

Response to the Health and Social Care Committee re Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act

1. Is there a need for a Bill to provide for a single Act for Wales that brings together local authorities' and partners' duties and functions in relation to improving the wellbeing of people who need care and support and carers who need support?

The intention to bring together local authorities' and partners' duties and functions in relation to improving wellbeing is generally welcomed. Whilst there is a need for legislation and guidance to guide the way that services are delivered to people by public services, there is currently a plethora of legislation and guidance that pertains to this and simplifying this would be beneficial to services and citizens who sometimes have to negotiate complex systems to get what they need. This would hopefully reduce bureaucracy and release officer time and energy to focus on delivering services that improve outcomes for people.

2. Do you think the Bill, as drafted, delivers the stated objectives as set out in Chapter 3 of the Explanatory Memorandum?

Yes, however, much of the detail will need to be included in regulations and we would want sight of these before being completely assured that the legislation will achieve the changes that it intends.

3. The Bill aims to enable local authorities, together with partners, to meet the challenges that face social services and to begin the process of change through a shared responsibility to promote the wellbeing of people. Do you feel that the Bill will enable the delivery of social services that are sustainable?

If it achieves the objectives that have been set out. However, there is little information currently about how much resource will be required to implement these changes. A very crude measure has been used to calculate some of the benefits that will be achieved. We agree that if processes and systems are streamlined this should free up social worker time to do more face to face work, however, more information is needed about what level of resource Local Authorities will have to commit to these changes e.g. developing preventative services whilst also having to meeting the needs of service users that have a high level of need currently.

4. How will the Bill change existing social services provision and what impact will such changes have, if any?

The move to focusing on outcomes and what difference we are making is very much welcomed. Streamlining the large number of policies, laws, regulations will hopefully reduce bureaucracy and this is

something that social workers in particular, have been asking for a long time. The fact that more face to face work will be undertaken by social workers is also to be welcomed – this is why people enter the profession in the first place and a focus on managerialism in the last few years has reduced the ability of social workers to do this.

Using the definition of wellbeing will potentially mean that large numbers of the community who would not previously have involvement with Social Services will request assessments of their needs. The impact on Local Authorities is as yet unknown and requires further exploration.

Whilst preventative services make sense and many of the Local Authorities already have such services in place, it has to be recognised that in many cases this will only delay the need for intensive services. There is a balance to be had in developing preventative services and continuing to provide services for service users with complex and high level needs.

Regionalising Safeguarding Children Boards is something that we have reservations about although we are in the process of developing a South East Wales Board. There does not appear to be much evidence of this improving the effectiveness of Boards. We welcome the research that has been commissioned by the WLGA that may enable us to better understand the benefits and challenges of regionalisation. The main concern of members is the loss of local links that has been the focus of much of the work of the Local Boards in South East Wales. The challenge will be establishing a Board that has an overview of local practice in five Local Authority areas in our case.

There are also concerns from practitioners and managers that merging the Adult and Children's Safeguarding Boards will result in one agenda being dominated by the other leading to a loss of focus on either children and young people or vulnerable adults.

5. What are the potential barriers to implementing the provisions of the Bill (if any) and does the Bill take account of them?
 - **There is still no national formula for Safeguarding Children Boards and therefore the issues that we faced as Local Boards are the same following regionalisation. There is still considerable debate about who should be contributing and how much and whether or not this should be in kind or cash. Until these matters are resolved Boards will continue to struggle to implement work programmes and therefore make any progress in co-ordinating and improving the effectiveness of multi agency safeguarding children practice.**
 - **Lack of information about how much resource will be required by Local Authorities to make the changes proposed in the Bill.**

- **The ability of Regional Boards to hold member agencies to account needs to be strengthened as does the role of the Chair of the Board. Without this, Boards will lack the ‘teeth’ to challenge and hold to account effectively.**
6. In your view does the Bill contain a reasonable balance between the powers on the face of the Bill and the powers conferred by regulations?

It is better that only those issues that require legislative change be included in the legislation and that all other guidance be included in regulation.

7. What are your views on powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (i.e. statutory instruments, including regulations, orders and directions)?

This may be required and provides for a level of flexibility to create supportive elements for the legislation which may only become apparent as the changes brought about by the law evolve.

8. What are your views on the financial implications of the Bill?

Please see previous comments in relation to resources.

9. Are there any other comments you wish to make about the specific sections of the Bill?

Although the regionalisation of Boards will bring some challenges, for example, working across five Local Authority boundaries, we are also viewing this as an opportunity to further develop the good work that the five Boards in Gwent undertook. There is considerable commitment to establishing an effective Board in South East Wales that provides strong leadership, clear strategic direction and strengthens the links between front line practice and the work of the Board and thereby improves outcomes for children and young people.

Regionalising will also provide some economy of scale, certainly for agencies such as Health, not doing the same/similar thing five times will free up officer time and decrease the number of partnership meetings they have to attend.

The Board may also have more influence and be better able to hold agencies to account for their role in safeguarding children. It may also be better able to influence the direction of safeguarding policy given the relationship it will have with the National Board.

Response sent on behalf of the five LSCBs in South East Wales, currently in the process of merging to become the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board from April 1st 2013.

