



Ms H M Jones
Chair
Children and Young People Committee
Welsh Assembly Government
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CARDIFF

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TDG/NS
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Dear Ms Jones

Children and Young People Committee

Thank you for your letter dated 23 January 2009, concerning the above Inquiry. I am replying in my capacity as Chair of the Wrexham Framework Partnership for Children and Young People, following consideration of the matter by the Partnership at the meeting held on 25 February 2009.

At the outset, I should like to express the Partnership's appreciation on two counts; firstly, that such a much needed Inquiry is taking place and, secondly, that sufficient time is being given for responses to be made. It is often the case that impossibly short time-scales are set for bids and budget returns, allowing no time for local consensus to be gained. It is refreshing to note that the Committee has recognised that time is needed to consider and collate views prior to submission.

In response, to your specific questions, the Framework Partnership would wish to make the following observations:

Consultation Question 1

To what extent do you think that budget setting and allocating resources for children and young people is transparent at national and/or local level?

Although there is widespread appreciation of the Assembly's emphasis on children and young people's issues, it is clear that there is a perceived lack of transparency at national level. In the main, this stems from the apparent, unco-ordinated approach to budget setting by the Assembly Government, with a multiplicity of Departments and sections responding to a diverse range of policy initiatives. This is exacerbated by later notification of budget underspends / slippages and the consequential, urgent requests for last minute bids for funding.



Within the school sector, there is widespread concern that funding mechanisms hinder rather than encourage transparency, making it difficult to pull together a total picture of funding levels for internal and comparative, purposes. In addition, multiple announcements of the same funding stream raise unwarranted expectations, particularly on the part of schools and voluntary sectors who may find it difficult to keep track of repeat announcements. This is sometimes the fault of the media whose reporting is not always accurate and does not always make clear whether 'national' funding translates as Wales or UK-wide provision. It would be helpful if Ministers and others making statements would be as clear as possible as to whether funding is new, existing, Wales or UK related.

Consultation Question 2

To what extent do you think children and young people taken into account in budget setting and allocation decisions in policy areas not obviously related to them, e.g. transport, housing, planning?

It is rare to find references to children and young people's needs within other, non-direct policy areas. As a consequence, local, retrospective efforts must be made to earmark funding for the needs of children and young people.

Consultation Question 3

To what extent do you think that departments within national and local government are joined-up in terms of what they spend on children and young people? Do you have examples where this is or isn't happening?

The existence of WAG's seven Core Aims suggest a co-ordinated approach to funding for this age group. In reality, overlaps and omissions are in evidence as timescales, bidding rounds and policy overlap occur at a Departmental level. One example of this would be the different deadlines for various statutory plans (Health, Social Care and Well-being Strategy, the Children and Young People's Plan and the Community Strategy). While these are not funding streams, they influence and feed into feeding streams; lack of co-ordination at one level generally results in less than 'thought through' funding at another level. Another example is the confusion relating to terminology with, for example, a funding stream called 'Stronger Families' and another called 'Strengthening Families'. The existence of many different grant streams leads to additional workload burdens at the local level and this must also be the case at the Assembly level. In Wrexham we have worked hard to join up thinking and action in relation to the three Departments in our Children and Young People Service and between partners, and believe we have succeeded in large part here. We are currently engaged upon extending this approach to Council Departments outside of the CYP Service

Consultation Question 4

Do you think there is enough forward planning about how funding is allocated to deliver policies and programmes for children and young people? Please give examples.

The forward planning is satisfactory in annual terms but needs to be established on a longer term basis. There are successful examples of three-year programmes which allow partners to deliver longer term programmes. This is of particular importance when recruitment is required. Applicants are understandably reluctant to show an interest in positions which have a limited, guaranteed security. Service delivery in more complex areas, such as social inclusion work, require sustained provision over an extended period. As an example of more longer-term funding Big Lottery funding is provided over a three-year period and this enables staffing and project stability to be secured. In terms of our own commissioning of services, we would usually commission for a three-year period and we are actively considering moving to five-year commissioning for certain service strands (with the necessary monitoring and service review mechanisms to ensure ongoing relevance and quality) in order to further enhance project and staffing quality and stability.

