

Children's Commissioner for Wales' view on the Welsh Government's Response to the joint committee report: 'Assessing the impact of budget decisions'

This note provides comment on the Welsh Government's responses to the recommendations of the joint committee. It does not seek to repeat or replicate the evidence given in [writing](#) and in person to the joint committee sessions in November 2018.

I am pleased to hear that the Welsh Government has committed to working with my office and the offices of other statutory commissioners (recommendation 1) 'to provide greater clarity on the purpose and expected outcomes of the SIIA process'. I hope that this work can now begin at pace to ensure that the budget-setting process for the 2020-21 budget is subject to the scrutiny that a comprehensive SIIA would bring.

As I stated in my evidence to the joint committee, I would expect a comprehensive Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) to be completed and published *alongside* the budget. This CRIA should include within its remit all elements of the budget relevant to children and young people.

The Welsh Government has responded to recommendation 2 by saying that it feels 'further consideration needs to be given as to whether this would aid accessibility, understanding and transparency'. The Welsh Government says that this is because publishing the individual impact assessments in a central location instead of alongside the relevant documentation could confuse those accessing the suite of documents published in relation to a particular decision or policy.

In relation to providing individual impact assessments in a central location, which would include Children's Rights Impact Assessments, I do not find the Welsh Government's explanation to be adequate. If the Government has already published individual assessments alongside policy / decision documents, then I am unsure why it would not also be possible to publish these individual assessments to a central location. I believe that this step would demonstrate a real commitment from Welsh Government to transparency, and would provide myself and others the opportunity to engage with them in a constructive way on the findings of their individual impact assessments. The current situation is not, in my opinion, sufficiently transparent.

Ministers in Wales have a legal duty to consider how the decisions they make affect children's rights. Currently, that duty is not given enough weight in the budgetary decision-making process, despite the fact that Children's Rights Impact Assessments form a part of that process under the Government's Children Rights Scheme.

I welcome the commitment to review the approach to the SIIA and the IIA (recommendation 3). I am pleased that the IIA review commits to engaging with external stakeholders. I would expect that external stakeholders, including my office, are to be offered an opportunity to contribute to *both* these reviews.

Specifically in relation to IIAs, in our experience, the extent to which an IIA is published alongside documents is inconsistent. As an example, some Welsh Government consultations may publish a short summary document which provides one or two sentences relevant to the impact on children and young people and children's rights, while others provide the full Integrated impact assessment document upon the launch of the consultation which includes a completed CRIA section (annex A) alongside other impact assessments.

Where CRIs are published as part of an IIA, alongside documents, or made available on request, we continue to be concerned about the variety in their quality, and an inconsistency in their application of the process of the Welsh Government's CRIA as prescribed in their Children's Rights Scheme. We have seen examples of CRIs which do not actually attempt to answer the broad question over whether and or how the policy will have an impact on children and young people, let alone attempting a fuller process.

I am concerned that the commissioned research referred to in recommendation 5 has not yet commenced, and would have expected progress by this stage in order for us to apply some learning to the 2020-21 budget-setting process. I would have liked to see this process commence at a quicker pace, but am pleased that Welsh Government has committed to commencing research by September. I look forward to engaging with Welsh Government and others to drive this forward to ensure that the situation improves throughout the upcoming budget-setting process.