

Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee Inquiry into the Impact of COVID-19

Consultation Response

Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation in Wales for children and young people's issues, bringing organisations and individuals from all disciplines and sectors together. One of our core aims is to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) a reality in Wales. **Children in Wales** campaigns for sustainable quality services for all children and young people, with special attention for children in need and works to ensure children and young people have a voice in issues that affect them.

For further information on the work of **Children in Wales**, please see www.childreninwales.org.uk and www.youngwales.wales

Our evidence for this Inquiry is drawn from a variety of sources, including a survey undertaken by Children in Wales at the end of April 2020 into the impact that coronavirus has had on organisations in Wales. Evidence is summarised in bullet points below.

Tackling poverty

Children and young people living in deprived communities more likely to suffer adverse effects of the pandemic, including:

- Impact on low income and disadvantaged families due to loss of jobs, reduced income and the additional costs of keeping children at home.
- Children and young people living in poverty less likely to engage with home education
- Ability to access the internet, limited devices for multiple needs such as home schooling, home working; poor internet coverage and cost of wi-fi.
- Lack of information/awareness of available support, both those who need support and frontline workers.
- Children and young people living in unsafe home environments, where school was a safe haven, are exposed to traumatic episodes of domestic violence, parental conflict, poverty, child abuse or neglect.
- Access to food have been severely compromised for families living in poverty, adults going without meals to feed children, choice between paying bills or buying food.
- Problems in some local authorities with accessing vouchers for free school meals.

Community and local government services

- Face to face interactions with young people and families ceasing; peer group support, parenting or respite groups suspended.
- Challenge of maintaining contact with service users and amongst colleagues.
- Barriers within services in forging effective remote ways of working and adopting new communication mechanism with service users.
- Maintaining engagement with many service users who lacked or had inconsistent access to technology, including effective internet use and mobile phones data.
- Limitations of virtual contact, eg inability to see their clients and read body language, concerns around maintaining confidentiality, especially when engaging directly with children.
- Challenges face by schools – not all vulnerable families are engaging effectively.
- Non-school settings reported having difficulties retaining contact with many vulnerable families; concerns around the wellbeing of particular groups of children including those with additional needs. Some reported a drop in referrals compared to this period last year and others had reduced their level of service.
- Third sector organisations concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their organisations finances and sustainability in the longer term.
- Access to trusted and reliable sources of information to enable them to adapt their services to Government requirements, to provide consistent and accurate and accessible messages for services users.

Recommendations

We believe Welsh Government should:-

1. Review and update the Child Poverty Strategy, to include a robust delivery plan with ambitious milestones and target, which can be monitored
2. Develop a plan for more joined up and collaborative services between health, social care and the third sector.
3. Create a central repository of information on accessing support, eg DAF, food banks, Healthy Start Vouchers, help with benefit claims etc and publicise this widely.
4. Consider what wider, ongoing support, could be available for low income and disadvantaged families, beyond its initial response to Covid-19.
5. Ensure that sufficient support is available within schools to support the mental health needs of children, young people and staff.
6. Ensure that local authorities and local services are sufficiently resourced and equipped to meet service demands, currently and in the future
7. Ensure that the learning needs of children from disadvantaged families and those with ALN are met