



Multi-agency working for children looked after: A policy timeline

Families First programme

2012

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

2015

Prosperity for All: The national strategy

Ministerial Advisory Group on Improving Outcomes for Children

2017

Care Inspectorate Wales reviews

2019

Introduction

Multi-agency working has been central in policy aimed at improving outcomes and experiences of children looked after, recognising the need for a holistic and whole system approach focused on early intervention and prevention. A range of policies, legislation and programmes in Wales encourage or require multi-agency working in relation to children looked after, supported by inspection frameworks and ministerial commitments. This policy briefing sets out the major policy developments related to multi-agency working for children looked after since 2010.

2010: Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS)

The Children and Family (Wales) Measure 2010 established the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS), an early intervention programme for families with parental alcohol or substance misuse whose children are at risk of being taken into care. As part of the programme local authorities and health boards are required to collaborate to provide support to families. In its 2014 evaluation it was found to improve short-term outcomes for certain types of families, with the 'multi-agency style of delivery used seen as highly effective' (Welsh Government, 2014a), and evidence suggests the original model IFSS is based on can prevent children being placed in out-of-home placements (Bezeczky et al., 2019).

2012: Families First programme

The [Families First](#) programme, funded by Welsh Government, aims to improve services local authorities provide to families, prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and mitigate the effects of ACEs for those exposed. It 'promotes greater multi-agency working to ensure families receive joined-up support when they need it ...[and] provide early support for families with the aim of preventing problems escalating'. Families First works across a continuum of

support from universal to specialist services including families with multiple needs.

Key elements of Families First include: 1) Joint Assessment Framework (JAF), which encourages multi-agency working for assessing needs and how to meet them; 2) Team Around Family (TAF), which promotes information sharing, coordinated multi-agency systems of support, and a family-centred approach, aligned to JAF; 3) Disability Focus, to recognise the specific needs of families affected by disability; and 4) Strategic Commissioning, that avoids duplication or gaps and covers domestic violence, employment, health, etc.

An evaluation found that 'the programme accelerated progress [of multi-agency working] by increasing the number of agencies collaborating and the extent to which they collaborate' (Welsh Government, 2015). Challenges included funding, engaging partners in over-stretched services such as health and mental health, and need for systems to underpin joint working.

Although Families First has been adapted in response to the Coronavirus pandemic (Welsh Government, 2021a), multi-agency working remains a core part of the programme.

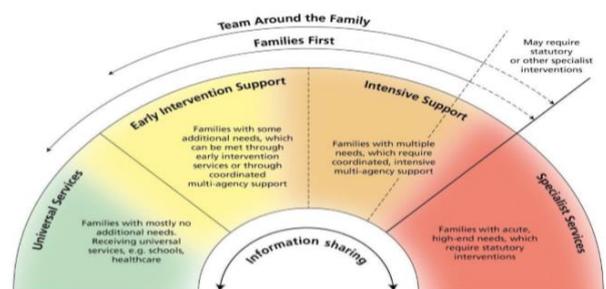


Figure 1: Effective multi-agency working for children looked after. **Families First**

2014: Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act

This Act placed a duty on local authority and health services to promote the wellbeing of those needing care and support. Principles of the Act outline a focus on partnership and prevention. It introduced new statutory partnerships between local authorities and

health boards ‘to drive integration, innovation and service change’ (Welsh Government, 2014b).

Part 6 of the Act provided a new legal framework for children looked after in Wales including care planning, placement and review. It set out the Part 6 Care and Support Plan for children looked after that brings together information on the child’s health, placement and education plans and reflects ‘the multi-agency contribution necessary to ensure that it addresses the full range of the child’s well-being and developmental needs’ (Senedd Wales, 2014).

2015: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

The Act outlines seven wellbeing goals for Wales and places a duty on public bodies (including local authorities and health services) to set and publish wellbeing objectives and take reasonable steps to meet them. It established Public Services Boards (PSBs) for each local authority area in Wales. One of their priority areas is ACEs. An [ACE Support Hub](#) was established by Cymru Well Wales Partnership, supported by the Future Generations Commissioner, to support all public bodies to tackle ACEs and include partnerships focused on multi-agency, preventative approaches, for example with police and criminal justice partners.

2016: Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales

This joint strategy for education and social services in Wales aimed to meet the goals set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It highlights the importance of early intervention and ‘effective multi agency working’ as well as leadership and clear roles and responsibilities (Welsh Government, 2016a).

