

# **The Children's Commissioner for Wales**

## **Evaluation of our *Plan for All Children and Young People: 2016-19***



**Comisiynydd  
Plant Cymru**  
Children's  
Commissioner  
for Wales

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# Commissioner's Introduction

This report presents an evaluation of my three-year strategic plan 2016-19.

In my first year as Commissioner (2015-16) I wanted to find out what mattered most to children and young people across Wales. To do this, I launched a Wales-wide consultation called *Beth Nesa? What Next?* to hear children and young people's views on many aspects of day-to-day life; the services they use, the schools they attend and the communities they live in.

I also asked them to set their own priorities; the things they thought I should be focusing on as Children's Commissioner to inform my work plan.

The conversations we had with over 7000 children and adults enabled my team and I to develop the *Plan for Children and Young People: 2016-19*, to take these priorities forward.

Included within the Plan were clear aspirations: that, by 2019, I hoped that Welsh Government and public services would have made significant progress towards delivering improvement in mental health, bullying, access to play for all children, better support for care leavers, better transitions between children's and adults services, the same legal protection as adults from assault, and that children would be better involved in public services (including my own organisation).

I don't commission services nor do I deliver front-line services. Instead my work is focused on persuading and supporting others to introduce and implement change. I want children and young people to hold me to account on how my team and I have worked to influence progress in these areas. Over the last three years we have made it our mission to bring forward new evidence and information, along with capturing the voices and experiences of young people in Wales to demonstrate to Welsh Government and wider public services in Wales why it is important that these changes take place. This report is an evaluation of how well my team and I have done this.

During this time, we have worked to promote improvements by encouraging public services to commit to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and improve how they plan and deliver their services for children. Through this, a number of organisations have committed to a children's rights approach, from South Wales Police to the National Museum of Wales. It is also hugely welcome that, after sustained influencing work by my team and I, Local Authorities must have regard to the

UNCRC when providing services for children under the Additional Learning Needs (Wales) Act 2016.

We have made sustained efforts to influence and shape Government policy and legislation to deliver for children's rights. We played a leading role in securing a Bill to ensure that children have equal protection against abuse as adults. We have taken part in the development of the Youth Parliament/Senedd Ieuentid and a new curriculum for Wales that will ensure children learn about their rights. Following our recommendations and influencing work, we have also seen new funding for services to work together to transform mental health services, and the beginnings of work towards a whole-school approach to emotional health and well-being. We have also seen more funding allocated to support young people who are leaving care. These are all hugely positive steps forward for the realisation of Wales' national commitment to equality and children's rights.

I have also continued to support individual children and young people whose rights have been breached by public services. I have challenged these services to do better and have used my powers, where appropriate, to ensure that children and young people receive the services and support they are entitled to. Too often these cases show that despite positive progress, some children do not always have their rights met. This tells me that I cannot be complacent and we must all continue to strive to address the rights breaches children face, to make sure that every child and young person in Wales can achieve their full potential.

## Comments from Advisory Panel

In 2016, I established my young person's advisory panel, a first for this organisation. The panel is made up of approximately 30 young people aged 11-18. To date, we have had 57 valuable members.

They play an important role in supporting my team, from interviewing new staff and helping at events to scrutinising our work and projects. They meet three times a year to discuss children's rights, question me on my work, and hold me to account on my promises.

I asked them if it was important for me to look back on my work since 2016, and who this report should be for. We also discussed how progress can continue to be made against the three year work-plan. They provided some very helpful comments, which have guided this report.

### How can we raise awareness of the UNCRC?

- "Events and activities — in the Assembly and leaflets for parents"
- "Better Curriculum Integration"
- "School Councils, posters, online information"
- "Welsh Youth Parliament"

### Who is responsible for improving young people's wellbeing and safety and what can be done to improve this?

- "Tighter laws on child safety on social media"
- "NHS, Schools, Councils, Sally, Youth Services, Welsh Government, Sports Wales, Sports Clubs"
- "Young people who want to share skills to be rewarded"
- "Schools must have bullying policy/ social media policy - Equal evaluation of both sides bully and victim"
- "Option to do free activities that are accessible for everyone"

## **Is it important for the Children's Commissioner to look back on her work?**

- "It is important for the CCFW to look back on her work because Sally can look, learn and see what worked and didn't work, championing the work that has been carried out and can be used to further develop the next CCFW to learn and have examples."
- "Yes it is because the CCFW can see her improvements over the years of her job."
- "Yes, everyone makes mistakes (not in a bad way)"

## **Who should this evaluation be for?**

- "Young people so we know how our opinions are being used".
- "Councillors/adults/teachers/parliament members so they can take our opinions and better children rights for us in ways that are helpful and needed for children"
- "Anyone who works with young people"

# Behind the Plan

My staff team, of just 23, have a Wales-wide remit. I rely on their challenge and support on a daily basis and their commitment to children and their rights has shaped and driven the work you'll read about here.

Since taking up post I have been committed to enabling and empowering all employees; to improve every employee's performance and contribute to the achievement of our strategic objectives by providing them with the right skills and environment to do the job to the best of their ability. As a public office in receipt of public funds, I am also committed to implementing rigorous and transparent accountability and decision-making systems.

On a monthly basis, my management team reviews the impact and effectiveness across the organisation via a balanced scorecard. This method enables us to look at how effective and efficient we are across 4 key areas:

1. Organisational Processes
2. Commissioner's People
3. Children and Young People
4. Commissioner's Financial Sustainability and Value for Money

Here are some highlights from the last three years:

## Organisational Process

- Welsh Language Standards: fully reviewed existing operational practices to ensure full compliance.
- Overhauled the Strategic Planning Policy and Process ensuring our strategic planning approach is a systemic one, to determine goals and to manage the delivery of our work.
- Established advisory panels of adults and young people to scrutinise the organisation's work and to act as a critical friend.
- Thorough risk identification and remodelled the risk register to fully align with our three-year strategic plan.

## Commissioner's People

- To support the implementation of our overhauled Strategic Planning Policy, 20 members of staff received training on an Association of Project Management

Course by the University of South Wales, with 16 members undertaking and passing the final exam.

- Continued Professional Development: team members from across a range of grades and working patterns and gender applied and benefitted from training, including from external providers such as:
  - o Afasic Cymru
  - o Blake Morgan
  - o Stonewall Cymru
  - o Equinox PR
  - o Plain English Campaign
  - o Cymraeg Clir, Bangor University
  - o Welsh lessons with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David
  - o Samaritans
- Enhanced our staff wellbeing commitment in conjunction with Time to Change Wales.
- Biennial staff survey: assists us in measuring employee experience and contributes to the continuous cycle of improvement in relation to people practices. We had an 82% response rate to our last survey (2018|19); here are some highlights:
  - o 100% of respondents agree or strongly agree that we listen to different communities and we work on the things that matter to them
  - o 100% of respondents agree or strongly agree that children's voices are at the heart of everything we do
  - o 89% of respondents agree or strongly agree that we demonstrate continuous improvement in our work from regular reflection
  - o 89% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they understand how their work contributes to our strategic goals and annual work plan objectives
  - o 100% of respondents agree or strongly agree that there are effective policies and procedures in place for project management and strategic planning.

## Children and Young People

- Awareness of the Commissioner at an all-time high: Beaufort Research noted that nearly 20% of children surveyed had heard about the Commissioner and 75% of our Ambassadors surveyed in 2018 had heard about children's rights.
- Engaged with nearly 30,000 children and young people.
- Supported 1753 children and young people via our independent investigations and advice service.

## Commissioner's Financial Sustainability and Value for Money

- Became a Living Wage employer.
- Seconded members of staff to the Future Generations Commissioner's office.
- More than 90% of the Commissioner's official journeys are carried out by train or bicycle.
- Reduced travel and subsistence costs from £26,000 in 2015|16 to £12,000 in 2018|19.
- Reduced office costs from £75,000 in 2015|16 to £63,000 in 2018|19.
- Delivered all our project work over the last three years for £251,000 = approximately 35p per child in Wales.

## Developing the Work Plan: 2016-19

When I first became the Children's Commissioner in 2015 my team and I held a nationwide conversation with Wales' children and young people and the adults who look after and support them. My role as Children's Commissioner for Wales is to be the independent voice of all children and young people in Wales. To be an effective champion, I needed to hear directly from children and young people what they felt I should be speaking out about.

These conversations enabled me to learn about what was important to children and young people and helped me to set priorities for the first three years as Children's Commissioner. This conversation was called [Beth Nesa/ What Next?](#) and was developed in two phases.

In phase one, my team and I met with over 1000 children and young people and more than 200 adult carers and professionals for structured conversations about their everyday lives and concerns, and views on what I should be prioritising. I spent time with pre-school children in Caerphilly, young carers in Powys, young people living in hostel accommodation in Port Talbot and Anglesey, disabled children and their carers in schools and a hospice, young people being treated within in-patient mental health settings in North and South Wales, Young Farmers, Scouts and Guides and many school and youth councils.

In phase two, my team and I gathered the views of well over 6000 children, young people, parents, professionals and other adults across Wales, mainly via questionnaires, organised around the four themes linked to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);

**Provision:** Do children have the things they need in Wales to be happy, healthy and safe? What should the CCfW prioritise in terms of influencing improvements in provision for children and young people?

**Protection:** Are children and young people kept safe? What should the CCfW prioritise in terms of influencing improvements in the protection of children and young people?

**Participation:** Are children and young people given choices and the chance to take part in decisions that affect them? What should the CCfW prioritise in terms of participation?

**Promotion:** Do children and young people know about their rights? How should the CCfW involve them in her work?

The findings of our conversations and consultation revealed that in 2016, many children in Wales had safe, happy and active lives, and felt listened to and respected by the adults around them.

