

National Assembly for Wales
Children and Young People Committee

Follow up inquiry into parenting in Wales
and the delivery of the Parenting Action Plan

Plain English summary and recommendations

February 2011



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Children and Young People Committee

We are a group of five people who work as Assembly Members in the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff. People in Wales have voted for us to do this and it's our job to make sure that the people who make decisions about things and how to spend money (called the Welsh Government) are doing a good job. Our group is called the Children and Young People Committee.

Current Committee Membership



Helen Mary Jones
(Chair)
Llanelli
Plaid Cymru



Eleanor Burnham
North Wales
Welsh Liberal Democrat



Sandy Mewies
Delyn
Labour



Jonathan Morgan
Cardiff North
Welsh Conservative Party



Joyce Watson
Mid and West Wales
Labour

The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry:



Lynne Neagle
Torfaen
Labour

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Glossary of terms

- **Chair:** The Chair of the Committee is the member who the Committee has elected to speak for them. He or she cannot make decisions for the other members or tell the Committee what to do.
- **Committee Inquiry:** an investigation into a topic. A Committee Inquiry will ask experts and people affected by the topic what they think and how things can be made better. The Committee then thinks about what all the people have told them and makes recommendations to the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government does not have to do as the Committee says, but if it does not do something the Committee has recommended, it has to say why not.
- **Evidence:** the things that people tell the Committee inquiry by writing, speaking or using other forms of communication are called evidence.
- **Local Authority:** a local council, led by a group of councillors who have been elected to make decisions on how to spend money in the local area.
- **Local Government:** this is how we refer to all of the local authorities as a group.
- **Recommendation:** a strong suggestion that something is done.
- **Statutory Guidance:** advice that should be followed to avoid breaking the law.
- **Welsh Government:** creates and carries out policy and is held to account by the National Assembly for Wales. It is led by Ministers who are also Assembly Members.

Message from the Chair

It's not easy being a parent, but it is really rewarding. Sometimes parents need some extra support or help from friends or family but for some parents, a little extra help and support can make a real difference.

The Children and Young People Committee has looked at the support that the Welsh Government and local authorities give to parents before. The Committee published its first report on parenting support in May 2009. At that time, the Committee thought that although the Welsh Government had some good policies, they were not being put into practice very well. The Committee decided to look at this topic again now to see if things have improved.

The Committee found that the support offered to parents was good, but that it was not always offered at the right time. Sometimes, families found themselves in crisis before any help was offered. The Committee makes 10 recommendations in this report that it feels will help the Welsh Government and local authorities provide even better support to parents when they need it.

The Committee thanks everyone who gave us evidence on parenting support during this inquiry. We are grateful for your help.

**Helen Mary Jones AM,
Chair of the Children and Young People Committee**

The Committee's Recommendations

The Committee's recommendations to the Welsh Government are listed below, in the order that they appear in this Report. Please refer to the relevant pages of the report to see the supporting evidence and conclusions:

Recommendation 1. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government helps local authorities to create and train political parenting champions. (Page 9)

Recommendation 2. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government checks that Families First is not accidentally suggesting that only poor parents need help with parenting. (Page 10)

Recommendation 3. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government's project on information sharing should reassure everyone involved that information can be shared in a sensible way. The Committee also recommended that the Welsh Government should tell the Assembly in April 2012 how much the information sharing project has done to make sure that families do not have to give all of their details to all the different people they get help from. (Page 11)

Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government asks the people in charge of the information sharing project to publish regular reports on what it has done. The reports should also say what has been done by the organisations it is working with to make sure that they can share information. The Welsh Government should also tell the National Assembly in April 2012 how much of the project to make computers able to share information it has finished. (Page 12)

Recommendation 5. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with the Incredible Years Wales Centre to create a set of measures that will show how well projects are working. Once a set of measures are agreed, the Welsh Government should only give money to the projects that will achieve enough of the measures. (Page 12)

Recommendation 6. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government gives guidance to staff that says that they should try to encourage fathers to use parenting support services when they feel they need them. (Page 13)

Recommendation 7. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government makes sure that measures for the support given to families affected by disability are included in the set of standard measures it develops. (Page 13)

