

Feedback to the Health and Social Care, and Public Accounts and Public Administration Committees - 25 May 2023

At the meeting you agreed to provide the following:

- Your views on how well you think assessments for care and support are currently working and whether improvements are needed in this area; and
- The evaluation identified problems with multi-agency working – what were the main barriers you found, what actions are you calling for and why.

In addition, we would welcome your views on the effectiveness of the Act's eligibility criteria/regulations and whether they are fit for purpose.

ASSESSMENTS FOR CARE AND SUPPORT

Overview

From qualitative evidence (from service users and carers and the workforce) across the IMPACT Evaluation Study, there is a mixed picture of how assessment processes are working, and as well, some intelligence of where improvements might be made.

Whilst there are positive views on the framework for assessments and the inherent co-productive processes, and examples were given of supportive outcomes, there were also views from people who use services and carers of negative and disempowering experiences.

There was an identified need for reduction in assessment related to bureaucracy, for time to have and co-produce respectful 'what matters conversations', more promotion (and in simpler ways) of the availability of assessments for care and support, and greater focus on continuity of care and relationship focused practice. Issues were also raised about portability of assessments across local authorities and the need for improvements including timely communication and information sharing between local authorities.

This evidence is from the following study reports:

- Llewellyn M., Verity F., Wallace S. and Tetlow S. (2022) *Expectations and Experiences: Service User and Carer perspectives on the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act*. Cardiff. Welsh Government, GSR report number 16/2022. (Qualitative findings from 170 people; carers and people who use social services).
- *The Expectations and Experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Service users and carers Report (2022)*, an account of qualitative research
- Llewellyn M., Verity F., Wallace S. and Tetlow S. (2021) *Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014: Process Evaluation*. Cardiff. Welsh Government, GSR report number 2/2021.
- Andrews N., Calder G., Blanluet N. and Baker R. (2023) *Co-production: Research to support the Final Report of the Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*. Cardiff. Welsh Government, GSR report number 38/2023.

[Expectations and Experiences Service User and Carer perspectives on the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act \(gov.wales\)](#)

Assessment Processes

Perspectives and experiences of the process of assessments are discussed in Section 3.10-3.15, and Section 3.44 of the *Expectations and Experiences of Service Users and Carers Report*.

Key messages

- There are positive accounts where assessments are described as supportive, acknowledging, and empowering, and negative and frustrating experiences where assessment processes are seen by some as overly about completing 'forms and paperwork', disempowering, judgemental and hard to access. (See Section 3.10-3.15).
- There are also stories of people having to repeat assessments because social workers had moved on and with a new worker the process started again. This raises issues about how continuity of care is being implemented. (See Section 3.44)
- There were also experiences of assessments not translating into any timely practical support as outlined in Section 3.22 of the report.

- Suggestions for improvement by the people we spoke with included a closer link between assessment processes and well-being outcomes, more emphasis on relationship-based practices, stronger continuity of care and less focus on the technical tasks of paperwork.

Knowledge of the Act

The need for knowledge about entitlements and the means to access assessments for care and support is a theme discussed in Sections 3.2-3.9 of the above report.

Key messages

- Some study participants found it hard to locate and access this information and if they did locate it, to make sense of it. They speak of the language describing entitlements under the Act being complicated, general, and unclear. From their perspectives, this was a barrier to engagement in the assessment processes and understanding entitlements under the Act.

Interpretations of the Act

Key messages

- Examples were given of inconsistencies between local authorities in the way that they interpreted the requirements and duties of the Act and how it was applied, leading to service users and carers pointing out variation in the processes of care and support between different authorities in Wales.
- For example, carers gave examples of the process for carers assessments being different in different parts of Wales. (See Section 3.35)

[Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014: expectations and experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic service users and carers | GOV.WALES](#)

Drawing on the findings of qualitative research with 10 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic older people, the following key messages were identified:

- The difficulties in accessing care and support, including assessments.
- Feeling let down by the care system and disconnect between expectations and what happened in practice.
- Having to 'battle' to be heard and receive care and support.
- Lack of responses to care needs.
- Impact of racial stereotyping on care and support.

[Evaluation of the Implementation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act: process evaluation \(gov.wales\)](#)

Assessments are discussed under Chapter 6 in the pre COVID-19 Evaluation report (2021, p.46-52).