However, there were large groups of children who missed out in a variety of ways. I was told;

- Children and young people wanted to feel safe out and about in their local communities and have things to do.
- Children from less well-off families are less happy with facilities in their community and feel less safe than others.
- Children aged 3-7 wanted the Children's Commissioner to put play as a top priority.
- Too many children reported everyday experiences of bullying and this was children aged 7-18's top priority for the Children's Commissioner to tackle.
- Children who need extra help with their mental health wait too long for the right care. This was parents' and professionals' top priority for the Commissioner's work.
- Children and young people who need extra social and health care experience a 'cliff edge' when they turn 18, with poor transition planning and support.
- More children were looked after in foster, kinship or residential care than previously and not enough of these children had stable care or good enough outcomes when leaving care.
- Children received a mixed message that they have rights to keep them safe under the UNCRC but the law gives them less protection from physical assault than adults have.
- Many children, young people and adults had concerns that children's provision, like play and youth centres, and financial support for families with children, have lost out more than other groups in the last few years of cuts to public funding.

*Beth Nesaw* was the biggest and most comprehensive consultation ever carried out by this office. The wealth of evidence provided to my team and I made it clear what my priorities should be for the first three years as Children's Commissioner. On the solid foundations of our conversations and consultation, the *Plan for Children and Young People: 2016-19*, was developed, and I made the following promises to children and young people.

By 2019 I hope that Welsh Government and public services will have made significant progress towards delivering the following improvements for children:

- Children and young people will have access to the mental health services they need in a timely manner. There will be stronger programmes for promoting emotional health and wellbeing in place in our health and social services, schools and youth services
- Children's contemporary experiences of bullying will be better understood and more schools will prevent and tackle bullying effectively
- There will be better access to play, culture and leisure activities by children who are most likely to miss out on these, particularly those living in poverty and disabled children
- Care leavers will have better access to safe and secure housing options and an active offer of a job, education or training place
- All young people requiring continuing health and social support will have improved transitions to adult services
- Children will have the same legal protection as adults from physical assault
- Children and young people will be better involved in public services, including my own organisation

As a team we have worked to deliver against each promise. We want to ensure that children and young people have their rights realised in all services they receive in their communities and can participate meaningfully in the decisions that impact their lives. It is these principles that have guided our work, and we are confident that we have seen improvements, but there is still a way to go.

This report will demonstrate how my team and I have sought to address each of the issues raised in *Beth Nesa* through our participation, investigations, influencing and policy work in each of the six priority areas:

- Mental health, wellbeing and tackling bullying
- Poverty and social inequalities
- Play and leisure
- Safety in the community, school and home
- Raising awareness of the UNCRC and its adoption across public services
- Transitions to adulthood

## Summary of progress: How have we made progress against these promises?

Priority	What have CCFW done to raise awareness of this issue?	Are services where we would like them to be?
<p>Children and young people will have access to the mental health services they need in a timely manner. There will be stronger programmes for promoting emotional health and wellbeing in place in our health and social services, schools and youth services.</p>	<p>Each year since becoming Children's Commissioner I have used my annual report to make recommendations to Welsh Government on how to improve mental health and emotional support services for young people in Wales.</p> <p>Concerns about access to and provision of emotional and mental health services continue to represent a significant amount of my case work, and I have met regularly with young people across Wales using mental health services.</p> <p>I am visiting every Regional Partnership Board in 2019 and challenging all of them to make sure that they are prioritising the needs of children and young people and can provide support services for any child who may require it.</p>	<p>Welsh Government have accepted all my recommendations to strengthen mental health provision, which has led to increased funding for the programme Together for Children and Young People (T4CYP) and progress towards a "whole school approach to emotional well-being and mental health". However, despite making recommendations to strengthen the planning structures for mental health services and the need to develop safe and secure residential provision, progress in this area has been slow. This is why my team and I will continue to push for progress in these areas.</p>
<p>Children's contemporary experiences of bullying will be better understood and more schools will prevent and tackle bullying effectively.</p>	<p>My team and I have consulted with over 2000 children on their views and experiences of bullying leading to the publication of reports on bullying and cyberbullying, and the development of high quality 'Sam's Story' resources for schools and community groups.</p> <p>I am confident this has led to an improved understanding of young people's experiences of bullying, with the Welsh Government's renewed "Respecting Others" guidance directly referring to the messages raised by</p>	<p>Bullying is a worry for many young people which is why I have pushed hard on the need for a statutory duty to be placed on schools to record incidents to inform prevention strategies. I am pleased the Government has now responded positively by issuing the new statutory guidance 'Rights, Respect and Equity'. I hope this will be implemented quickly in schools across Wales and</p>

	children and young people in these reports.	will continue to monitor progress.
<b>There will be better access to play, culture and leisure activities by children who are most likely to miss out on these, particularly those living in poverty and disabled children.</b>	We have consulted with young people on their access to play, culture and leisure activities, which led to the publication of our Article 31 report, <i>Don't Hold Back</i> report and a <i>Charter for Change</i> . Each made a number of specific recommendations as to how public services in Wales can improve their access to culture and leisure activities for those most likely to miss out. This included calls for greater involvement of young people in the services they use and the introduction of a Child Poverty Delivery Plan.	Summer Holiday Food and Fun schemes have continued to grow over the last 3 years. In 2019, the funding was made more flexible, supporting the growth of community-based holiday play and food schemes; a change I had recommended to Government. I have received a formal response to the recommendations in my <i>Charter for Change</i> report and am actively following progress of these.
<b>Care leavers will have better access to safe and secure housing options and an active offer of a job, education or training place,</b>	In 2017, I published my <i>Hidden Ambitions</i> report which made recommendations to Welsh Government and Local Authorities on how to improve services to support young people to thrive after leaving care. We then followed up progress on this work in 2018.	Our influencing work led to the creation of a specific grant fund for care leavers, the St David's Day fund, and Personal Advisor support extending to all care leavers to the age of 25. There has been an extension of training and apprenticeship schemes within Local Authorities and more involvement of care experienced young people in policy development. Half of local authorities had exempted care leavers from paying council tax in response to my reports, and the Government made this exemption Wales-wide in 2019 following a public consultation.

		<p>However, despite our calls in this area, access to housing and an active offer of employment or training is not happening consistently across Wales, which is why I will continue to push for this beyond 2019.</p>
<p><b>All young people requiring continuing health and social support will have improved transitions to adult services.</b></p>	<p>I published <i>Don't Hold Back</i> in 2018 which highlighted the challenges faced by young people when transitioning between children's health and social services to adults.</p> <p>I have held meetings with Welsh Government officials to discuss transitions for young people in health services and will continue to pursue this in 2019/20.</p>	<p>Having made a number of recommendations to Welsh Government, RPBs, Local Authorities and Health Boards, my case work demonstrates that young people still experience barriers, which is why I will continue to push for progress in this area.</p> <p>I am pleased that the Government has now developed draft guidance in this area and is working with my office and others to ensure that it helps to produce improved experiences and outcomes.</p>
<p><b>Children will have the same legal protection as adults from physical assault.</b></p>	<p>I have discussed this issue regularly with officials and Ministers throughout my term as Children's Commissioner, pushing for the introduction of legislation. We have spoken to children and young people to gather their views on any proposed law change. My office has been represented on Government working groups, and worked closely alongside other organisations in the children's sector to address this key issue where children were not being protected in law against physical punishment. I have given written and oral evidence to</p>	<p>The Equal Protection Bill was introduced in March 2019 and is now progressing through the National Assembly for Wales with broad political support. If passed, children in Wales will have the same legal protection as adults from physical punishment.</p>

	<p>consultations and inquiries on this topic, and published public position papers to inform the debate.</p>	
<p><b>Children and young people will be better involved in public services, including my own organisation.</b></p>	<p>Since 2015, 57 Children and young people have been members of my advisory panel. We have engaged with almost 30,000 children and young people and now have 39% of primary schools and 50% of secondary schools participating in my Ambassadors Scheme, along with 10 different community groups.</p> <p>We have also produced three different versions of the Right Way to encourage public organisations to adopt a children’s rights approach to planning their services.</p>	<p>A number of organisations have worked with my team to develop a children rights approach in their own policies and practice. This includes South Wales Police, the National Museum for Wales, HMP Parc YOI, Wales Ambulance Service and most other health boards and trusts, Wrexham and Vale of Glamorgan Public Service Boards.</p> <p>The Youth Parliament/Senedd Ieuencid has been established and there is a Bill to reduce the voting age to 16.</p>



# Participation

We have visited at least 361 groups, schools and organisations

361

Trained at least 465 schools to be rights ambassadors

465

29,850  
We have engaged with 29,850 children

# Policy & Public Affairs

Responded to 63 Assembly, Welsh and UK Government Consultations

63

Attended 325 working groups since 2017

325

# Schemes

10  
10 Community Ambassadors groups

Trained and supported 57 members of our young people's advisory panel

57

50%  
50% of secondary schools in Wales part of the Student Ambassadors scheme

39% of primary schools in Wales part of the Super Ambassadors scheme

39%

Produced 30 resources for schools and community groups, on issues such as rights, discrimination and poverty.

30

9  
9 Special Missions created

9

9 Special Missions created

# Communications

Secured 1840 pieces of broadcast and print coverage

1840

Published 26 reports

26

# Investigations & Advice

979  
979 parents have contacted us

106  
106 children have contacted us for support

106

# Sally

Gave evidence 15 times to Assembly Committees

15

Met individually with 56 Welsh Government Ministers, Assembly Members and Members of Parliament

56

1,753  
Supported 1,753 young people

1,753

Supported 1,753 young people

222 professionals have contacted us for support

222

Met on average with 100 groups of children and young people for face-to-face discussions each year

100

# Highlights

Since 2016, we have played a central role in the following improvements for children and young people's rights in Wales:



# Investigations and Advice: Supporting young people to access their rights

The Investigations and Advice service is a free and confidential, independent source of advice and support for children and young people or those who care for them, if they feel they've got nowhere else to go with their problem.

My team of Officers ensure that all adults, whatever their role, act in the best interests of children and young people by putting their wellbeing at the forefront of any decisions and actions which affect those children and young people. Whilst we do everything we can to resolve all of the cases that come to us, there are times where systemic issues or lack of appropriate guidance means we are unable to hold particular agencies to account at that time. Those issues are then taken forward by our policy team to influence broader change. Examples of this would include our ongoing work on health transitions and our 2019/20 project on the role and operation of Regional Partnership Boards.