Recommendation 8. The Committee recommends that grandparents who look after their grandchildren all, or much of the time can have parenting support if they feel they need it. (Page 14)

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government recognises that parenting support that is available to all the families who need it, that is delivered well trained staff, is really important. Guidance given to local authorities by the Welsh Government should say that parenting support should be given to families who need it as soon as possible. (Page 16)

Recommendation 10. The Committee recommends that local authorities make sure that professionals who work with families know about positive parenting and the support that parents could get if they need it. (Page 17)

Background

1. In December 2005, the Welsh Government published its Parenting Strategy and Parenting Action Plan. The Parenting Strategy set out what support the Welsh Government would give to parents until March 2008. The Parenting Action Plan set out how the Welsh Government would deliver services to parents across Wales.

2. In May 2009, the Children and Young People Committee (called 'the Committee' in the rest of this report) published its report on 'Parenting in Wales and the Parenting Action Plan.' The report said that more needed to be done if everything the Welsh Government said it would do in the Parenting Action Plan was to be delivered. The report made 11 recommendations. The Welsh Government said that they would do all of the things the report recommended, either in the way the Committee suggested, or in a way not suggested by the Committee but that would have the same end result.

3. In 2010, the Committee decided to look again at the support the Welsh Government gives to parents in Wales. This is the report of that follow-up inquiry.

Parenting is important and should be supported by the Welsh Government and local government

4. The Committee thinks that parenting is a difficult job that can be very rewarding. Parenting is very important to children and can make a really big difference to the sort of person they are when they are older. But children are affected by the communities that they live in too so parenting should not be seen as the job of Mum's and Dad's alone.

5. Since the Committee's last report on parenting, the Welsh Government has not updated its Parenting Action Plan. Huw Lewis AM, Deputy Minister for Children, told the Committee that they had not updated the plan because they were going to deliver services in a new way instead. The new way of delivering services would be called 'Families First'.

6. Families First would make sure that children and their families had all the services and support that they needed, delivered in a way that was best for them. This would mean that a Health Visitor might be able to help a family get debt advice if they needed it, or a school might be able to help a family find parenting support if they were struggling. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that this would be better than the way services were delivered at the moment as families had to go looking for help and sometimes didn't know what was available for them.

Parenting Champion

7. The Committee felt that it would help local government to see how important parenting is if each local authority had a political parenting champion. A parenting champion would be one of the elected members of the local authority who would take on the job of reminding the rest of the members that parenting was important, and would find ways to make the local authority support given to parents better.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government helps local authorities to create and train political parenting champions.

Working together

8. It is really important that all the people who deliver services to families work together. If staff do not work together and share ideas, information and details about their work, it could be that lots of people are doing different things to try and solve the same problem. This would be confusing for families who would not know where to go for help, and a waste of money for the local authorities who would be paying lots of people to do the same thing.

9. Some people told the Committee that a new Parenting Strategy would help to make sure that everyone was working together. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that a new Parenting Strategy was not needed because a group of people called the 'Families Working Group' had been asked to make sure that the projects people were working on went well together and were not trying to do the same thing as another project in the same area.

10. The Director of Barnardos Cymru had not heard of the group so the Committee asked the Welsh Government to make sure that they made told volunteer groups who helped families about the Families Working Group.

11. The Committee heard that the Families Working Group had to tell the Child Poverty Programme Board what it was doing. The Child Poverty Programme Board is a group of people whose job is to make sure that all the things the Welsh Government is doing to stop child poverty are working well.

12. Because the Families Working Group (and therefore the parenting support) is connected to the Child Poverty Programme, the Committee felt that the Welsh Government might be accidentally suggesting, that only poor parents need help sometimes.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government checks that Families First is not accidentally suggesting that only poor parents need help with parenting.

Families First

13. The Committee was pleased to hear about the things that Families First should do.

14. The Committee was told that groups of local authorities in north and south Wales were working together to try and find ways to deliver services in the way Families First asks for them to be delivered. This is going to be a big challenge for them.

Sharing information

15. The Committee realised that if Families First is going to work, all the people who work with families are going to have to share information about what the family needs and what each service is doing to help.

