

Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales

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Briefing for the National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee

Children's Commissioner for Wales' Annual Report 2013-2014 (please note this report covers the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014).

The Children's Commissioner for Wales officially launched his annual report for 2013/14 on Thursday 13 October 2014. This is Keith Towler's final annual report as Children's Commissioner for Wales, with his 7 year tenure coming to an end in February 2015.

As in previous years, the Commissioner's annual report provides an analysis of the state of children's rights in Wales including highlighting areas that he is concerned about, with calls upon Welsh Government to address these concerns and reposition children and young people as the nation's priority.

As well as highlighting areas of concern to the Children's Commissioner, the annual report and accounts covers other main areas of work undertaken by the Children's Commissioner's office over the last 12 months to champion and support children and young people across Wales, including:

- how the office has worked with over 6000 children and young people over the last twelve months;
- how we hosted 5 webinars, with over 900 pupils tuning into the one hosted in Pembrokeshire;
- awareness levels of the Commissioner at an all-time high amongst children, young people and adults, and;
- £1.186m media coverage secured for the Commissioner's office this year.

The report also contains details of the Commissioner's independent advice and support service, which has dealt with over 500 cases this year - 33% in relation to social services and 28% in relation to education.

Issues facing children and young people in Wales

In this year's annual report, the Commissioner is concerned that the Welsh Government seems too comfortable with its status as an international children's rights trailblazer, and is failing to deliver on securing children's rights.

The Commissioner believes that vital services aimed at protecting vulnerable children and young people are in danger of being lost, due to the lack of vision and leadership from the Welsh Government. He believes that children and young people's services need to be protected against the backdrop of further cuts as actual spend may be significantly reduced or indeed lost as local authorities attempt to balance their books. Strong leadership is needed from Welsh Government to re-position children and young people as the true national priority for Wales, where outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people meet that vision.

Why is the Children's Commissioner concerned?

During the past year, the Commissioner's office has been made aware of real threats to the protection of vulnerable children and young people in Wales, threats such as:

- loss of respite provision for children and young people with disabilities;
- looked after children having to move placements due to financial reasons, and;
- threats to vital front line services for children and young people, including children services, statutory youth support services and play services, along with;
- the lack of transparency in public expenditure on children and young people making it difficult to hold Welsh Government to account on its priority to delivery for children and young people.

What is the Children's Commissioner calling for in his annual report?

The Children's Commissioner wants to see clear leadership at all levels that establishes children and young people as a true national priority for Wales where outcomes for our most vulnerable meet that vision. In the absence of a Minister for Children, the Commissioner is concerned that the Welsh Government should seek to maintain and improve its' cross government strategic vision for children and young people and that action should be integrated with coherence across portfolios and departments.

The Children's Commissioner wants the Welsh Government to re-state its vision for children and young people. In doing so we would like to see that vision articulate a rights-based approach, rather than a token reference to the UNCRC, with a focus on practice that secures positive outcomes for all children and young people in Wales. It would signal very clearly that the due regard duty on Ministers, as outlines in the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, is a demonstration of leadership binding all functions to a common purpose.

Other calls within this year's annual report include:

- Welsh Government to develop separate age-specific Regulations and Guidance under provisions contained in the Social Services and Well-being Act, including an age-specific eligibility criteria and code of practice;
- Welsh Government to ensure that the regulations and guidance for the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 meet the needs of children and young people who act as carers;
- Welsh Government to incorporate pupil wellbeing into its improving schools plan and ensure it is reflected in national policy drivers and performance;
- Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association to encourage local authorities to address children's rights in carrying out their equality impact assessments to understand how proposed changes to services will affect children and young people's wellbeing;
- Welsh Government to set out how it will improve children and young people's access to appropriate, child-focussed CAMHS that respond to their individual needs, and provide regular reports on progress;
- Welsh Government to address the issues facing wheelchair-using children and young people in accessing education;
- Welsh Government to provide the necessary strategic leadership to ensure that independent advocacy provision for all relevant children and young people becomes a reality;
- Welsh Government to ensure that its child poverty strategy is revised to ensure it takes a rights-based approach to tackling child poverty in Wales.

Further Information

If you would like further information about any of the issues raised within this briefing, please contact:

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