The service has grown in the three years, having handled 519 cases in 2015/16 to 671 in 2018/19.

Here are some examples of how we have been able to support children and young people throughout the years;

## Mental Health, wellbeing and tackling bullying

### Mental Health

**The issue:** A family member contacted us with concerns about their child who was having suicidal thoughts, had disengaged with education and that despite referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) from their GP and education provider, no support was felt to be forthcoming.

**What we did:** Our officer made contact with the local authority education department, social services and CAMHS to establish which roadblocks were preventing the young person from accessing the required mental health support. Following our intervention, the local authority's social services department put in place a package of support for the child in the short-term and CAMHS made arrangements to meet with and assess the young person.

## Bullying

Bullying in education settings was an issue in 53 cases brought to the attention of our Investigation and Advice service in 2018/19. Bullying cases came from across the school age range and ranged from teasing to alleged physical assaults. Cases of self-harming as a result of the bullying were also reported. We were able to provide advice and support to them all.

## Poverty and Social Inequality

**The issue:** There have been few cases where we have been contacted specifically in regards to issues relating to social inequality and poverty. Where we have had conversations with young people, parents and carers, these have informed policy development in regards to uniform policy, free school meals and greater financial support for care leavers. Any issues raised with us regarding access to Universal Credit have been shared anonymously at a UK-wide level with my fellow children's commissioners.

**What we did:** We have been contacted by family members concerned about a lack of financial support from the Local Authority when caring for children and young people under a Private Family Arrangement which prevented these children needing to be accommodated. Our officers have been in touch with the respective local authorities, the majority of which subsequently made nominal payment to the families. These concerns have been shared with the policy team.

## Play and Leisure

**The issue:** We received a letter from pupils of a school council seeking advice on how to ensure their voices were heard during a consultation process regarding the proposed closure of their local sports centre.

**What we did:** We made contact with the local authority and obtained information about their existing plans to consult with local children and young people. The authority provided us with information about the next stages of consultation and confirmed the pupils would be afforded an opportunity to ask questions and be heard at the public meeting soon to take place. We shared the information with the pupils and encouraged them to ask for any children's rights impact assessment completed as part of the planning process.

**Outcome for children:** Here's the feedback received from the school: "Thank you for your reply to our letter in October about the possible closure of Sports Centre A. Our School Council attended the public meeting and, following your advice, asked a question about whether local authority B had completed a children's rights impact assessment on the removal of the Sports Centre. Mr C (Local Authority Strategic Director) told the meeting that local authority B had not yet completed an assessment but that they would complete one before making a final decision about the centre."

## Safety in the Community, School and Home

**The Issue:** We were contacted by a parent whose child had reported they had been sexually assaulted by another pupil and the parent was dissatisfied with the response of the school and local authority to their concerns. The young person was not attending school due to concerns for their safety.

**What we did:** An Investigation and Advice Officer met and spoke with the young person on a number of occasions. They agreed to act on their behalf to speak with the school and local authority in order that a solution could be found that would enable them to remain in their current school and feel safe. This required the officer to develop a trusting relationship with the pupil who had become disillusioned with adults who they felt should have been protecting them. This was a complex case that required the I&A officer to negotiate between parent and young person as well as a variety of senior school and local authority officials all of whom had different perspectives about the case. The case took three months to resolve including attendance at a multi-disciplinary meeting as part of the resolution process.

**The Outcomes:** The young person eventually returned to school and was satisfied with the arrangements that had been put in place to safeguard them. The local authority brought forward training for all school staff on how to deal with incidents of this nature and the police as part of their ongoing work with schools delivered training to pupils in the school on appropriate and inappropriate behaviours.

## Raising awareness of the UNCRC & public services

Investigation and Advice is an important service in ensuring all children and young people in Wales can access their rights through the services they use.

Here are some examples of the issues raised with Investigations and Advice in regards to the recognition of children's rights and the UNCRC in practice:

- A parent contacted us to discuss Welsh Medium Support for her son who is awaiting an ASD diagnosis. The parent had been advised that her son needs to move to an English medium school with a behavioural unit as none are available in Welsh. An Officer made contact with the Head of Inclusion who advised that a scoping exercise was underway to explore possible collaborative work to provide Welsh medium provision. We have since learned that the young person now has an ASD diagnosis and has a Welsh speaking 1:1 support worker and is accessing online courses of interest.
- A young person contacted us as they were not happy with a response they had received from the Chair of Governors of their previous school, having written to them to share their experiences of being at the school;
- A young person who uses a wheelchair contacted us as they were unhappy with their KS3 PE Assessment results — they felt they had been discriminated against as no reasonable adjustments were made during the KS3 PE assessment to take into account their physical disability.

## Transitions to Adulthood

The following highlights the range of issues brought to us from young people, parents/carers and professionals in relation to young people leaving care. We provided advice to all callers and, where appropriate, intervened to support the resolution of the issue.

- A young person who had left care made contact stating they had not received any support moving into independent living, had no money and that their Personal Advisor and Social Worker were not returning their calls.
- A young person who had left care and was now studying at University made contact for advice about a guarantor for privately rented accommodation. They intended to share a house with other students and had approached their Personal Advisor for support but no useful advice had been shared.
- A young person who had left care, who had been in receipt of funding for a 2-year HND course had been advised they would have to self-fund their first year at university. Information was provided to them about the St David's Day fund.
- A young person who had left care and had additional needs made contact; they had been in an 'out of county' foster placement for 15 years. They were no longer being supported by social services and were caught in a dispute between two local authorities about who was responsible for providing them with support.

## Strategic Objective: Mental health, wellbeing and tackling bullying

Under the UNCRC, children in Wales have a right to have the best possible standard of health, both mental and physical, and have a right to be treated with respect, dignity and protected from all forms of violence, abuse and bad treatment. This means that services in Wales have a duty to prevent these issues where possible, to limit the harm experienced by children.

Here is how my team and I have worked towards securing improvement in these areas:

### Mental health and wellbeing

By 2019, I hope that progress will have been made by Welsh Government and public services to ensure children and young people will have access to the mental health services they need in a timely manner. There will be stronger programmes for promoting emotional health and wellbeing in place in our health and social services, schools and youth services.

My team and I have been working to see a whole system shift in the way mental health services are delivered and mental health issues addressed for children and young people in Wales. Concerns regarding access to both primary and specialist CAMHS, and mental health provision more broadly continue to represent a significant amount of my case load. Too often young people are told they need to fit into the service structure, rather than services being able to fit their needs. A small number may have to travel far away from their homes and families for treatment. In 2016, I became aware that teenagers often experienced a “cliff edge” when moving or ‘transitioning’ between children and adult mental health services and that children, despite having complex behavioural and emotional needs, are not always considered to need formal mental health support.

## What did we do to improve this for children and young people?

Each year we have made recommendations to the Welsh Government on how to improve mental health and emotional support services in Wales:

In 2015/16, I recommended that the NHS Together for Children and Young People Programme (T4CYP) continue to receive adequate funding to fulfil its ambitions and should monitor whether children's experiences of mental health care are improving. This was accepted by the Welsh Government and I was invited to join the Expert Reference Group for the T4CYP Programme as an observer. The Welsh Government also provided CAMHS with additional funding and set ambitious waiting times, which helped reduce the excessively long waiting times for some children. The funding for T4CYP was extended until October 2019.

In 2015/16, I recommended that the curriculum review programme 'Successful Futures' should work closely with the NHS's Together for Children and Young People programme to promote evidence-based, whole school approaches to healthy relationships, mental health and wellbeing.

I have been pushing for a whole-school approach since making this recommendation, including in evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into the emotional and mental health of children and young people. I was pleased to see that the need for a whole-school approach featured prominently in the committee's resulting Mind over Matter report. There has been progress on this with the setting up of a joint ministerial task and finish group on a whole-school approach and draft guidance has been produced. As part of this, there has been new funding for a pilot scheme providing mental health training and direct support to schools.

I have been working to ensure the curriculum in Wales supports children to understand about mental health and wellbeing and healthy relationships.

In 2017/18, I recommended that the Welsh Government takes action to require Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) to set up specific multi-agency planning structures for children and young people. They should also require RPBs to take steps to integrate children's social care and mental health services into multi-disciplinary teams, that will respond to the needs of children and young people who require emotional, behavioural or mental health support and treatment.

I am pleased to see signs of rapid changes in several regions in the re-shaping and re-imagining of mental health and social care services. I would like to see this change in all areas and I am meeting and tracking progress with each region in Wales.

I have been pushing for some time with Welsh Government Ministers, officials and others for there to be new residential care facilities for those children and young people for whom there is no suitable provision currently in Wales which meets their complex mental health and social care needs. I am pleased that the Welsh Government appears to have accepted the need for this new provision, and have promised to explore the practicalities of commissioning such a service.

In my Annual Report for 2018/19 I made a number of recommendations which seek to further influence progress in this area. They are:

- Welsh Government should ensure new ring-fenced funding specifically for the purposes of jointly commissioned mental health and social care residential provision for the small number of children and young people with the most complex needs in Wales.
- Welsh Government should also act to ensure that the existing mental health in-patient units in Wales make changes necessary to extend the range of young people who can be safely cared for there.
- Welsh Government should take action to develop secure mental health provision in Wales for the very small number of children who require this care.
- I also recommended that the Welsh Government works as a matter of urgency to establish continuation arrangements for the important work currently being delivered through the Together for Children and Young People Programme.

### **What will CCFW continue to do:**

I hope that by 2022, Wales is a country where services work together to give children and young people a one-stop, 'no wrong door' support for mental health and wellbeing. We will be visiting each Regional Partnership Board this year, and challenging all of them to make sure that they are prioritising the needs of these children and young people and can provide support services for any child who may require it. I will continue to raise the need for sufficient safe accommodation for our children with the most complex mental health and behavioural needs who need to live away from home.

