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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Helen Mary Jones
Chair
Children and Young People's Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

15 December 2010

Dear Helen Mary,

I was pleased to have an opportunity to submit written evidence and appear at the Children and Young People Committee on 12th October to discuss the update to the Committee's report on the Parenting Action Plan.

We did not have time to cover all the Committee's questions, so I am pleased to submit an update on timescales for and development of, the information sharing protocol; an update on the Committee's report recommendations, related to those recommendations the Welsh Assembly Government accepted, or accepted in principle ; and answers to the four questions that we did not reach in Committee. These are set out in the attached annexes.

Best wishes.

Huw

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Annex 1.

Sharing Personal Information (SPI) Programme

1. The Sharing Personal Information Programme aims to make sure public sector services, as well as third and private sector providers where appropriate, share personal information about individuals legally, safely and with confidence. SPI is critical in ensuring that public services maintain and improve standards and efficiency, are coherently and collaboratively delivered based on need and safeguard the vulnerable. People must be confident in and satisfied with the services they receive.

2. The following actions will be completed by April 2012:

- The Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) to be developed to become the single "Gold Standard" and the accredited basis for all SPI nationally;
- Information Sharing Communities (ISCs) network to be established to ensure advice on SPI is available to practitioners locally and nationally;
- Governance arrangements to be put in place, for example in a confederation of governing bodies, to underpin practice and standards across the public sector, third and private sector providers;
- Programme support to be available with training, advice and accreditation, that will set standards and promote good practice;
- Programme to be guided by partners and ISC representatives through the Wales Stakeholder Forum and Corporate Board that are already in place;
- Progress can be demonstrated - through existing partnership and partner reporting, with performance measures;
- A business case can be evidenced for that supports a case for any revision to IT architecture and the investment that may be needed..

3. Immediate work being undertaken to progress in the three priority actions includes:

3.1 WASPI: Planning is underway to establish a dedicated WASPI Team by January 2011 that will lead on implementation of the Accord and development of local Information Sharing Protocols.

3 regional training events are planned for March 2011 for the relevant staff across public services and voluntary and private providers. Local training will then be delivered as requested and the team will advise organisations on the development of protocols and ensure standards are met by accredit final versions for publication and wider use.

3.2 Information Sharing Community development. Arrangements are being made to establish pilot Information Sharing Communities through Local Service Boards in areas in which we are aware agencies have already begun to meet to share information .

3.3 Governance: We plan to set up a Task and Finish Group shortly, representing the existing governance bodies to decide how joint cross public sector governance can be implemented, and intend to issue a proposal for consultation between May and July 2011. It is planned to hold a first meeting of the new joint body in September 2011.

Annex 2

Recommendation 1 was that the Welsh Assembly Government should appoint a 'parenting champion'.

As I explained in my oral evidence to the Committee, I do not propose to appoint a parenting champion. My view is that it is preferable to concentrate action on co-ordinating broad support for the range of parents. This can be achieved through further development of existing resources both within the Welsh Assembly Government and through partners.

Recommendation 2, was that the Assembly Government to say whether there are any outstanding actions from the Parenting Action Plan that it no longer intends to take forward, and give reasons why they will not be taken forward, and, for those actions the Welsh Assembly Government does intend to take forward, from the original Parenting Action Plan, the Welsh Assembly Government should set out clear timescales for their delivery.

I have previously set out my position in terms of the Parenting Action Plan and how it has been superseded by the new Families First approach.

I explained that a national telephone number for the Family Information Service has been created so that families can access information and help about a range of parenting and family issues. We will continue to promote this service, with a marketing campaign in January 2011.

As explained at committee, we continue to make the following booklets available: 'Help at Hand – Taking a Positive Approach to Parenting'; 'From Breakfast to Bedtime – Helping you and your toddler through the day!' and 'Birth to Five - The guide to parenthood and the first five years of a child's life'.

In terms of the Parentsnet website, a project has been undertaken to look at the benefits of the site and a user-focused report will shortly be finalised. Once available, we will consider the options for Parentsnet.

Recommendation 3 was that the Welsh Assembly Government should produce an overarching Parenting Strategy and a refreshed Parenting Action Plan.

As we discussed in some detail during the Committee session, our approach towards Families First now represents the thrust of our activity in relation to families. As such, I do not intend to 'refresh' the Action Plan.

Accordingly, I do not now propose to take forward recommendation 4, relating to resourcing for delivery of the Parenting Action Plan. As set out in my evidence, we are working towards full roll-out of, and appropriate funding for, Families First from April 2012.

Recommendation 5 was that the Welsh Assembly Government should identify expenditure on parenting support and ensure transparency and clarity about spend across departments at national and local levels.

I have previously set out that we will be further exploring the opportunities presented by the learning uncovered by the Families First pioneers to pull together the strands of funding relevant to the Parenting Action Plan and associated programmes to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness. Additionally, the Families Working Group, an official-led group, has been constituted to bring greater clarity to policy development and expenditure for families.

Recommendation 6 was for a major public information and education campaign to promote positive parenting and non-violence towards children.

As I explained to the Committee, Families First will take a whole system approach to supporting families. I am determined to promote a positive approach to parenting, and to help parents take responsibility.