2016: Taking Wales Forward 2016-2021

This set out the Welsh Government’s key priorities and a delivery plan for improving public services and the Welsh economy. These priorities included ‘work to reduce unnecessary use of care, building on the work of the Integrated Family Support Service’ (Welsh Government, 2016b).

2017: Prosperity for All: The national strategy

This outlined ambitions to ‘raise the educational attainment and improve life chances of children in care, adopting a child centred approach, through the collaboration of education, social services and others’. It aimed to ‘create a more joined, up responsive system’ and to pilot ‘Children First areas’ to focus on integrated services to reduce the numbers of ACEs, as well create ‘ACE aware public services’. It also promoted early intervention to help children stay with families and the establishment of centres where co-located support is available (Welsh Government, 2017).

2017: Ministerial Advisory Group on Improving Outcomes for Children

The Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care established the cross-sector, cross-government Improving Outcomes for Children Programme supported by a [Ministerial Advisory Group \(MAG\)](#). An appreciative inquiry carried out by the MAG across six local authorities to identify effective approaches to reducing care rates found all demonstrated ‘integrated care systems where multi-agency teams provided timely support to families so crises could be de-escalated or avoided’ and highlighted the importance of ‘whole system change across the public services and beyond’ to address factors that drive the need for care services such as exposure to ACEs (Irranca-Davies, 2018).

Work of the programme to date includes (Welsh Government, 2019):

- The Corporate Parenting Task and Finish Group to improve the offer for care experienced children and young people and consider what corporate parenting responsibilities are beyond local authorities in other public sector organisations in Wales, including education and skills and emotional and mental health.
- Launch of *Listen. Act. Thrive* report into the mental health of children looked after which recommended 'local authorities as corporate parents, health, social services, and education, should work together to provide a joined-up approach to emotional and mental health services and support to care experienced children and young people' (NSPCC Cymru, 2019).

The MAG also finds that factors attributable to variation in rates of children looked after across Wales include multi-disciplinary working, information sharing, and integrated planning around early intervention/prevention. Next steps for the work programme include examining RPB mechanisms for multi-agency risk assessments and planning and promoting models of integrated practice between public services.

2018: Early Action Together programme

The [Early Action Together programme](#) is a partnership with Public Health Wales and police, prison and probation services focused on reducing the impact of ACEs through preventative, multi-agency working with agencies such as social services, schools and housing.

2019: Care Inspectorate Wales reviews

Care Inspectorate Wales (2019a, 2019b) made various observations and recommendations

related to multi-agency working in 2019 reports, including:

- 'Families in complex situations were not always fully supported by an appropriate multi-agency response' – child protection investigations that were agreed to be undertaken jointly with police didn't happen because of capacity issues, or appropriately skilled representatives weren't present for conferences.
- Whilst there was some effective multi-agency working for families and carers where there were risks of significant harm, improvements were still needed in safeguarding, with 'the involvement of multi-agency partners at strategy discussions limited'.
- Some local authorities had introduced Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs – arrangements varied but hubs aimed to improve information sharing and management of referrals.
- 'While all local authorities were engaged in a variety of quality assurance activities most did not have a well-embedded multi-agency framework'.

Priority areas for improvement included multi-agency strategies to ensure delays in children accessing education are minimised and a multi-agency approach to review and reduce incidents of criminal activity for children. The reports recommended Welsh Government develop a national multi-agency strategy to reduce the risk of care-experienced children being criminalised.

2021: Whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being

This is a Welsh Government framework for schools and other education settings to help them develop their own approaches to wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2021b). While not specifically focused on children and young people looked after, their needs are considered in the guidance. It is premised on the idea that schools alone are not responsible for meeting young people's needs and that regional bodies, the NHS, and the third sector need to support schools. Multi-agency working is therefore

recommended, supported by 'implementation leads' in each regional area/health board. Schools and other agencies are encouraged to develop positive partnerships, including through inter-school partnerships, developing communities of practice, seeking opportunities for joint procurement, and establishing information-sharing mechanisms.

2021: Programme for Government

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government includes commitments to support multi-agency working that will affect children looked after, such as promoting a 'no wrong door' approach to mental health support and rolling out child and adolescent mental health services in schools across Wales (Welsh Government, 2021c).

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Find out more

For the accompanying evidence review, see Peixoto Gomes, L. (2021). *Multi-agency working and outcomes for children looked after: Evidence review*. Wales Centre for Public Policy.

For the full reference list associated with the evidence review, see Peixoto Gomes, L. (2021). *Multi-agency working and outcomes for children looked after: Evidence review sources*. Wales Centre for Public Policy.

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