Findings from *Beth Naur* - our large scale consultation with children and adults in 2018-19 to assist in the development of our next three-year plan, showed that:

72% of young people aged 11-18 believe the Commissioners priorities should be the right support for mental health	29% of young people aged 11-18 believe my top priority should be getting the right help for mental health or emotional problems	86% of professionals worry about the mental health of children	85% of parents and carers believe my top priority should be mental health
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## Bullying

Children of all ages across Wales have raised their concerns about bullying with me. In 2015, those aged 7-11 and 11-18 put tackling bullying at the top of their priorities list, which is why I made a commitment in my work plan that by **2019, children's contemporary experiences of bullying will be better understood and more schools will prevent and tackle bullying effectively.**

In 2017, my team and I undertook a large scale consultation with my Super Ambassador schools — Sam's Story, which gathered the views of more than 2000 children and young people and nearly 300 professionals. This special mission asked pupils to share their thoughts and feelings about bullying. Cyberbullying is a key issue, particularly in secondary schools, and should not be seen in isolation to physical or verbal bullying. Children also told us that they often felt unsure about what to do when they witnessed bullying and talked about the importance of direct action by school staff and trusted adults to intervene.

### Digital Rights and Cyberbullying

We supported young people from Wales to take part in a European project in 2019, the theme of which was children's rights in the digital environment. We worked with a group of 16 pupils in a school who discussed the topic over a few weeks and came up with recommendations including interactive digital education, education for parents on how young people use the internet and getting rid of anonymous messaging services. Two ambassadors from the group were then selected to represent Wales at the ENYA Forum in Brussels, and one of them presented findings to Commissioners and Ombudspersons from 44 nations in Belfast in September 2019.

"It will get better. There is always someone to talk to. Whether that's your mum, sister, teacher or peer. There is someone who wants to help; and you have to let them." - Secondary school pupil.

#### What worries you?

"Being cyber bullied by other people" (Girl, 11)

"Bullying in school like people say mean things about skin colour." (Girl, 9)

"People being mean to me online" (Boy, 9)

## What did we do to tackle bullying?

Having listened to children and young people's experiences of bullying in Wales, my team and I [published Sam's Story](#).

Using the main messages from our work with young people, I made a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government, local authorities and schools to tackle bullying and support young people who are affected by this.

These were also put forward in my annual reports. I recommended that the Welsh Government review the "Respecting Others guidance" and to place a duty on schools to monitor bullying incidents and to develop anti-bullying strategies as part of a whole school approach to emotional well-being and mental health.

My office worked with schools to create five anti-bullying schemes of work differentiated by age (covering Foundation Phase to Key stage 4) and all published with accompanying resources. These were launched to coincide with anti-bullying week 2017 and within six months the primary school resources had 10,640 downloads and the secondary resource was downloaded 1439 times. During Safer Internet Week 2019 my office launched [Don't Worry, I'm Here for You: Children and Young People's Experiences of Cyberbullying in Wales](#), this report highlighted key findings from my 2018 consultation about cyberbullying and is accompanied by three differentiated Action Packs, developed with young people to enable peer-led change.

We held an art exhibition in the Senedd in November 2017 too, which ensured that children and young people's powerful depictions of the impact of bullying were seen by national decision makers in Wales.

## Has progress been made since 2016?

We are confident that our work has met our goal of ensuring children's experiences of bullying are better understood and we have enabled schools to develop better strategies.

I welcome the progress made by Welsh Government in this area, bringing forward renewed statutory guidance on bullying - "Rights, Respect and Equity". The new guidance responds positively to several of my recommendations, including the expectation for each school to appoint an anti-bullying lead and emphasising the need for schools to develop clear recording mechanisms for incidents of bullying. I hope this guidance is implemented quickly in schools across Wales and my team and I will continue to monitor progress.

## Mental Health in schools, Healthy relationships, advocacy and respecting young people's voices

### Healthy Relationships education

Children have a right to be treated with respect and dignity and live free from violence and discrimination. This is why we teamed up with the NSPCC in Wales, Cardiff University, Welsh Women's Aid and Welsh Government to help children learn about healthy relationships.

We supported the creation of AGENDA: a young people's guide to make positive relationships matter. The resource provides a range of creative ideas, tried and tested in schools in Wales that enable young people to lead healthy relationships education to prevent and combat bullying related to sexism and homophobia. An age-appropriate primary school resource with a similar creative focus was also supported by my office. A group of students from a comprehensive school, which has adopted AGENDA approaches, represented Wales at a meeting of European Young Advisors in Paris in 2017 and the subsequent European Children's Ombudspersons conference in Finland, where they helped shape a Europe-wide statement on this issue.

My office contributed to the work of the Welsh Government's Healthy Relationships Expert Panel, providing advice and support on the delivery of Healthy Relationships education in Wales' new Curriculum. It is welcomed that young people will now learn about healthy relationships in schools, yet there is little detail on how this will link to a rights based approach.

## Challenging stereotypes

All children have a right to be treated fairly. This is why we worked to tackle negative portrayals of the LGBT community in the media. We developed the “The Children’s Commissioner for Wales’ guide to challenging the negative media reporting of the LGBT community”: As the champion for the rights of all children and young people in Wales, I will speak up for the rights of LGBT\*young people to live full lives as equal citizens, free from stereotyping, bullying or institutional barriers. This guide supported young people to challenge negative portrayals in the media.

### Tackling Islamophobia

Research shows that religious hate crime has risen in previous years and that Muslims are more likely to be affected than any other religious group. We teamed up with Show Racism the Red Card and Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) in Swansea to produce a resource about rights and equality for young Muslims in Wales, as well as a range of videos, which have been used by community groups and schools across Wales, to help young people recognise negative stereotyping.

96% of pupils who returned the evaluation forms in the first three months agreed that they were “more likely to recognise negative stereotyping in the media” whilst 78% agreed that they were “more likely to challenge negative stereotyping”. This work won a Gold PRide Award from the Chartered Institute for PR.

## Advocacy and Health

Children have a right for their views to be respected and for their voice to be heard in decisions that affect them. Despite young people in Wales making up a significant number of NHS Wales users, when it comes to making a complaint, it is not clear or accessible for them on how to do so. This is why in 2016/17 and 2017/18 my annual reports made recommendations to the Welsh Government to undertake an audit of advocacy in health settings for under 18s and to fill any gaps in services. I also recommended that the Putting Things Right patient information is updated to direct young people and their families as to how they can access face to face advocacy in health settings across Wales.

Despite the Welsh Government accepting my recommendations, to date there have been no changes to any of the guidance or documents that provide information to children and their families accessing health services. My annual Child Health Seminar in July 2019 had a session specifically on health advocacy for young people and I will continue to monitor Welsh Government progress in this area.

**I used my Annual Report 18/19 to recommend Welsh Government establish national standards for health-related advocacy for all children and young people who require it**

and monitor health boards' progress towards commissioning sufficient advocacy, and their promotion of it.

## Wellbeing and social care

Children have a right for their best interests to be a priority in all decisions that affect their lives. This is why we have worked to ensure that children who are placed in care can have a meaningful way of ensuring their rights and views are recognised.

In 2017/18, we worked in partnership with Coram Voice and the Welsh Government to roll out a pilot programme with six local authorities in Wales to survey the wellbeing of looked after children in their respective authorities. We had recommended that the Bright Spots "Your Life, Your Care" survey developed by Bristol University, alongside care experienced children and drawing on an international evidence base, be piloted in Wales. The survey was developed with care experienced children in England and has different age versions for 4-7, 7-11 and 11-18, to allow for children of all ages to participate and share their views. The work was funded mainly by the Welsh Government's Ministerial Advisory Group on Improving Outcomes for Children, with a contribution from our office as well. Each local authority received their own report highlighting 'bright spots' of positive practice and areas that children and young people were concerned about. We also ensured that a national overview report was produced in English and Welsh and shared with the Ministerial Advisory Group. The results showed a very useful picture of children's views. Local Authorities that took part valued the tailored picture for their area, allowing them to target pieces of work to relevant groups as identified in their own report, for example one report highlighted some worries in boys aged 7-11 around bullying. However, there has been no update from the Welsh Government on the future roll out of this survey.

# Strategic Objective: Poverty and Social Inequality

In Wales, we benefit from having children's rights embedded within the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, requiring the Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the UNCRC when exercising any of their functions. However, despite this legislation being in place, it is not always evident that decisions taken have fully considered the potential impact on children's rights. The needs of some children can be overlooked, despite the decisions having a direct impact on their lives.

This has too often been the case for children in Wales who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or have additional needs. This is why I have worked to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, needs or circumstance, do not miss out on their rights and can fully participate in their communities.

Here is how my team and I have worked towards securing improvement in these areas:

## A Charter for Change: Protecting Welsh Children from the Impact of Poverty

Children and young people living in poverty in Wales miss out on their most basic human rights of having their food, shelter and health needs met. The costs of attending and participating in school leads to an inequality of opportunity for children and young people living in poverty. These children and young people also feel socially isolated because of a lack of opportunities available to them in their local community.

## What did we do to address this?

I have made recommendations each year to the Welsh Government to address the impact of poverty on children in Wales, calling on the Welsh Government to eradicate child poverty by putting in place stronger measures to tackle the root causes of poverty. I have also called for greater support to reduce the pressure on the poorest families, through addressing holiday hunger, the costs of school uniform, fuel bills and period poverty.

Frustrated with a lack of progress in this area, my team and I published a report in 2019 drawing on the views and experiences of children, parents and carers and professionals which outlined the practical steps Welsh Government, local authorities and schools could take to help protect the most vulnerable children and young people from the impact of poverty. It reflected the views of 550 children and young people, as well as 40 professionals and survey responses of 300 parents and carers from across Wales.

"Sometimes, when I was younger, I used to sit in the bath when I was on my period because I had no pads. I'd miss school and my brother would bring my homework home for me and there I'd be just sitting in the bath" (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

"I am one of 5, it would cost my mam £1000 a year to buy us uniforms. I'm not talking about fancy stuff: Tesco shoes, Tesco trousers..."