16. At the moment, families are often asked to give all their details every time they get help from a different person. Some families might have to say the same thing to lots of different people, such as a doctor, a Health Visitor, a school and a social worker. This is not helpful to families who are already struggling to deal with the problems they have.

17. The Welsh Local Government Association, the organisation that speaks for all local authorities, told the Committee that families had to give their information to each person individually so that they could be sure that the families were happy for everyone to have that information. But, people who worked with families in Blaenau Gwent and Powys local authorities said that families could be asked once if they were happy for their information to be shared with people who could help them and that would stop them having to say it over and over again.

18. The Welsh Government told the Committee that it was working on a project that should help and encourage local authorities to share information.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government's project on information sharing should reassure everyone involved that information can be shared in a sensible way. The Committee also recommended that the Welsh Government should tell the Assembly in April 2012 how much the information sharing project

has done to make sure that families do not have to give all of their details to all the different people they get help from.

19. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that the Welsh Government was working on a project to make sure that all the computers that staff used to store information about the families they worked with, could share that information with computers used by other staff. A big part of this project should be finished by April 2012

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government asks the people in charge of the information sharing project to publish regular reports on what it has done. The reports should also say what has been done by the organisations it is working with to make sure that they can share information. The Welsh Government should also tell the National Assembly in April 2012 how much of the project to make computers able to share information it has finished.

Telling others about what worked well

20. A Children's Charity 'Children in Wales' told the Committee that some good things were being done to support parents in some parts of Wales. But they also said that sometimes no-body tells other people about what worked well. If other people were told, they could do the same things in their area instead of wondering how they could solve the problems they had.

21. The Deputy Minister for Children agreed that things that worked well were not always shared with other people. One of the reasons for this might be because it is hard to work out what is working well in one area compared to what is being done somewhere else to solve the same problem.

22. The Committee felt that it was important to have ways to measure how well something was working.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with the Incredible Years Wales Centre to create a set of measures that will show how well projects are working. Once a set of measures are agreed, the Welsh Government should only give money to the projects that will achieve enough of the measures.

Support for families with particular needs

Support for fathers

23. The Committee was told that parenting support is mostly given to mothers. Some people felt that this was because fathers needed to learn in a different way and would not go to parenting classes if they were seen as only for mothers. Some fathers might feel that bringing up children is a mothers' job, but that is no longer true. Both the Committee and the experts they spoke to agreed that fathers have a really important job and can make a very big difference in their children's lives.

24. Tony Ivens of Children in Wales told the Committee that only 5 in every 100 parents who had parenting support in Cardiff were fathers. The Committee felt that staff should do more to encourage fathers to be involved in parenting and to use parenting support services when they felt they needed to.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government gives guidance to staff that says that they should try to encourage fathers to use parenting support services when they feel they need them.

Support for families with disabled children or parents

25. Families that are affected by disability can often have particular problems that they face. The Families First way of delivering support services to all families should recognise those families who need particular help.

26. The Committee felt it was important to make sure that families with disabled children were supported in helping their children become independent. It is also important that families affected by disability can get specialist support, where they might meet other families who are experiencing similar problems to theirs. Families should also be able to choose to get mainstream support if they want to as it is important for families to have choices.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government makes sure that measures for the support given to families affected by disability are included in the set of standard measures it develops.

Support for grandparents

27. The Committee already knew about some of the problems grandparents face when they spend a lot of time looking after their grandchildren. It is important that if grandparents look after their grandchildren a lot of the time that they can get parenting support too.

The Committee recommends that grandparents who look after their grandchildren all, or much of the time can have parenting support if they feel they need it.

Support for all parents

A Welsh culture of support

28. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that Families First should help to create a culture in Wales that means that parenting is recognised as being a difficult and important job. The Committee hopes that this will happen.

There should be no shame in asking for help

29. Some parents might feel that there is a stigma attached to asking for help with parenting: that is, they may feel that others will think less of them if they say they are not coping.

30. Because Families First support will be available to all parents as a matter of course, the Committee agrees with the Deputy Minister for Children that parents should not feel embarrassed or ashamed for asking for help.