Consultation Question 5

Do you have any examples of cost benefit analysis being undertaken on policies affecting children and young people (i.e. assessing the costs and benefits of the impacts of an intervention or policy)? Is this something you would like to see done more routinely and made more transparent?

As part of its work on the review of externally commissioned services, Wrexham County Borough Council has undertaken a review of the effectiveness of currently commissioned services and is using the information to re-configure services to improve their effectiveness. Cost/benefit analyses have featured in this process.

The Assembly scrutiny of grant funding streams ranges from micro management to broader review and there appears to be no consistency of approach. This can lead to minimal checking on large-scale expenditure and over-regulation of relatively small grants.

It is also certain that authorities are asked to provide information to one Welsh Assembly Government Department which we know is already held by another. Such information is generally required in a slightly different format meaning that it must be reworked before sending off. Similarly, with monitoring information that would be needed to conduct cost-benefit analyses, much of the monitoring information authorities are asked for is of doubtful value and it is suspected is not really used by the Assembly Government. As part of its own procedures, Wrexham is looking at the information it requires from those it is commissioning from in order to streamline this and make sure that anything required is really used. This will enable a better understanding of costs versus benefits to be developed.

As cost-benefit analyses are very complex, especially when dealing with such a wide range of often extremely complex services, exemplification from WAG would be helpful/useful. This should obviously not result in demands for even more data and

survey returns from authorities. There is no capacity for more paperwork to be dealt with all the current time.

Consultation Question 6

Tackling child poverty is seen as a high political priority in Wales. To what extent do you think budget allocations reflect this high priority? To what extent is budget allocation and actual spend in Wales 'pro-poor'?

A considerable amount of funding impacts positively on children living in poverty, both generally and as a direct consequence of actions within Core Aim 7 of the Children and Young People's Plans. The lack of a cohesive, national policy in this area of work, however, means that provision is patchy. In addition, many of the factors influencing family and child poverty are out of the hands of both the Assembly Government and local agencies.

This is not to say that local, impact reduction work cannot reap significant benefits. What is emerging, however, is a tendency for national policy pronouncements to ignore the financial consequences of such policy. Additional funding or a re-definition of priorities are required if local agencies are to increase the effectiveness of their poverty reduction work, and this needs to be reflected in a clearly set out national policy framework, and an achievable action plan.

Consultation Question 7

To what extent do you think children and young people are enabled to participate in budget setting and allocation decisions at a national and/or local level, and do you have any examples of this happening?

The involvement of children and young people within the budget decision-making process is at an early stage. In fairness, this is understandable as the necessary structures and systems have needed to be put in place for this to be feasible. Initiatives such as Youth Fora, School Councils, Funky Dragon, Looked After Children 'Speak Out' sessions and e-mail / texting offer a number of routes for children and young people to influence decisions which affect their lives. These need to operate at a local level if the varying needs and views of children and young people across Wales are to be addressed.

Consultation Question 8

What would you like to see change to make it easier to monitor spend on children and young people?

The monitoring of local expenditure on children and young people is well in hand through a variety of regulatory mechanisms. LMS, Audit Commission and grant reporting mechanisms could even be regarded as over-complex. More significant, perhaps, is the need for an assessment of the balance of funding distribution across a number of policy areas, both within the children and young people domain and across the adult / young person / child continuum. It is widely held view that in several areas, such as Health, children and young people are, literally, the 'poor relations'. An

analysis of WAG funding streams would both test this and would identify aspects where funding re-adjustments are required.

Consultation Question 9

Are there further comments you'd like to make about children's budgeting?

It needs to be re-iterated that the Scrutiny Committee's interest in this area is welcomed and that, certainly as far as Wrexham is concerned, we would wish to support the Committee's work. It goes without saying that children and young people themselves need to be able to contribute to this debate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T. D. Garner." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T' and 'D'.

Terry Garner
Strategic Director - Children and Young People