It makes several recommendations to Welsh Government, including:

- Publishing a new Child Poverty Delivery Plan with clear, measurable steps they will take to improve the lives of children living in poverty
- Making more children eligible for free school meals
- Giving more children access to Holiday Hunger schemes
- Making more families eligible for a grant to spend on school costs such as uniform and equipment
- Making sure school uniform policies across Wales are affordable, flexible, and fair

Alongside the report, we've produced and published resources to help schools consider the impact of their current policies on families' finances and make plans for changes together with children in their school. This has been launched as a special mission for autumn 2019.

“Our focus is on a child poverty delivery plan, in the way that the Children’s Commissioner for Wales recommended in her report. And it’s delivering improvements in the lives of families that allow children to benefit that this Government has at the forefront of our planning.”  
First Minister, September 2019

## Has progress been made?

29.3% of children in Wales live in poverty. Despite the Welsh Government having a Child Poverty Strategy, with long term objectives such as ‘improving outcomes for the poorest’ and ‘addressing the poverty premium’, the practical steps to achieve these goals is not drawn together in any form of cross-governmental delivery plan. For example, in 2018, the Welsh Government made the decision to withdraw the school uniform grant while introducing support in respect of sanitary products in schools. I spoke out about the Welsh

Government’s decision to end the School Uniform Grant in April 2018, without outlining what would replace it. In June 2018 the Welsh Government announced a new scheme, PDG Access, which can now be used for purchasing school uniform, equipment, sports kit and kit for activities outside school. [New statutory guidance](#) for school governing bodies on school uniform and appearance policies should also contribute towards lowering the cost of the school day.

## What needs to change?

Welsh Government should develop a new Child Poverty Delivery Plan, focusing on concrete and measurable steps to make a positive difference to children living in poverty. However, I acknowledge that action taken by the Welsh Government will be curtailed by non-devolved policy-making. UK Government welfare and tax reforms, such as the introduction of benefit caps in areas of high housing costs, and the ‘two-child limit’ on payments, means that children in larger families will lose out significantly compared to their peers in smaller families through no fault of their own.

**I have ambitions that by 2022, Wales will be a country whose government has taken new steps to reduce child poverty and its impact. Unless changes are made to eligibility rules for free school meals and implementation of Universal Credit, the prospects for child poverty in Wales are very likely to worsen.**

**I recommended in my Annual Report 2018/19 that Welsh Government need to take account of the recommendations of the Charter for Change report, and publish a delivery plan setting out in detail how departments across Government will take practical steps to mitigate and tackle the impact of child poverty.**

## Additional learning needs legislation

On becoming Commissioner, it became clear that children with additional learning needs faced challenges when accessing education. Following considerable lobbying and extensive evidence from our office and others, a duty of 'due regard' to the UNCRC was placed on the face of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. This will mean that children with additional learning needs can expect to have their rights considered and respected by local authorities and other bodies that are making decisions about the support that they need to fulfil their potential in education.

My team and I will be working with children, families and schools to ensure that their needs are met as set out in this new legislation. I have used my Annual Report for 2018/19 to revisit the need for a cross-sector approach when making decisions. I recommended:

- The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 applies to young people up to the age of 25. Welsh Government must ensure that there is a statutory duty that requires all children and young people covered by the Act to be provided with safe transport to their place of education.
- Welsh Government should therefore reconsider their response to my 2015/16 annual report recommendation to review the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and associated statutory provision and guidance.

## Childcare

It is essential to ensure that children are given the best possible start in life — it is one of their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 29). Integral to this is ensuring that more children from less affluent backgrounds have the right to receive free standard childcare, in English or Welsh. This is why my office has challenged the Welsh Government on their current childcare offer, which only extends childcare to working families. I have:

- Given evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee;
- Spoken out about the issue in the media and raised it directly with Ministers;

- Attended the Childcare Offer Stakeholder Group as an observer;
- Submitted a response to Childcare Funding (Wales) Bill consultation.

The Government is missing an opportunity to lessen the achievement gap that exists between our most and least affluent children. I will continue to speak out on behalf of the children who need our support.

## BSL

Deaf children, young people and their family members expressed concern to me on multiple occasions about the lack of provision and support for families of Deaf children to learn BSL. I met with Deaf Children, young people and their family members to understand more about their experiences in accessing support.

Following this, I recommended that *“The Welsh Government and local authorities should ensure appropriate state support for the communication needs for Deaf and hearing impaired children and young people and their families, including accessible and affordable BSL learning opportunities at a range of levels and the employment of staff in schools who are fluent communicators of BSL, to meet individuals’ needs”*. I further outlined my concerns in my response to the Parliamentary Review on Health and Social Care. However, there is no action plan in place to meet the needs of children and their families or strategy to support the education workforce working with Deaf and hearing impaired children.

We produced and [published BSL rights materials](#) and meet regularly with a DEFFO Group.

## Adoption Support

Since 2016, care experienced young people have raised with my office their concerns about not being able to maintain contact with their adopted siblings. The issue has come through to my independent Investigations and Advice service, and been raised with me directly at two separate consultation events. The young people I have spoken to recognised that there may be many different factors surrounding decisions about ongoing contact, as these decisions have the potential to affect the children of both families, the birth parents, adopters and foster carers. However as a fundamental point, they feel that they should be able to maintain a level of contact with their siblings, and they have a right to retain their family relationships.

I raised this issue with Welsh Government, the National Adoption Service and Adoption UK and made a recommendation that “Welsh Government should work with the

National Adoption Service to ensure that siblings' rights to contact are fully considered during adoption care planning".

In response to our calls, The National Adoption Service [has published guidance](#) for young people who have been adopted or are in care, about their rights to contact with their brothers and sisters.

In addition, I have called for more adoption support services to be available to families across Wales. I had heard from families via my Investigations and Advice team that in some areas of Wales there was little in the way of therapeutic support that they could freely access, and that children had different access to CAMHS support in Wales than in England.

The National Adoption Service, along with Adoption UK, announced the development of a range of adoption support services, supported by £2.3 million in additional funding from the Welsh Government. This will enable families in Wales to access Therapeutic Education Support Services for Adopters (TESSA) and children will be able to access child-specific support services. These support services are due to be rolled out across Wales.

We will continue to monitor the development support, through our position on the National Adoption Service Advisory Group.

## Strategic Objective: Play and Leisure

In 2015, children in Wales told me they want to feel safe when out and about in their local communities and have things to do. Children from less well-off families were less happy with facilities in their community and felt less safe than others. Many children and young people were concerned that children's provision, like play and youth centres, and financial support for families with children, have lost out more than other groups in the last few years of cuts to public funding. This is why I set out that:

Here is how my team and I have set out to make improvements for young people in these areas:

By 2019, I hope that there will be better access to play, culture and leisure activities by children who are most likely to miss out on these, particularly those living in poverty and disabled children."

### Spotlight on Article 31: the right to play and leisure

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) creates a specific right for all children to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. Wales' legislation reflects the right to play on a statutory level and there's been a steady increase in sports participation among children. However, these positives are constantly under threat with local authority funding pressures leading to the closure of some play, youth and leisure services in Wales.

During 2017/2018, my team and I undertook a review of accessing rights under Article 31. Over 450 children and young people told us about the way they play, spend their free time, and take part in activities in school and their local area.

- Many children and young people find it difficult to do the things they want to do because of the cost of activities, the fact that there aren't always enough of them, and that they're sometimes difficult to get to.
- Children and young people wanted opportunities to spend free time and socialise in their communities, and to feel safe whilst doing so.
- Some children and young people don't always feel confident enough to take part in the activities that are available to them.

- All children have the right to have a say on decisions that affect them. We'll be asking all councils in Wales to work with children and young people across Wales to make sure that their needs are understood, and met effectively.

The report highlighted to local authorities and other organisations, that access to play, leisure, arts, sport, culture and heritage opportunities are not something that are simply 'nice to have', but critical to children's intellectual, emotional and social development. It is important that local authorities and other organisations build the environments that provide our children with the opportunities to enjoy play and free time with those children and their families, in order to achieve the best results.

The results of the review have been used to influence government policy through responses to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's Inquiry into physical activity of children and young people and Welsh Government consultations including: the draft national planning guidance, Planning Policy Wales: Edition 10; the draft obesity strategy Healthy Weight Healthy Wales; and The Fostering Services (Fostering Services Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2019.

**As part of the work my office teamed up with Mudiad Meithrin and the National Assembly for Wales to have a joint presence at the 2017 Urdd Eisteddfod to consult with children, young people and adults about play and leisure provision.**

We continue to champion access to play through our promotion of Play Day and active participation in it.

In August 2018 to mark the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of National Play [Day I issued a joint statement](#) with the other UK Children's Commissioners highlighting the importance of play for children and young people.

## Transport

Transport for young people is an issue that is often raised with my office; particularly in relation to accessing education but also as a general point to access leisure activities or places of employment for young people.

In 2016, I recommended that Welsh Government review the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and associated statutory provision and operational guidance, to ensure that all journeys to and from school are safe and that local authorities are quite clear about their responsibilities for ensuring that this happens.

In 2017, the Welsh Government ended their subsidised travel scheme for young people, without a full Children's Rights Impact Assessment. I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure to raise my concerns about this scheme ending and the lack of consideration for children's rights and experiences. I also made a recommendation which urged the Welsh Government to;

- Extend the scheme to 18 year olds;
- Ensure the scheme identifies young parents and carers, and care leavers undertaking work place training or apprenticeships.

The scheme has now been reinstated and is available to children up to the age of 18. However, a fuller review of travel arrangements is required to ensure all children and young people can travel to their place of education. This is why my 2018/19 annual report has called for the Welsh Government to review the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and associated statutory provision and guidance.

