

Dyddiad: Dydd Mercher 11 Mehefin 2003
Lleoliad: Ystafell Bwyllgora , Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Teitl: "Ar Goll mewn Gofal" – Adroddiad Tribiwnlys yr Ymchwiliad i Gam-drin Plant mewn Gofal yng Ngogledd Cymru (Adroddiad Waterhouse)

Cefndir

Ar 26 Mawrth 2003, bu'r Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol blaenorol yn trafod Adroddiad Waterhouse. Cododd yr Aelodau nifer o faterion ac ymrwymodd Sandy Blair, Cyfarwyddwr Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru, i roi mwy o wybodaeth amdanynt.

Mae copi o'i ymateb yn Atodiad A.

Ysgrifenyddiaeth y Pwyllgor

Mehefin 2003

“LOST IN CARE” – RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS FROM HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Training for complaints officers

All local authority complaints officers, whether or not they are dedicated to children's complaints, benefit from training and support provided through the All Wales Complaints Officers Group (AWCOG). The AWCOG provided training on the legal framework for children's services in 2002 and has a training session on listening to children planned for this year. In addition, complaints officers have the same access to in-house and external training courses as other staff who work in children's social services, which increasingly includes courses on communicating with children. Even when there is no dedicated children's complaints officers, some authorities report requiring candidates for complaints officer posts to be qualified social workers who have considerable experience of working with children. Some of those who are active in the AWCOG question whether the dedicated children's complaints officers do, in practice, have more experience of or better access to training about dealing with children than the more generic complaints officers.

Do complaints officers have any line management responsibility for staff who may be the subject of a complaint?

As far as we are aware, no social services complaints officer in Wales has line management responsibilities for staff who provide social services. A number of authorities have also been careful to ensure that their complaints officers receive day to day supervision and management from someone who is outside children's services.

Progress in meeting NVQ Level 3 targets by 2005

The majority of local authorities no longer run children's homes or only have one or two small and highly specialised units, such as respite care facilities, with the rest of the children's homes being provided by the independent sector. In these areas, local authorities have little part to play in meeting the 2005 target and only the Care Standards Inspectorate is in a position to comment on the level of progress being made in the independent sector. Where authorities do employ child care staff, staff that have not yet met NVQ level 3 are required to undertake the necessary training and almost all authorities report good progress. One or two already meet the 2005 target and most of the others feel confident they will by 2005. However, the Health and Social Services Committee will be aware that high levels of staff turnover and a general shortage of experienced staff can undermine the efforts being made to invest in staff training. Despite rolling training programmes and considerable investment, some authorities are struggling because childcare staff who achieve their qualification, tend to move on to better paid jobs elsewhere, and the authority must then invest once again in training new entrants.

In addition to your written questions, I agreed in the course of the discussion to provide information and views on three other issues:

Elected Members' role as corporate parents

Most authorities already have a rolling programme of training, seminars and briefings for elected Members on different aspects of children's services, including corporate parenting. Those that have had more ad hoc training arrangements in the past are currently assessing Members' needs and deciding what the priorities should be. Training on corporate parenting is also being focused on overview and scrutiny committees, as well as other elected Members in several authorities. Additional initiatives in a few local authorities include the adoption of a corporate parenting strategy and the provision of corporate parenting packs to all elected Members, including a checklist identifying the different roles for elected Members as corporate parents. Some authorities have also invited Peter Clarke and other speakers to attend full Council or talk to their Cabinet about these issues. We are discussing with advisers how these good practice initiatives could be adopted more widely.

Mechanisms for school governors to report concerns to social services

Since the Waterhouse report was published, as our Children's Action Plan demonstrated, authorities have taken much more seriously the importance of inter-departmental and inter-agency working and communication. Authorities are learning from each other about what works and several now have inter-agency planning arrangements in relation to particular issues affecting looked after children and children in need. Others are developing more of an inter-agency approach to corporate parenting, with service level agreements and compacts between the main service providers in relation to looked after children.

The importance of schools and school governors raising concerns about individual children, who may be unknown to the local authority, is well recognised and highlighted by the Climbié Inquiry. Authorities are developing ways to engage school governors, as the attached leaflet from Carmarthenshire demonstrates. School governors participate in child protection training and are expected to follow child protection procedures. School staff get more detailed training. There is a designated governor for child protection on school governing boards and also a designated child protection teacher in each school. In some areas, any governors can report concerns to the designated teacher. But in other areas, governors tend to delegate this responsibility to the head teacher. There is also a designated officer in the local authority's education service from whom governors can seek advice. Where the allegations relate to the head teacher, the governors can report their concerns direct to this officer. There are also formal links between the local authority's education service and the Area Child Protection Committees in many areas.

Identifying measures that demonstrate improvement in child care

There are already a range of performance indicators and inspection regimes that seek to allow both local authorities and the National Assembly to monitor improvements in children's social services and outcomes for children in need. Many of the Waterhouse recommendations were out of date before they were published, most notably those relating to institutional care, such as rota visits. New indicators for measuring improvements – as well as identifying early warning signs - must reflect the fact that most child care is provided through fostering and in the independent sector and recognise the difficulties with engaging the youngest children, which make up an increasingly large proportion of looked after children.

The objectives in the Children First Action Plan, together with relevant policy agreements, have provided a sound basis for a national framework for measuring improvements in children's services. But there are also other performance indicators from a variety of sources that apply to children's services and the achieving a core set of indicators on which everyone is agreed and which link to improved outcomes for children and young people would be helpful. The current work being undertaken between the Local Government Data Unit, SSIW, Social Services Support Unit and the ADSS Children and Families Group to identify critical success factors is an invaluable exercise aimed at identifying the most important and "SMART" measures. Initiatives of this kind can help to develop more appropriate and mature measures that relate to outcomes for children as well as service improvements. Similarly, the action plan from the Laming Inquiry may also offer useful and contemporary pointers which could help to refine the existing national framework for performance measurement. The Assembly government's future approach to indicators should ensure that they are used consistently and left in place, unaltered, for long enough to allow valid and comparative judgements to be made.

Sandy Blair
Director
Welsh Local Government Association
30 May 2003