

**Consultation on measuring social services performance: code of practice**

**August 2019**

**Response by the National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru**

**About Us**

The National Deaf Children’s Society is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

We support deaf children and young people with all levels of hearing loss from mild to profound, including those with a unilateral loss (hearing loss in one ear) and temporary hearing loss.

**Background**

Deaf children and young people face many barriers as a result of living in a hearing orientated society. As such, without appropriate support, deaf children and young people can be vulnerable to delays in linguistic and educational development; difficulties with emotional wellbeing; and feelings of isolation. Research also tells us that deaf children can be at an increased risk of experiencing bullying.[[1]](#footnote-1)

More than 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents who have not had any prior experience of deafness. [[2]](#footnote-2) Many will require advice and support on supporting the language and communication development of their child.

**Our Response**

Given the particular vulnerabilities of deaf children and young people, as outlined above, we are keen that methods for measuring social care performance specifically reference the needs of deaf and sensory impaired children to ensure that this vulnerable group are not overlooked.

The National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru is pleased to be working with the Welsh Government and Action on Hearing Loss Cymru on guidance for social care practitioners on supporting people who are deaf/have a hearing loss. We would welcome further discussion around how this guidance could be cross referenced and reinforced within the code of practice following its publication in 2020.

**2. To what extent do you agree that the Quality Standards (as set out in the Code of Practice) enable local authorities to measure performance and inform improvement in relation to the social services functions placed upon them under the Act?**

For the standards to be successfully achieved for deaf children, young people and their families, it is essential that professionals at the point of referral into the local authority are aware of the various needs that deaf children and their families may have. This is especially important since families themselves may lack a clear understanding of what support might be available.

Permanent deafness in childhood is a relatively low incidence need that can require a specialist response. However, the number of specialist sensory social workers across the whole of the UK has significantly reduced in recent years and have been replaced by general disability teams. As identified through research in England by the University of Manchester, there is a risk within generic disability teams that deaf children are not recognised as ‘children in need.’ [[3]](#footnote-3) As such, deaf children’s specific social care needs can go unacknowledged and early intervention for families of deaf children may not be provided.

In order to reduce this risk, we suggest that performance measures look at:

* Whether staff have undertaken basic deaf awareness training.
* Whether the service considers referrals against the Welsh Government’s *Integrated framework of care and support for people who are D/deaf or living with hearing loss.*
* Whether the service can demonstrate that it is using the guidance on social care for deaf people commissioned by the Welsh Government, which is set to be published in 2020.

**3. To what extent do you agree that the Performance and Improvement Framework (as set out in the Code of Practice) enables local authorities to measure performance and inform improvement in relation to the social services functions placed upon them under the Act?**

The National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru finds it difficult to comment based on the level of detail provided on the qualitative and research sections of the framework.

Given the challenges that deafness can pose to children’s lifelong development and also the significant incidence of hearing loss in the wider aging population, we would support the presence of metrics with a specific sensory focus within the framework. As outlined above, local authorities could be measured by considering whether staff have been trained in deaf awareness and assessing the service’s use of deaf specific social care guidance.

It might also be helpful to consider the percentage of the local deaf population that is accessing social services. Low levels of uptake could indicate the need for further awareness of the support that social services can offer to deaf children and their families. It might also indicate the need for improved mechanisms for referring deaf children onto the service, for example, from local audiology services.

**5. Considering the metrics that are set out in the Technical Guidance, do you have any specific comments in relation to the metrics that are being proposed? Please include the metric reference in your response.**

**CH/009a CH/009b**

**‘The assessment was undertaken using the language of choice’**

We welcome this measure and assume that this entitles children and young people to an assessment in sign language if this is their preferred language. However, we would welcome an emphasis on ensuring that the language needs of the child and young person are met as opposed to just the language needs of the parent/carer. At the National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru we know that well-meaning assumptions are sometimes made about the language and communication needs of deaf children without specifically asking them for their preferred mode of communication. It is not uncommon for some deaf children to lack the confidence to express their preferred mode of communication is and instead, they may seek to meet the communication needs of the adult professional who they are communicating with.

It is also important not to rely on family members to translate for deaf children and young people. This may not be appropriate and is not how assessments should be conducted.

**6. The qualitative component of the Performance and Improvement Framework is still under development. Thinking specifically about Qualitative Data, what, in your view, should be included in this component so that we are able to understand and improve people’s experiences of care and support and carer’s experiences of support?**

We recognise the challenges that local authorities face in providing support which at times may not meet the expectations of some individuals. Despite this it is of critical importance to measure how individuals have been able to feel in control of any care and support received. Qualitative and quantitative approaches must therefore equally consider the experience and journey of children and families as this will help embed co-production and person centred practice.

In addition to the above, children and families should have a clear understanding of what their rights are and what the local authority expects them to have received from the support they have received. Therefore, we would recommend that when qualitative or quantitative research is being carried out, that children and families are reminded through clear and accessible information about what their rights are and what the intended outcomes of care and support being offered before their views are gathered.

**7. The Research and Evidence component of the Performance and Improvement Framework is still under development. Thinking specifically about Research and Evidence, what, in your view, should be included in this component so that we are able to understand and improve people’s experiences of care and support and carer’s experiences of support?**

To better understand the social care context, research approaches should be designed to recognise that support or actions from other services may have some bearing on the experiences/outcomes of social care and support to individuals and families. For example, a deaf child who is provided with a radio aid in school may, with agreement, also use this aid at home to support communication and improve parent/child interaction at home.

With this in mind, we would suggest that some research is considered jointly with health and education services.

**8. To what extent do you agree that the Children Receiving Care and Support Census, the Looked After Children Census, the Adults Safeguarding return and the Staff of local authority departments return are fit for purpose and should be included as they are into the new Performance and Improvement Framework?**

The National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru considers the data captured on disabled children within the Children receiving care and support census to be useful. We would welcome further disaggregation within this data to enable deaf children to be identified as a specific group.

However, we are concerned that there does not appear to be anything within the proposed metrics of the technical guidance which seeks to identify disabled children, particularly given that disabled children are at greater risk of abuse. Indeed, the Safeguarding Disabled Children guidance (2009) states that additional action is required in order to appropriately safeguard disabled children. We feel that specific data on disabled children should be gathered here which can align and complement the existing Children receiving care and support census. For example, data on disabled children at the initial Information Advice and Assistance stage (IAA) who may not continue further to receive and care and support. The gathering of this data would help inform whether disabled children were receiving the appropriate level of support at this early stage and whether this is consistent with the duties of local authorities under the Equality Act, particularly with regard to Public Sector Equality Duty.

We are pleased that the national core dataset (part 3 of the Code of Practice) recognises the need to identify a child’s preferred communication method, but we are disappointed that it does not require the recording of a child’s disability. It also enables local authorities to leave data set fields incomplete where the child does not receive a care and support plan. This appears to be a missed opportunity on recording data that could help to assess the identification and support of vulnerable disabled children.

**Further information**

For further information about any of the points raised within this consultation response, please contact Campaigns.Wales@ndcs.org.uk.

Thank you.

1. National Deaf Children’s Society Buzz website online poll. 2014. More than 600 responses, of which 42% said they had been bullied and 24% said sometimes (totalling 66%). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mitchell, R.E. and Karchmer, M.A. Chasing the Mythical Ten Percent: Parental Hearing Status of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in the United States. *Sign Language Studies.* 2004. 4: 138-163. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/social-care-services-are-failing-deaf-children-says-report/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)