This is not just about providing information to parents but working with them to help them to be aware of the help and support that is available to them. We will be looking closely over the coming months at the programmes and information available to families.

Recommendation 7 was that the Assembly Government should monitor awareness of FIS amongst the public of Wales.

We most recently met all Family Information Services representatives from across Wales on 12 October. FIS representatives were given a further opportunity to contribute to plans to increase awareness of their services. We continue to consider how best to support the FIS to align more closely to the emerging Families First agenda and, as part of that, how best to monitor their usage and effectiveness. Funding is available for a support contract for the FIS, and I will want to ensure that the contract includes an element of monitoring.

Recommendation 8 was that the Assembly Government should provide guidance about involving parents in schools.

Further to my written evidence, good progress has been made on the Behaviour and Attendance Action Plan and responding to the National

Behaviour and Attendance Review. The Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Education issued a Written Statement on the progress on November 1st which provides a summary of what is underway or has been completed. This has included commencing provisions (as from October 31st) on behaviour and discipline contained in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and, at the same time, issuing accompanying guidance, including comprehensive material on the use of reasonable force.

Recommendation 9 was that the Welsh Assembly Government should commission long-term, qualitative studies about a range of parenting programmes.

As set out in my earlier evidence, we continue to provide funding for research and evaluation of parenting programmes, including *Incredible Years Wales* and *Family Links* research projects in addition to recent evaluations of Cymorth and Flying Start.

Recommendation 10 was concerned with strengthening arrangements for sharing good practice across Wales and identifying and sharing good practice from international examples.

I provided a substantial written answer in my written evidence and would, here, stress the focus that Families First will place on the sharing of good practice. Indeed, three seminars are scheduled for November and December that will provide an early opportunity for just such exchange as part of the Families First Pioneer stage.

Recommendation 11 was concerned with a statement that, in determining whether to breach confidentiality to protect the child or other children from a risk of serious harm, professionals should set aside preconceptions based on parents' economic or social backgrounds and make decisions on a case by case basis.

I provided a substantial answer in my written evidence and would reiterate that the Assembly Government is not aware of any instances where a parent or adult has reported concerns to the statutory agencies and subsequently treated differently because of their circumstances or background. This has not changed.

I also provided information about the Wales Accord for the Sharing of Personal Information, an update on which appears in this letter.

Once again, thank you for providing me with an opportunity to update you on this important area of work. I hope this information is of help to the Committee.

Annex 3.

Question 6: How will the new approach meet the different needs of men and women involved in parenting?

Principally through Families First, the Assembly Government aims to meet particular, bespoke needs, so far as possible. We also recognise, however, the - sometimes different - needs of the genders in relation to parenting.

My officials recently met researchers from Cardiff University in connection with the University's work on, "Transition in the Lives of Men as Fathers" and "Fathers' voices in times of change". We also continue to track numerous early parenting projects across Wales, which tend to be accessed more by young women at present. We will continue to develop such important links to ensure that the needs of both genders can be fully considered and addressed.

Question 10: Your commitment to giving children and young people the same protection in law as adults and to supporting the aims of the Children are Unbeatable! Campaign is set out in the written evidence. Will the Deputy Minister re-consider prioritising a public information and education campaign on this issue, aimed at informing and changing public attitudes and promoting positive non-violent forms of discipline?

The Welsh Assembly Government remains committed to this principle and we will actively look at ways to educate parents about non-violent methods of discipline.

I will look further at suggestions for a campaign, budget permitting, and at other channels through which to deliver information about positive parenting.

Question 11: Given the current financial climate, is there a risk that support for parents will be targeted at vulnerable families with the most complex needs – for example, through the Integrated Family Support Teams and the Integrated Family Support Service, and that universal support for anyone raising a child will be lost?

There is a balance to be achieved between targeted services and strong universal provision. Increasingly effective universal provision will be a key element in the delivery of the Families First agenda. The Assembly Government is anxious to ensure that the needs of the many are not lost, nor are they exacerbated, in the imperative to address those of the most vulnerable.

In terms of the Integrated Family Support Teams (IFST), an aim of the Families First initiative is to promote early identification and intervention in order to prevent families escalating to the specialist services typically engaged in the IFST areas. That is one reason we have co-located our lead Families First pioneers in IFST pilot areas: Wrexham and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

It is our intention to uncover good practice around early identification and intervention, and to develop evidence further supporting the benefits of early action.

Question 12: What are the key priorities for the Welsh Government in relation to parenting in the next 6 months? Do you think you've got the balance right in terms of the kinds of things the state is trying to put right and what should be the responsibility of parents?

A key priority over the short-term is the successful inception of the initial stages of Families First. In launching Families First, the Assembly Government is setting out the clear direction of travel for our programmes and for policies that support families. Families First focuses, particularly in these early stages, on understanding the best practice that exists in Wales and ensuring that such best practice is developed and promoted across all areas. It is, however, also about challenging the way we do things and considering best practice in the construction of support systems for our families.

Such careful planning and construction, and effective, efficient delivery are going to be essential in the current economic climate.

We will need to balance what we can provide and what remains the proper province of parents. Families need to understand and accept their own responsibilities. In balancing support and responsibility, an enabling factor is the development of resilient, self-reliant families, sufficiently robust to meet and deliver on their responsibilities: this is central to the aims of Families First.