Health**

We would like to thank you and all the members of the Petitions Committee for considering this petition. Furthermore we would like to thank Vaughan Gething AM for his comprehensive response to your request for information in relation to the issues raised by the petition asking the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to create a National Task Force for Children's Mental Health. Additionally, we are very grateful for the support the petition received across Wales, with residents from every electoral region signing it. Below is our response to Vaughan Gething's letter dated 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018 in relation to the petition.

- 1) We commend the Welsh Government for including mental health as one of its priority areas in its *Prosperity for All* strategy, and thank Vaughan Gething AM for recognising the importance of supporting the emotional well-being of children and young people. However, with almost 25% (\*1) of young people having experienced suicidal thoughts we believe that the **commitments made within the strategy are insufficient to prevent the continuing prevalence of serious mental health issues among children and young people**. Placing a 'real and meaningful focus on well-being' (\*2) within the new curriculum and assessment arrangements is an important step as it could help develop the resilience of pupils, but it **fails to address the societal and cultural factors that are leading to the mental health issues being experienced by children and young people**. Furthermore, although ensuring 'teachers have the help and support they need to respond to children experiencing difficulties' (\*2) may improve the level of support provided to children and young people with mental health illnesses, this is not a preventative measure. Consequently, **this is a policy that will continue to incur escalating costs and utilise resources without reducing the number of young people experiencing difficulties with their mental health**.
- 2) We agree with Vaughan Gething AM that schools have a crucial role to play in identifying problems early and helping to provide children and young people with the tools to cope with the stresses of growing up. However, it is important to remember that **not all children and young people attend school**. We welcome the pilot projects launched by Vaughan Gething AM and the Cabinet Secretary for Education to build relationships which extend from the classroom to specialist mental health services. Nevertheless, **a National Task Force for children's mental health could provide a robust Wales specific evidence base and substantive, cost-efficient, long-term recommendations that, if implemented, could significantly reduce the number of children and young people requiring treatment for mental health problems**.
- 3) The *Mind over Matter* report referred to by Vaughan Gething AM is another important element in helping to create a culture where young people feel supported and not stigmatised if they are suffering with their mental health. Furthermore, the promotion of 'good mental health' (\*3) and improved signposting to services are welcomed by us. However, **with the number of referrals to children's mental health services having already doubled in Wales in recent years (\*2), such an approach is incomplete and insufficient; and may leave service users and providers frustrated by an ongoing deficiency in the level of support and resources available**.



- 4) The establishment of the Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group announced by Vaughan Gething AM and the Cabinet Secretary for Education in September 2018 is an important response to the *Mind over Matter* report and fulfils **some** of the remit that a National Task Force for Children's Mental Health would encompass. We particularly welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to taking the opinions of children and young people into account during their work. Evolving this Task and Finish Group into the National Task Force that residents from every region in Wales have called for by signing our petition could support the ambition of the *Prosperity for All* strategy and **intensify the work currently being done as a consequence of the *Mind over Matter* report.**
- 5) If part of the £7 million to improve children and young people's mental health, announced by Vaughan Gething AM earlier this month, was used to expand the Task and Finish Group into the National Task Force proposed by the petition then this could **provide a comprehensive and extensive development of policies that build on the *Prosperity for All* strategy, the *Mind over Matter* report, the pilot projects, and the work-to-date of the Task and Finish Group itself.**
- 6) Just as Wales has led the world in other areas of policy relating to children and young people – for example, by incorporating the UNCRC into domestic law and the passing of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – a National Task Force for children's mental health as outlined in the petition would likewise demonstrate our determination as a country to create and sustain a culture in which every child and young person has the opportunity to thrive and fulfil their potential. By establishing this National Task Force, the Welsh Government **could transform the outcomes of a considerable number of children, young people and their families.** Furthermore, **this cross-party, cross-society approach could dramatically reduce the number of children and young people needing to access treatment for their mental health.** Consequently, **resources that are currently over-stretched would become available to provide a rehabilitated, augmented service to those in need of help and support in the future.**

I believe that the evidence above provides a balanced analysis that explains how a National Task Force for children's mental health could build upon and enhance the existing work of the Welsh Government in this area; and the significant impact that it could have on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people throughout Wales, particularly through the development of preventative measures. It is evident that Vaughan Gething AM and the Welsh Government take the issue of poor mental health among children and young people very seriously and have taken important and significant action to tackle the problems presented. We believe that a National Task Force for children's mental health would reinforce this commitment and provide a comprehensive strategy to further strengthen and increase the pace of work.

If any further input from me would assist you and/or the committee please do not hesitate to contact me at [contact@nocmh.com](mailto:contact@nocmh.com). I look forward to hearing the outcome of your considerations in relation to this petition.

Yours sincerely

*Geraint D. Evans*

Managing Director



\*1 [https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/suicidal-feelings/?gclid=EAlalQobChMI6\\_OeuJSB4AIVC-DICh06dgKuEAAYAiAAEgJKRPD\\_BwE](https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/suicidal-feelings/?gclid=EAlalQobChMI6_OeuJSB4AIVC-DICh06dgKuEAAYAiAAEgJKRPD_BwE)

\*2 <https://gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>

\*3 <https://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11522/cr-ld11522-e.pdf>