## Strategic Objective: Safety (in the community, school and at home)

I set out in the Plan for all Children and Young People: 2016-9, my concerns that children in Wales received mixed messages that they have rights to keep them safe under the UNCRC, but the law gives them less protection than adults. This is why I set out that:

**“By 2019, I hope that children will have the same legal protection as adults from physical assault”**

Here is how my team and I have worked to give children in Wales equal protection in law and contribute towards them being safe at home, in school and in the community.

### Equal Protection

On the day I was appointed in 2015, I set out my plans to ensure children in Wales had equal protection as adults from physical assault. This required calling on the Welsh Government to bring forward legislative change to remove the defence of “reasonable punishment” which could be used by adults if they assaulted a child, and if accepted, could lead to the adult not being convicted. Removing this defence means that children have the same protections as adults in place and make all people in Wales, including children, equal in law.

The Welsh Government, in the election manifesto commitment in 2016, committed to removing the defence of reasonable punishment from the law in order to give children equal protection. The Bill was introduced in March 2019 and is now progressing through the National Assembly for Wales with broad political support.

I raised the need for equal protection for children as it is a fundamental rights issue potentially affecting every child in Wales, in every Ministerial meeting I had in 2015-16, including two meetings with the then First Minister. I have given evidence in support of the Bill to the Children, Young and Education Committee, provided a briefing for Assembly Members and have spoken widely in public on this issue.

It appears likely that by early 2020 Wales will have passed legislation to give children equal protection to adults from physical punishment.

## Quotes from Young People / News reports

"Children should be protected not smacked"

"Smacking can always go too far, where do you draw the line?"

"Some people think you have to smack children for them to learn how to behave. I disagree, it is completely unnecessary".

"You should talk and explain so that they don't do the same thing again."

"Instead of smacking you can ban TV or the iPad; anything is better than smacking"

## CSE Roundtable – Protecting children from exploitation and violence

I have facilitated a national roundtable meeting about child sexual exploitation (CSE) since coming into post in 2015. The roundtable was set up by my predecessor. It brings together representatives from all Welsh Police forces, Police and Crime Commissioner Offices, local authorities, Public Health Wales, the Youth Justice Board, the National Independent Safeguarding Board and the voluntary sector. The meetings monitor and assess progress in tackling the issue and attendees share promising practice. Associated issues, including children who go missing overnight and County Lines drug running are also regularly on the agenda. In addition external speakers have been invited to attend and present, including the St Giles Trust and the National Advisors for Violence against Women, Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

This roundtable has helped to facilitate positive progress in protecting children from violence. Since 2017 we have;

- raised serious concerns about sexual assault referral centres which led to funding being restored to a third sector partner and the reinstatement of a cross-agency planning forum to secure the long-term arrangements of the centres
- progressed work with Welsh Government, Local Authorities and public bodies to collect consistent data on the prevalence of CSE in Wales.

## Intergenerational Project

We worked in partnership with the Older People's Commissioner for Wales to explore ways to remove the barriers between younger and older people, and how both could learn new skills from one another.

"Ollie (y6): "That's the best thing I've done in A LONG TIME! I look forward to it each week, it gives me a positive attitude."

"Hashem (y5)"It helps me understand how it might feel to be older, and also to be more patient."

We developed an Intergenerational Resource, including three videos that show the positive impact intergenerational projects can have, and a lesson plan to help teachers to explore the possibility of starting an intergenerational group with their pupils. I also [set this as a Special Mission](#) and at least 16 schools in Wales took part.

## All Wales School Liaison Programme

In 2017 the Welsh Government proposed to reduce the funding for Wales unique Police Liaison Programme, without undertaking a Children's Rights Impact Assessment. The All Wales Schools Liaison Programme is a crime prevention and child protection programme jointly funded by the Welsh Government and the four Police Forces in Wales.

Each state school in Wales has a police liaison officer who delivers lessons on themes of substance misuse, personal safety and school and community issues. They also help respond to any incidents and help tackle online behaviours — like bullying, sexting and exploitation.

Following the meetings with the All-Wales Liaison Service National Co-ordinator, Youth Justice Board and Senior police officers, I recommended to Welsh Government the need for an agreed funding model to support the continuation of the programme. I am pleased to say, the funding has been reinstated and a report reviewing the impact of the programme, which gathered young people's views, is underway.

# Strategic Objective: Raising awareness of the UNCRC and promoting its adoption across public services

*“By 2019, I hope that children and young people will be better involved in public services, including my own organisation”*

In my Plan for all Children and Young People: 2016-19, I set out my commitment to encourage public services to commit to the UNCRC and improve how they plan and deliver their services as a result.

I set out to influence and shape Government policy and legislation so that it delivers for children’s rights.

Here is how my team and I have made progress in this area:

## The Children’s Commissioner’s Ambassadors Scheme

My Ambassadors scheme has played a vital role in ensuring that children and young people right across Wales are involved in my work. Ambassadors support me in my role to promote children’s rights, within their schools and communities, and provide a systematic base for us to enable children and young people from a wide variety of backgrounds to influence our work.

Ambassadors have three different jobs. These are to:

- Inform others about the Commissioner and her powers;
- Make sure others know about children’s rights under the UNCRC;
- Do special missions for the Commissioner — these inform the work of our office and have a real impact on our work and on children’s rights in Wales.

**We have three different Ambassador Schemes:**

**Super Ambassadors:** These are primary school pupils who are elected by their schools to tell other pupils about the Commissioner, her powers and help their schools promote children’s rights.

**Student Ambassadors:** This is the scheme for secondary schools. They raise awareness of rights within their schools and undertake Rights Missions, to help inform our work.

Community Ambassadors: Children and young people who have volunteered as a member of their local community group or special interest group.

Through their Special Missions, they have helped my team with their research and inquiries into poverty, equalities, bullying and life in residential care. They have helped give marginalised groups of young people a strong voice and influenced positive policy change in these areas.

#### Since 2015...

- Super Ambassadors has risen by 147%
- Student Ambassadors has risen by 50%
- 9 Missions have been completed
- We have held 22 events

The Ambassador Scheme plays an important role in delivering the priorities of the 2016-19 Work Plan, by ensuring children and young people can participate in our projects, but also support me, as Commissioner to promote children's rights across Wales.

We have held training events for our Super Ambassadors across Wales in October every year, attended by over 900 children. We have also held additional 'cluster' events with secondary schools and their feeder primary schools in response to a high level of demand and interest.

Each year, since 2015, we have reviewed the scheme to help expand the network of ambassadors and make it more accessible.

In 2017-8 we commissioned an external evaluation of the primary scheme by WISERD.

Then in 2018-9, in response to this external evaluation we developed the scheme to ensure it was accessible to all children and young people, including in SEN settings. We consulted with over 36 education settings, over 50 education professionals and over 150 children and young people with additional learning needs to find out what would help all children get the most from the scheme. Working with professionals and young people we developed a suite of accessible resources including easy read symbols posters, BSL resources and images, so that all children have an equal opportunity to learn about their rights and their views can help inform the Commissioner's work. The numbers of Special Educational Needs settings taking an

#### Evaluation of Ambassadors Scheme

75.9% of children knew what children's rights were;  
58% knew about the Commissioner;  
76.2% of teachers had taught a lesson on children's rights;

active part in the scheme doubled over 2018-19, with 14 settings taking part in March 2019.

In 2016, we initiated a Secondary scheme called Student Ambassadors (with a small pilot of 6 settings in 2015-16, a launch across Wales in September 2016 which then expanded to current numbers). We held our first Student Ambassador conferences in north and south Wales in January 2019.

## The Right Way

It is my role as Commissioner to raise awareness of children's rights and ensure that public organisations in Wales acknowledge them too. In order to help public organisations in Wales with this, my team and I worked in partnership with the Wales Observatory on Human Rights of Children and Young People to create The Right Way.

This is a framework for public bodies in Wales to help embed children's rights into their decision making, policy and practice. All public bodies in Wales have a duty to contribute towards the realisation of children's rights. The Right Way encourages these bodies to make their duties a reality and sets out how this can be achieved by following the principles of a Children's Rights Approach.

We have made three frameworks; "The Right Way" for public bodies, "A Children's Rights Approach to Education in Wales" for schools, and "The Right Way: A Future Fit for Children", which was developed with the Future Generations Commissioner to help public bodies meet their Well-being Goals through a Children's Rights Approach.

The principles of a Children's Rights Approach are:

- **Embedding children's rights** — putting children's rights at the core of planning and service delivery.
- **Equality and non-discrimination** — ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to be the best they can be.
- **Empowering children** — enhancing children's capabilities as individuals so they're better able to take advantage of rights, and engage with and hold accountable the institutions and individuals that affect their lives.
- **Participation** — listening to children and taking their views meaningfully into account.

- **Accountability** — authorities should be accountable to children for decisions and actions that affect their lives.

My team have been working with a number of organisations in Wales to help them make a children's rights approach a reality. We have worked with:

### **Parc Young Offender Institution**

Following a meeting between the Commissioner and the Governor at Parc, they have embedded a rights-based approach to their practice. Following the principles of "The Right Way", we have supported Parc to identify practical ways to implement a Children's Rights Approach within their education unit. All young people at Parc are taught about their rights and the rights of others. Senior staff have told us that the young people are engaging more in their education as a result.

### **South Wales Police**

We delivered a training session with South Wales Police's Gold command: its senior police leaders. They have committed to embedding a Children's Rights Approach in their work, and plan to develop a children's rights charter for young people, showing them how they'll uphold and promote their human rights. We've also helped them to design their participation strategy, ensuring that the way they engage with children and young people includes the principles of a Children's Rights Approach

### **The National Museum of Wales:**

Have developed new ways to engage young audiences, particularly from under-represented groups. They have also started to embed children's rights in policies that influence safeguarding, accountability and equality.

### **Local Health Boards:**

In July 2019, we held our third All Wales Child Health seminar. It provided an opportunity for Wales' Health Boards and Trusts to come together to discuss children's rights in a health setting. Since then, several health boards and trusts have made excellent progress in implementing their children's rights approaches, including Cardiff and Vale UHB's new and dynamic youth health board and Aneurin Bevan UHB's adoption of the participation standards for Wales.