31. The Committee's earlier recommendation that the Families First parenting support should not be accidentally associated with child poverty will also help to make sure that parenting support is delivered in a way that does not cause stigma.

Money for support early on

32. If support is given to families when they first need help, it can stop problems getting worse. Sometimes, local authorities will only give money to run services that help parents who have had problems for a while.

33. Families who have had problems for a while will sometimes need a lot of support to turn things around. Often, the sooner families are given the help they need, the better things turn out for them. Because of this, the Committee feels that parenting support should be offered to all families that need it as early as possible.

34. It is also very important that the people giving parenting support to families can do their job really well. Sometimes, local authorities who employ staff to give parenting support might think that they can save money by stopping the training that they used to give to staff. The Committee thinks that having well trained staff is a really important part of the support that local authorities give to families.

The Committee hopes that if less money is spent on training, that the money has been saved by finding cheaper ways to deliver the training rather than by stopping the training altogether.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government recognises that parenting support that is available to all the families who need it, that is delivered well trained staff, is really important. Guidance given to local authorities by the Welsh Government should say that parenting support should be given to families who need it as soon as possible.

Positive parenting

35. When parents bring up their children in a positive way without using violence to discipline them, that is positive parenting. The Committee, the Welsh Government and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) agree that smacking children is wrong but some parents do not know any other way of disciplining their children.

36. The Committee feels that it is really important to teach parents how to discipline their children in a positive way and without using violence.

37. Sometimes, a chat with the Health Visitor, doctor or teacher will be all the help parents need for them to start using positive parenting techniques. Other parents might prefer to go on a course or meet other parents to practice positive parenting.

38. The Committee thinks that if all professionals, like doctors and teachers, who work with families know about how important positive parenting is, and how to do it, they could help families themselves. If those professionals also know about what courses and other help is available too, they could also put parents in touch with other support.

The Committee recommends that local authorities make sure that professionals who work with families know about positive parenting and the support that parents could get if they need it.

Witnesses

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in full at <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-cyp-home.htm>

12 October 2010

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Huw Lewis AM | Deputy Minister for Children, Welsh Assembly Government |
| Huw Maguire | Head of Family Support Branch, Welsh Assembly Government |
| Martin Swain | Head of Children and Families Programmes Branch, Welsh Assembly Government |
| Lynne Hill | Policy Director, Children in Wales |
| Tony Ivans | Fatherhood Development Officer, Children in Wales |

2 November 2010

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|-------------------|---|
| Dr Tracey Bywater | Deputy Director, Incredible Years Wales Centre |
| Bridget Roberts | Child Psychologist, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board |
| John Sayce | Assistant Director, Barnardo's Cymru |

16 November 2010

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| Dr Chris Llewelyn | Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information, Welsh Local Government Association |
| Shelly Davies | Partnership Manager, Children and Young People Partnership, Powys |
| Tania Hayward | Parenting Co-ordinator, Blaenau Gwent, representing the Children and Young People Partnership |

List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All written evidence can be viewed in full at

http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-cyp-home/bus-committees-third-cyp-inquiry/cyp_3__responses_received_.htm

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Organisation</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Judy Hutchings, Professor of Clinical Psychology Director, Incredible Years Wales Centre | Incredible Years Wales Centre | PAP 01 PAP 1a PAP 2 AWE 01 |
| Dr Chris Llewelyn, WLGA Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information | Welsh Local Government Association | PAP 03 AWE 05 |
| Tim Ruscoe Development Officer, Assembly Liaison and Participation | Barnardo's Cymru | PAP 04 |
| Gail Bennett Parenting Strategy Coordinator | Flintshire Children and Young People Partnership | PAP 05 |
| Paul Apreda, National Development Manager | Families Need Fathers (FNF) Cymru | PAP 06 |
| Lucy Akhtar Development Officer (Parenting) | Children in Wales | PAP 07 AWE 03 |
| Huw Lewis AM, Deputy Minister for Children | Welsh Government | PAP 08 AWE 04 |
| Edwina Hart, Minister for Health and Social Services | Welsh Government | AWE 02 |