

Welsh Government consultation on improving social care arrangements and partnership working

April 2021



Response by the National Deaf Children's Society Cymru

About Us

The National Deaf Children's Society seeks to create a world without barriers for deaf children, young people and their families. We support children and young people with all levels of deafness, from mild through to profound, including those with temporary hearing loss and a unilateral loss. We use the term deafness to refer to all levels of hearing loss.

In referring to deafness, we include all levels of hearing loss from mild through to profound, unilateral, bilateral and temporary.

Summary

Deaf children in Wales are a low incidence group, widely dispersed across the country. The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru wishes to emphasise that the proposed developments should ensure a specific focus on meeting specialist and low incidence needs, including childhood deafness.

Background

We live in a society which often assumes typical hearing levels and is heavily orientated around speaking and listening. As such deaf children and their families frequently face major barriers. If unaddressed, these barriers can have a significant impact on children and their families and carers. This might include; communication delays/difficulties; difficulties accessing services due to a lack of deaf awareness and/or a lack of service provision in British Sign Language (BSL); social isolation and loneliness; low confidence; poor mental health; and vulnerability to bullying/harassment/discrimination.

Social care support can play a crucial role in supporting deaf children, young people and their families. However, over the past twenty years, there has been a demise of professionals specialising in working with deaf children and young people.

In 2018/19, the National Deaf Children's Society Cymru consulted with families of deaf children on their experiences of social care in Wales. The following key themes emerged:

- Lack of information on possible social care support and how it can help families of deaf children
- Postcode lottery in accessing equipment free of charge

- Lack of awareness within children’s social services of how to support deaf children, including signposting
- Lack of deaf awareness/communication needs not being met
- Lack of support for learning BSL
- Lack of planning for transition and moving towards independence
- Once need is identified, a lack of accessible services to support parents and deaf children.

We recently welcomed the opportunity to work with RNID Cymru to draft guidance for social workers in Wales, which we hope the Welsh Government will publish soon.

Given the significant barriers this group face, we also feel that the proposed changes within the White Paper would benefit from taking a specific focus on meeting the social care needs of low incidence groups, including deaf children and young people.

Response

We welcome the emphasis on ensuring “quality” of service. In order to achieve this for some of our most vulnerable groups, we believe that the new national framework and “national office” should give specific consideration and clear reference to meeting low incidence, specialist needs, like those of deaf children and their families.

It will be imperative to ensure that methodologies and processes clearly take account the complexities of meeting such specialist needs. For example, methodologies must be able to adapt and commission services for low numbers, or even at an individual level. Any finalised methodology must account for this and protect the rights of deaf children and their families.

We also hope that the national framework would specifically seek to address the issues identified in our background above, including the current postcode lottery in accessing specialist support. To this end, the National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru would welcome the opportunity to feed into the discussions around the development of the new national office and framework.

Where specialist support services are required, there can be real benefits to working regionally and in partnership. Potentially, Regional Partnership Boards could play an important role in jointly commissioning specialist services in order to address lower incidence needs, such as childhood deafness.

The National Deaf Children’s Society Cymru is also keen to seek assurances that charges for services supporting deaf children, young people and their families will not be introduced/increased as a result of these developments. As outlined above, social care support can be fundamental for these families.

More information

The National Deaf Children's Society Cymru would welcome the opportunity to discuss these points further and to feed into the discussions around these developments. Please do not hesitate to contact us at campaigns.wales@ndcs.org.uk. Many thanks for taking the time to read our response.