## **Wales Ambulance Service:**

Applied a Children's Rights Approach and began by engaging with children and young people (aged 8-18) to capture feedback on "What they expect when they use any of our services". This feedback was then used to develop a set of "Promises for Children and Young People".

## **Schools:**

6392 children and young people and 391 teachers took part in our survey to measure to what extent pupils experience their rights in school. The survey's questions were formed around our Children's Rights Approach's five principles. Each school completing the survey received a personalised, anonymised report showing how their pupils' answers compared to the nationwide average

Schools used their reports to set children's rights targets for the coming year. Next year we'll run the same survey, allowing returning schools to measure their progress.

One of the results' key messages was that young people in secondary school feel they have less of a chance to take part in decisions in their school, compared to children in primary school. As a result, our office will undertake a specific piece of work next year to examine the effectiveness of school councils in secondary schools.

## **Youth Parliament**

When I became Children's Commissioner in 2015, Wales had no specific democratic space for its young people. One of my first recommendations was for Wales to establish its own youth assembly. Needless to say, when Wales' Senedd Ieuenctid sat for the first time in February 2019, this was a monumental moment for Wales' democracy and realisation of Wales' commitment to children's rights.

This new and exciting moment in the political history of Wales not only fulfils young people's right to take part in decisions that affect them, but realises the importance of young people's voices and helps shape a better future.

The young people of Wales truly embraced this opportunity, with almost 500 candidates standing for the 40 regional seats. A further 20 have been filled by young people from a range of diverse backgrounds through partner organisations, including two members of my young person advisory panel.

Whilst this is hugely positive development to ensure young people's participation and representation at a national level, my team will continue to engage with the Assembly support team to ensure the Senedd leuencid can scrutinise my work, and the Government's work on behalf of all children and young people in Wales.

In October 2019 the Youth Parliament held its first scrutiny session with me, holding me to account on how I champion and safeguard children's rights in relation to mental health.

## Wales' new curriculum and the UNCRC

I recommend that .... "The new curriculum ensure[s] all children and young people learn about their rights".

Children's human rights are not an optional add on or a nice extra. They should be fundamental in the everyday experience of children and young people, and should be integral to the new curriculum for Wales.

My Right Way Education Survey of 6392 children and young people and 391 professionals highlighted a need to improve all five principles of a children's rights approach in education across Wales.

With this aim my office has sat on the Independent Advisory Group and the Strategic Stakeholder Group to curriculum reform, and engaged regularly with senior officials in Welsh Government, and the pioneer leads of the Health and Wellbeing and Humanities Areas of Learning and Experience. My position paper on curriculum reform showed the key benefits to children of a human rights education and illustrated how children's human rights mapped across the Four Purposes and the developing six Areas of Learning and Experience.

The draft curriculum explicitly includes the requirement that all children learn about and understand their rights under the UNCRC and that they develop the skills to advocate for the rights of themselves and others.

I am pleased that the Welsh Government have accepted my recommendation to ensure the new curriculum enables all children to learn about their rights under the UNCRC. However, my team and I will continue to push for children's rights to be given due regard in the Curriculum Bill.

I have used my Annual Report for 2018/19, I recommended that:

*To ensure an enduring commitment to the human rights of children the Welsh Government should introduce a duty upon all relevant bodies to pay due regard to the*

*UNCRC in the delivery of the curriculum. This duty should be placed on the face of the Curriculum and Assessment bill.*

## Advocacy: Respect for the views of the child

Advocacy has been a key issue for this office for over a decade, with all three Commissioners campaigning for improved access to this important safeguard for children and their rights.

My predecessor published a series of 'Missing Voices' reports, highlighting the importance of advocacy to safeguard and promote the rights of children in care or being supported by social services. These reports showed that many young people had no idea what independent advocacy was, how it could help them or how it could be accessed. This led to a lengthy series of work co-ordinated by Welsh Government and WLGA/ADSS to address this point, driven strongly by the office.

The Children, Young People and Education Committee undertook two inquiries to measure progress in this work, and I gave written and oral evidence to the second inquiry in 2016. This work culminated in June 2017 with the introduction of the Active Offer of advocacy as part of an agreed National Approach to Statutory Advocacy. This approach includes measures to publicise the services to young people, to drive consistency in procurement and contracts, and to monitor take up and outcomes for young people.

Since then we have been working in partnership with important groups such as NYAS, Children in Wales, TGP Cymru and Voices from Care to monitor the Welsh Government's roll out of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy. We are also monitoring the awareness and take up of advocacy through cases that come through to our Investigation and Advice service. There remain a number of cases that we've dealt with where young people are not aware of their entitlement to advocacy services so we will continue to signpost them to advocacy providers through this work.

I am pleased to note that the National Approach is now live across all regions in Wales. This means that all children who are looked after by Local Authorities are entitled to an independent, professional advocate to support them to participate in decisions that impact their lives.

We have also been working to ensure that children can access advocacy for **health related issues**. I made recommendations in 2017/18, that health boards take an audit of their current advocacy provision and explore how this can be improved so young people can access this important support. However, whilst the Welsh Government

have accepted my recommendation, little has changed in policy terms for young people, and advocacy in health is very inconsistent across Wales.

## Home Education

In my last three annual reports I have called on Welsh Government to make significant policy changes to ensure that children educated at home are not invisible and that they receive all of their human rights: this includes their right to education, their right to participate in decisions about their lives and their right to be safe.

My calls have been informed by the CASCADE research commissioned by the National Independent Safeguarding Board, which found that home educated children have poorer access to universal services in comparison to children educated at school. I have been urging Welsh Government to introduce new measures as current policy and practice is leaving some children at risk of missing their human right to education and in rare cases a lack of safeguards has left children's safety at risk.

Welsh Government accepted my 2016-17 recommendation in principle and announced in January 2018 that new measures to identify children and to enable cross-sector information sharing would be implemented under the legislative framework of the Children Act 2004. In 2018 I recommended that Welsh Government brought their updated policy forward to consultation with the aims of meeting the following three tests in full:

- First, that all children in Wales can be accounted for and that none slip under the radar of universal services and society in general;
- Second, that every child receives a suitable education and their other human rights including health, care and safety;
- Third, that this cannot be achieved without enabling every child the opportunity to be seen and their views, including their views about their education, and experiences listened to.

This recommendation was accepted by Welsh Government in their written response to my annual report in December 2018, an acceptance that was also confirmed to me in person by the First Minister.

Due to concerns at a lack of pace and progress, over the 2018-19 period I made Government aware that I was considering using my legal powers to review the development of this policy area, retaining the option to review at any point should I have concerns that Government are not exercising their functions to ensure appropriate policy aims will be met.

My office and I have been assessing the development of statutory guidance to ascertain whether it is able to meet my three tests. This has been through our presence on the Elective Home Education stakeholder group; through a number of meetings between myself, my officers and senior government officials; and through an ongoing review of sections of the guidance as they are being developed.

I have also discussed this policy area directly with the then Cabinet Secretary for Education in October 2018 and the First Minister in November 2018, and was assured that the policy aim was in alignment with my calls.

## **Progress and recommendation**

Since then, Government has been responsive to my ongoing involvement in development of this policy area, and public consultation on the guidance took place over summer 2019. Government officials have also engaged widely with other stakeholders, including home educating families and local authorities. I continue to make government aware that I retain the option to use my powers to review should the ongoing development of this policy fail to fully meet the three tests they have accepted. In my Annual Report 2018/19, I recommended that Welsh Government must implement statutory guidance giving effect to my three tests in full in 2020, to ensure children's rights are being respected wherever they are educated..

## **Wheelchair access to education**

In 2017/18 we followed up our 'Full Lives: Equal Access?' report from November 2014, which highlighted concerns about wheelchair access for secondary school pupils in Wales. The report made recommendations to the Welsh Government, asking them to update their guidance on access for disabled pupils, and to ensure that those building new schools under the 21st Century Schools programme demonstrate their intentions to increase accessibility. We also asked the Welsh Government to make sure that all Local Authorities and schools were complying with their duties under the Equality Act 2010.

We made contact with all 22 Local Authorities in Wales and spoke to representatives from the Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Estyn and the Wales Audit Office (WAO). We wanted to find out whether Welsh Government, local authorities and schools are effectively planning for increased access to education for pupils in Wales. We also wanted to know whether children and their families are able to access clear information about accessibility in schools in their area, in order to make informed choices and to make sure that children can attend the school of their choice, along with their friends. The follow up report was published in March 2018. This report highlighted general improvements in the awareness of schools and local authorities of

their duties under the Equality Act 2010, but the fact remains that information is extremely difficult for children and their families to obtain when they need to make decisions about school places.

**PROGRESS:** The Welsh Government committed in their response to this report to work with my office to revise their guidance in order to reflect these points. My team and I will continue to monitor progress in this area to ensure children are able to participate in the decisions that impact their lives and can equally access schools.

# Strategic Objective: Transitions to adulthood for all young people requiring continuing support and care

In my *Plan for all Children and Young people*, I set out my intention to launch a three-year project to improve the transition from childhood to adulthood for those who need support and services — this includes care leavers and those with chronic health conditions and disabilities.

Since becoming the Children's Commissioner in 2015, issues surrounding transitions across all services have been raised with me by young people, parents, carers and professionals, who have found that transitions between services are not always smooth, timely or easy to navigate. My Investigations and Advice team are contacted regularly by young people or those who support them with concerns of this nature.

In 2016, I set out my hopes:

**That by 2019, the Welsh Government and public services will have made significant progress towards ensuring care leavers will have better access to safe and secure housing options and an active offer of a job, education or training place, and, all young people requiring continuing health and social support will have improved transitions to adult services.**

In order to play our part in achieving these aims, highlighting young people's experiences of transitions has been a key focus of our work. My office has produced two reports on transitions; one focusing [on the transitions to adulthood for children and young people with learning disabilities](#) and another focusing [on the ambitions of care leavers and the barriers they face upon leaving care](#). Working closely with young people who were experiencing transition in their care and support, each report produced a number of specific recommendations for Welsh Government, Local Authorities and Health Boards to take forward to improve their services for young people.