Key messages

- Overall, and 'on balance' from the perspective of the workforce members interviewed pre COVID-19, the assessment processes were working well. Some participants noted examples of empowering outcomes as a result.
- The focus on strengths and asset-based conversations were positively noted. What matters conversations were viewed as a 'return to good practice' (2021, p.50)
- The focus on less risk aversion in assessments was noted as positive (2021, p. 49).
- There was also a view that the assessment processes require more time which can hard to realise with a system under pressures.

- There was a view expressed that the assessment forms and paperwork needed to be less complicated, and also that there are systems issues across local authorities which impede the 'portability of assessments. (2012, p. 50).
- Some participants spoke about carers 'not accessing carers' assessments' (2021, p.48).
- Tensions were discussed between voice and control when needing to facilitate/undertake challenging conversations e.g., safeguarding 2021, p.49).

[Co-production: research to support the final report of the evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 | GOV.WALES](#)

Key messages

- Co-production is a key aspect of the undertaking of assessments.
- The IMPACT co-production study found that:
 - '...the value of participation, and what makes it work well, were often expressed in terms of principles and virtues, such as respect and inclusion and good listening' (2023, p.23).*
 - Conversely, as the report author's state where there were experiences where '...a lack of participation were articulated in terms of feeling marginalised, discriminated against, or being 'done to' rather than respected'. (2023, p.24)*
- Some perspectives that co-production is ambiguous with implications for what it means in practice. (2023, p.15)
- 'Organisational rigidity' has a bearing on how co-production happens. (2023, p.16) and power dynamics and hierarchies.
- When it works well the process is as important as the outcome.

[From Act to Impact? Final Report of the Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 \(gov.wales\)](#)

In closing, the 'test' questions posed in the final report have a relevance to the question around assessments for care and support, directly Qs1-4, which sit under Strategic Intention 1:

Strategic Intention 1: Providing help and support to people to assess their needs and organise and secure the care and support services they require

What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in the:

1. delivery of social care such that it reinforces compassionate, relationship centred forms of care and support services?
2. way that assessments for social care support are undertaken, when, and by whom so that they are better able to deliver the best possible well-being outcomes for individuals and carers?
3. sufficiency, appropriateness and sustainability of funding so that everyone who has needs as defined by the Act can be supported and cared for?
4. workforce recruitment and retention, to ensure workforce quality, sufficiency and sustainability?

MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

This is an issue which appears in a number of the documents in the study, and in the response we identify the key points that are of note in response to the question.

[Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 Literature Review \(gov.wales\)](#)

Key messages from the literature review are:

- Terms are often used interchangeably but have common characteristics and success factors.
- Building equal relationships with common language and purpose, culture (trust, honesty, reciprocity), managing expectations, permissions and processes are key although can be resource (including time) intensive.
- Working together across agencies is challenging but it provides opportunity to problem solve by sharing each other's knowledge and skills, so benefitting individuals, families, and communities.
- There is a gap in the multi-agency literature on the views and experiences of the individual, but especially family and carers and the workforce as the literature focusses mainly on care organisations, policy, and governance.
- Integrated care has mainly focussed on health service delivery until recent years where it is now moving towards health and social care integration.
- Not one study has sought to identify the success factors of a country's workforce working towards multiagency working.

[Evaluation of the Implementation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act: process evaluation \(gov.wales\)](#)

Key messages from the pre-COVID process evaluation, examining workforces perspectives on the implementation of the Act were broken down into two sections – strategic and operational multi-agency working relationships:

Strategic relationships with partners

Findings were that:

- Boards and structures have been a key aspect enabling the formalising and strengthening of partnerships between social care, health, and other agencies
- Regional Safeguarding Boards were especially viewed as positive developments to enable regional working
- Work is required to continue to develop the structure of RPBs, and to improve relationships between the RPB and the PSB
- The size of the region presents challenges to in-depth discussions about health and social care integration
- Applying 'a one size fits all' regional approach is problematic in responding to sub-regional and locality issues

Operational relationships with partners

Findings were that:

- The importance of leadership to initiate and sustain change is clear
- There is great value placed on positive, reciprocal working relationships with partners

- The Act is a driver and lever for developing partnerships with health
- The Act has, to an extent, enabled the integration of social care and health to develop in respect of collaborative regional approaches, commitment and buy-in from leaders, integrated working spaces, mutual respect and trust, and consistent messages to both organisations
- Time and resource are required to build effective partnerships
- The voluntary sector is an excellent partner on the whole, but concerns over capacity, funding and sustainability persist
- Competing 'cultures' of different organisations – especially social care and health – need to be further reconciled