But has enough changed? Whilst there have been some positive developments for young people transitioning between services, I am not confident that the processes are clear for young people and those supporting them.

## What have young people told us?

"Just because I am 18 I still need supporting"

"I feel overwhelmed and isolated in independent living accommodation and don't have the skills on how to cook or keep healthy or register with a dentist for example?"

"Have a residential home for people who are over 18, instead of being removed from residential home after turning 18"

It continues to be a significant area of our Investigations and Advice case load. Young people fall between the gaps in services. Too often are those aged 16 and 17 viewed as being “difficult ages” and don’t fit in to either children or adult services. This is not acceptable.

I would have hoped to have seen more progress in these area. For example, I would have liked to have seen greater progress made towards all young people leaving care receiving safe and suitable accommodation and the offer of employment or training. I know the Welsh Government are working towards this, but change hasn’t happened consistently for young people.

This is why my team and I will continue to monitor the progress of Welsh Government, Regional Partnership Boards, Local Authorities and Health Boards to ensure service and support transitions are seamless, accessible and easy to navigate for young people.

## The Right Care: The experiences of young people living in children’s homes

In 2016, I wanted to ensure that all children, regardless of the background or circumstance were accessing their rights. My team and I met with children living in residential homes in 19 of Wales’ 22 local authorities to learn more about their experiences. Whilst some children felt safe and secure in their homes, I quickly learned that many children living in residential care do not always have their rights met, did not feel in control of the decisions made about them and faced challenges in accessing education and moving on to independent living.

I also learned that children felt uncomfortable about there being an element of profit in the care they receive. **Young people told me they feel like decisions about their care are made on cost before their best interest.** This is why I made a recommendation to the Welsh Government in my 2016-17 annual report to increase the range of not for profit services for looked after children.

In my 2018-19 report I returned to the topic and recommended that...

### Right Care Recommendations

- Young people need to be better involved in the decisions affecting their care;
- There needs to be better pre-placement planning for children being placed out of area so they continue to access services they need;
- Care providers, the Police and Care Inspectorate Wales need to explore the prevention of unnecessary criminalisation of young people;
- Explore the extension to “When I’m Ready” to young people leaving residential care to care leavers have equal access to support.

*“Welsh Government must commit to taking concrete actions within the next year towards reducing and ultimately ending profit making in children’s care services, without detriment to children and young people’s current care arrangements.”*

The Right Care report sought to reinvigorate a national debate about residential care and made recommendations to Welsh Government and those who commission, inspect and regulate children’s homes on how the care provided to young people could be improved.

## Has progress been made?

**June 2016:** report published about the rights of young people living in and leaving residential care. All of the recommendations were accepted in full by the First Minister.

**February 2017:** the Welsh Government’s Children’s Residential Care Task and Finish Group had accepted and included all our recommendations within its work plan.

**September 2018:** Having raised concerns about the Group’s pace of progress, £100,000 was provided by Welsh Government to progress the work of the Task and Finish Group

**Now:** There has been a lack of progress to develop alternative care leaving provision for children who have lived in residential care and little work has been done to address the high levels of criminalisation of young people living in residential homes. Whilst I am aware of a few local authority managed and not-for-profit services developing for children in care, this is not being driven forward nationally by Welsh Government.

This is why, in my annual report 2018/19 I have revisited calls to ensure young people leaving residential care can access equivalent levels of support as offered to those leaving foster care with a When I’m Ready arrangement.

Welsh Government should make more definitive progress on extending the entitlements of the ‘When I’m Ready’ scheme to provide an equivalent level of support for young people leaving residential care. This should be secured on a statutory basis.

## Improved Support for Care Leavers

Through my consultation events with care experienced young people in 2015 and 2016, I heard consistent and strong messages from care leavers - those leaving local authority foster or residential care - about the differing levels of support that they receive from their local authority as their corporate parent. I also heard in detail about the ambitions they each have for the future and the help they would like to receive in order to achieve these ambitions.

Whilst I heard many examples where local authorities are providing innovative and practical support options and bespoke training and apprenticeship courses for care leavers, I also heard how the picture differs across the country.

In 2015, we launched the My Planner App to assist care leavers moving towards independent living. This provided young care leavers with information on their rights and entitlements.

Following the conversations we held in 2015 and 2016, we published my Hidden Ambitions report in March 2017, which contained commitments to Wales' care leavers from the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). The report highlighted the need for ongoing support for care leavers up to the age of 25 and put forward a number of recommended policy changes in training, employment, education, advice and financial support which could be made by Welsh Government and local authorities to better support care leavers.

As a direct result of my report, on 1 March 2017 the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children announced an annual £1 million care leavers' bursary — the St David's Day Fund — which can be used by care leavers to access funding for items or training that support their successful transition to independence.

In addition, the Welsh Government committed to exploring options to reduce poverty amongst care leavers, to extend entitlement to the support of personal advisors up to the age of 25 and to ensure that they receive clear and up to date information about their entitlements.

My annual report in 2016/17 reiterated the need for the Welsh Government to fulfil all of their commitments set out in the Hidden Ambitions report, including equal support for all care leavers whether they have come from foster care or residential care, funding for personal advisors to support for all care leavers to the age of 25, publishing clear information for care leavers on finances and guaranteeing financial support for care leavers entering higher education, and, for this to be monitored by Welsh Government.

As a result of our influencing work following the publication of this report, an additional £625k was allocated to support work placements / traineeships for care leavers. In response to this, the Welsh Government provided further funding for local authorities to meet our call for Personal Advisor support for all care leavers up to the age of 25. All local authorities have now exempted their care leavers from paying council tax, following my recommendations to remove this barrier.

- ✓ £1 million care leavers' bursary
- ✓ Council tax exemption for care leavers
- ✓ Extension of support and funding for personal advisors
- ✓ £625k to support work and traineeship placements

In 2017/18, I made further recommendations in regards to care leavers, as despite the Welsh Government committing to my recommended policy changes, children in residential care have not benefitted from the same level of support when leaving care as those leaving foster care, for example, with the offer of “When I’m Ready” and equivalent housing options. Whilst this has been accepted as a work stream for the Task and Finish Group on Residential Care, I am not confident that young care leavers have seen the shift in support. I am also awaiting the Welsh Government’s publication of clear information on finances for care leavers.

In my annual report for 2018/19, I called for statutory changes to be made to Personal Advisor support:

“Welsh Government should amend legislation and guidance for the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 to secure all care leavers entitlement to a Personal Advisor up to the age of 25.”

There is still work to be done across local authorities to ensure that the all authorities offer the same level of support to young people leaving care, up to the age of 25, as I am not confident that policies are consistent for care leavers. This will continue to be a focus for me and my team for the next three years.

## Don't Hold Back: Transitions

If a child receives support for whatever reason (health or social) it is important that they are supported to receive this as they transition into adulthood. This is why we have been working to ensure services recognise this.

The human rights of children and young people with learning disabilities are protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). In Wales we have some important legislation that recognises these rights and requires services to be centred around each person’s needs, to involve people in planning their own care, to be preventative and to be integrated. These Acts are the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Through the conversations we had with 99 young people, 187 parents and carers, and 43 professionals, the report highlighted that these Acts were failing to deliver the support needed for young people with learning disabilities as they move towards adulthood.

The report highlighted the need for:

- Better involvement of young people in making plans for their future;
- More support and recognition of the role of parents and carers;
- A more coherent, joined up experience for young people and their families. The Welsh Government needs to ensure Regional Partnership Boards pay attention to improving the experience of young people;
- Better opportunities for young people to be equal and active citizens through social, education and employment opportunities.
- The report made nine recommendations to the Welsh Government, Health Boards and Local Authorities on how to improve their services for young people.

"I had a plan for when I moved from children's services to adult services, but I am not sure what happened with it."

"Adult services do not recognise the parents' role and so you get shut out."

My team and I will be monitoring progress against these recommendations. In Autumn 2019, I will be meeting with all Regional Partnership Boards in Wales to see how they are strategically planning their services for children and young people. The needs of young people with learning disabilities will be a key focus of this work.

I have also used my Annual Report 2018/19 to make further recommendations in this area, such as:

- Welsh Government should ensure that health boards have effective guidance that will lead to children and young people having access to coherent multi-agency pathways for transition to adult services. Children and young people should be directly involved in the creation of their care plans.
- This guidance should also ensure that 16 and 17 year olds accessing health services for the first time, including emergency care, have a clear pathway to age-appropriate care.

## Conclusion

As the only independent human rights institution for children and young people in Wales, we want to make sure that we're about delivering change for those who we're here to represent and we want to be accountable to them.

Since taking up post, I have been determined to ensure we're robust in assessing our performance on delivering on our promises for children and young people and that we become a learning organisation, continuously improving operational effectiveness.

The purpose of this report is to deliver on accountability, on transparency on the progress we've made on our promises to children and young people and to reinforce what work remains.

I hope this work captures the significant achievements of this small team of 23 staff, all of whom demonstrate a dogged determination to listen to children, to speak out on their behalf and to influence others to ensure every child living in this country has the very best start in life and is given the best change to reach their full potential.

Despite positive changes, there remain significant children's rights breaches. We will persevere with those issues, pressing on those who can implement change to do so.

As always, we will take the approach of working with those who can shape and deliver change to ensure every opportunity to improve things are seized upon. We've committed to publishing on a quarterly basis our take on the Welsh Government's response to our recommendations — you can read them on our website — and we'll continue to work with the National Assembly's Committees to hold the Government to account.

At the time of writing this, we're now working on implementing our next three-year plan, devised as a result of another significant consultation with over 10,000 children, young people and adults — Beth Nawr. Despite working on some new areas of children's lives for the next three years, we will not rest until we see positive outcomes on all aspects of our first and second work plans.

I am proud of our achievements but I also feel a huge sense of responsibility to ensure the thousands of children and young people we've spoken with and listened to can see and feel real changes as a result of our intervention. This report is for them.