[Expectations and Experiences Service User and Carer perspectives on the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act \(gov.wales\)](#)

There is a chapter in the 'Expectations and Experiences' report about the service user and carer experience of multi-agency working (Chapter 4, pp.59-70) which concluded that:

- Overall, there was a shared perspective on the importance of agencies not only working well together with each other, but also with the people in receipt of care and support.
- Yet, across the interviews and focus groups, there were frequent experiences of a lack of effective multi-agency working within and between LAs, and between different sectors. In particular, poor multi-agency working practices between social services and health featured heavily in the accounts of participants.
- Further, despite a significant value placed on third sector support, it was felt these services are not fully recognised by statutory services, which is especially problematic given that there were a number of positive examples of third sector support cited by participants.
- As demonstrated in this chapter, an absence of effective multi-agency working in the provision of care and support was the norm rather than the exception for the service users and carers we heard from.
- Their evidence focused on issues of variation like disparities of care and support between LAs and other agencies, differing interpretations of the Act, and delayed information sharing. Ineffective working, communication and information sharing between and within LAs, and between and within sectors, were all identified as issues to the detriment of service users and carers. For example, disruptions to the continuity of care when moving between LAs, and repeating information and experiences to multiple professionals, leading to feelings of frustration and distress.
- Whilst there were few positive experiences of multi-agency working, aspects seen as supporting effective multi-agency working included the introduction of dedicated transition workers for those moving between children and adult services, and single point of access teams.

One of the concluding statements of the report also reflected this:

Statement	Comment
<i>There was absolutely no warning ahead of hospital discharge. We were kept out of the multi-disciplinary team meeting where all of the key decisions were taken.</i>	Multi-agency working is an area that was identified as especially problematic. The feeling of being on the outside when a multi-agency meeting is happening and important decisions are being taken is a symptom of sub-optimal working relationships. The Act requires that people are at the heart of the decisions about them, but there is distance to travel before this is consistently achieved.

[Multi-agency working Research to support the Final Report of the Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 \(gov.wales\)](#)

There is an entire report focused on multi-agency working which was produced as part of the study. There is considerable detail in the document, but turning to 'next steps' for multi-agency working in the Welsh health and social care system, the authors identified six issues as a basis for further discussion on how the effectiveness of multi-agency working can be improved:

1. **Performance measures, outcomes and evaluation information need to be more robust to inform decision making.** At present, the development of effective outcome measures is an ongoing issue. Determination of effective methods at an organisational level needs to be coupled with consideration of how agencies can adopt measures on the basis of joint accountability.
2. **Multi-agency and cross-border processes should be clear to individuals, their families and carers.** Navigating the health and social care "system" is difficult for people seeking access to care and support. It is made more difficult when that care and support is provided by more than one agency.
3. **Further guidance on how to achieve sector-leading multi-agency working should be produced.** This should be developed for use by Regional Partnership Boards and agencies, and include a multi-agency 'checklist' of critical success factors that are considered most important with most impact, thereby facilitating a sense-check of where they are in relation to achieving excellence.
4. **A community of practice across Wales should be established to share ideas and solutions for challenges encountered.** The development of communities of practice for other purposes, such as achieving implementation of the national models of care being supported through the Regional Integration Fund, should be extended to include fulfilment of the Act's aspirations for improved multi-agency working, alongside the other principles.
5. **A champion for multi-agency working should be identified within each Regional Partnership Board across all population groups.** This should be undertaken with the Commissioners for Older People, and Children and Young People.
6. **Mandatory refresher training on the Act should be provided for all operational and strategic partners, in a multi-agency setting, together.** In addition, mandatory training on multi-agency working should be provided through inter-professional education (IPE) and through higher education and further education professional programmes in health and social care.

[From Act to Impact? Final Report of the Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 \(gov.wales\)](#)

In closing, it is worth pointing to the 'test' questions posed in the final report – many of the 19 have a relevance to the question around multi-agency working, but in particular Q18 and Q19, which sit under Strategic Intention 7:

Strategic Intention 7: Achieving integration of local government services and between local authorities and their partners, particularly the NHS, to achieve better outcomes for individuals, carers and communities

What needs to be done to ensure there is improvement in:

18. multi-agency working and practice (including safeguarding), and in the practices of remote and distant working for some forms of interaction?
19. technological solutions that enable people to live independently, especially in a post-pandemic context of system pressures and workforce shortages?

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA/REGULATIONS

There is limited evidence within the study on the effectiveness of the Act's eligibility criteria / regulations and whether they are fit for purpose. The following excerpts provide some insights in this regard, but do not provide sufficient evidence for us to make a determination as to whether they are fit for purpose.

[Evaluation of the Implementation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act: process evaluation \(gov.wales\)](#)

New approaches which embodied the emphasis on strengths- and asset-based assessment under the Act in understanding people's eligible need around well-being were evident

Paragraph 6.2

There was an overall approach described by many which embodied the new emphasis on strengths- and asset-based assessment under the Act in understanding people's eligible need around well-being, and an honest reflection that at the time of implementation there were (ultimately unfounded) worries about this leading to 'flood gates' opening.

...having those strengths based conversations with them [citizens] is almost like planting a seed I guess, allowing that person time to think about what you've said and what the impact is on them and promoting trust and confidence (Operational Manager, LA, Locality 2) There was an anxiety, I think, as there is with all aspects of change around 'what's that going to mean for me'? Are we going to open the flood gates of loads of things all coming in through the front door because everybody is going to be asking for an assessment and they have to have one [...] That didn't actually bear out in reality (Senior Manager, Regional, Locality 4)

Paragraph 6.32

Key to outcomes-focused working was the judgement of practitioners which has received a challenge in respect of linking outcomes to eligible need:

[T]he staff are having to have uncomfortable conversations and I think for staff to be able to do that well, they need to be well supported, they need to be confident in their ability and clear in what the expectation is on them really isn't it. (Operational Manager, LA, Locality 2)

[Expectations and Experiences Service User and Carer perspectives on the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act \(gov.wales\)](#)

Paragraph 3.13

In contrast, some participants expressed their frustration that assessments felt like a 'tick box' exercise with the priority being the completion of forms and paperwork. There were experiences recounted where carers had not been able to gain an assessment, despite being eligible and wanting one. This was the case for the two carers below, as seen in extracts from their interviews:

...the Act specifically says that you know, carers have a right to an assessment and that assessment should be, is carried out by law to ensure that carers have the same outcomes and treatment that the person that they care for has. I think what has happened is the Act and the actual carers assessment has become, uh, disfranchised. It's become just a loose thing that happens, that possibly happens, when you become a carer (Carer, South West Wales, Male).

I mean just to give you an example, under the Act we are legally entitled to a Carer's needs Assessment and let me tell you my experience of carers needs assessment and I can tell you a great deal of other people, you can't get them ok (Carer, South East Wales, Adult).

Paragraph 3.21

Some respondents had opposing interpretations to social service staff on what they were eligible to receive under the Act. The first excerpt below illustrates this point through an experience of direct payments, where the offer from the social service department contrasted with the respondent's own wishes for the provision of support as noted in the excerpts below:

I think the way that social services interpret the Act is very, very different to how an individual would interpret it. They're often using it to shut things down rather than open them up because their argument is 'ok you could find a personal assistant for £12.66 an hour therefore that is a reasonable direct payment to give you', whereas I'm saying 'a) I can't find one and b) I don't want one'. So it was easier for them to then contract the agency themselves and pay them directly which closes the whole thing down (Carer, South West Wales, Female, Adult).

...they're [LAs] just not doing what you know, those things that they say that they are supposed to do. They're just not doing it (Service User and Carer, South West Wales, Female, Older person).

I think to be honest it is since lockdown everybody is using excuses [...]. ... there's so many more excuses used about COVID as a reason not to do things now and that's in all aspects of disabilities full stop (Service User and Carer, South West Wales, Female)

Paragraph 3.53

Experiences were relayed where participants perceived that the social services managers were making care and support decisions based on the money available, not the assessment process:

...the social workers don't decide on you know what support you get, the managers do. I think it just depends on how much money they've got in the budget at that particular time you know and basically whether you're eligible in inverted commas or not (Carer, South East Wales, Adult).

As far as we know this request was turned down by a panel of middle/senior managers. To date, we have not been formally informed of this decision. This to me suggests that our views and wishes, as a family, in respect of the type of care and support we need are listened to at a ground roots level. Unfortunately these views can be overridden further up the decision making chain. These decisions and the reasons behind them are seldom communicated to the service users. These are factors that I believe are contrary to the aims of what is on the whole a good and empowering Act (Carer).