

Response to the National Assembly for Wales' Priorities for the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee August 2016

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Citizens Advice Cymru welcomes the opportunity to help inform the forward work programme of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee of the National Assembly for Wales during the 5th Assembly, in particular the next 12 to 18 months.

1.2 Citizens Advice Cymru has produced a report titled 'Paying for and accessing social care in Wales: a people's perspective'. The report highlights a number of areas of concern, some of which are being addressed by the introduction of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWB Act 2014). However, there are a number of areas that require further attention or ongoing monitoring as outlined below.

1.3 We ask that the committee considers the following as part of its work programme:

- how effective the Information, Assistance and Advice services are at meeting the Information & Advice Quality Framework for Wales (IAQF) requirements and that the information provided is of quality-assured standards;
- review the number of requests for reassessments under the SSWB Act 2014 and consider the need for an appeals process;
- investigate the system of paying for care in Wales;
- review how effective the Welsh Government has been in addressing mental health issues;
- identify and promote best practice in social care;
- keep a watching brief on the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015.

Citizens Advice Cymru forward work programme recommendations

Information and Advice

1.4 We welcome the requirement under the SSWB Act 2014 for local authorities to establish Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) services. The services are seen as central to the success of the transition to the care and support system under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. Code of practice on Part 2 of the SSWB Act 2014 which covers the IAA services places an emphasis on ensuring the services are accessible, we fully support this. Citizens Advice Cymru believe this should be kept under review to ensure the service remains fully accessible, in particular, for those who are digitally excluded to ensure they do not experience any detriment as a result.

1.5 In addition, IAA services are required to meet national standards for the provision of information and advice as set out in the Information & Advice Quality Framework for Wales (IAQF). We believe the Committee should consider how effective the IAA services are at meeting the IAQF requirements and that the information provided is of a quality-assured standard. Our research showed that people did not know where to go to access information and advice and how best to use the information and advice to help them. Ensuring the IAA services are easy to access and provide quality-assured information and advice will be key to the success of the SSWB Act 2014.

Appeals and Complaints

1.6 Clear and accessible appeals and complaints procedures are essential to ensure information and services meet the needs of the people who use them and identify any problems or issues that need addressing. Unlike the English Care Act 2014, the SSWB Act 2014 does not contain an appeals process, but individuals can request a review or re-assessment of eligibility decisions in certain circumstances. We do not believe this is sufficient nor will it ensure people in need of support get help at the right time.

1.7 Our research shows people are reluctant to appeal a decision or make a complaint about decisions regarding social care services or public services more generally, nor will they be likely to request a reassessment. We believe this could have a negative impact on people's health and well-being.

1.8 The Health and Social Care Committee of the 4th Assembly highlighted the need to closely monitor how the SSWB Act 2014 is implemented. Mark Drakeford, the then Minister for Health and Social Services, committed to evaluate the Act in the Fifth Assembly, focusing on assessment and eligibility to determine whether the objectives are being met. We believe the committee should prioritise this and agree a timeline for review, including the numbers of reassessments requested or carried out.

Paying for care

1.9 A further issue for consideration by the Committee is how residential care is paid for in Wales. This was due to be reformed in April 2016, however, delays to reforms in England and the ongoing reforms to the welfare system resulted in an announcement to delay reforms in Wales. Given the increase in the number of people expected to require care in a residential setting to increase significantly, Citizens Advice Cymru believe the committee should investigate the system of paying for care, using existing evidence to make recommendations to Welsh Government on moving forward with reforms prior to April 2020 when the UK government is expected to introduce changes for England.

Mental Health

1.10 One of the Welsh Government's priorities is to improve the mental health and well-being of people in Wales. The committee should look at how active the Welsh Government has been in addressing this priority and consider what more can be done to ensure services across Wales including social services, financial capability support, domestic abuse provision and victim support are integrated to identify and support those with mental health issues.

1.11 In our response to the Welsh Government consultation on the mental health delivery plan we asked for the delivery plan to be updated to include:

1.12 Clearer cross referencing to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act and the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act where appropriate, in particular reference to:

- Identifying and supporting victims of domestic abuse during pregnancy and perinatal to promote the best possible start in life
- The new duties on local authorities to assess and support those with social care and wellbeing needs in the secure estate

- The new role of information, advice and assistance services to promote health and wellbeing

1.13 Inclusion of debt and welfare benefits advice, information and support services as a preventative measure and, in light of welfare reform, mitigating the affects on people with mental health problems.

Sharing Good Practice

1.14 During our research we found some examples of good practice, whilst there are some existing forums for sharing good practice we feel more could be done to highlight and share the best examples of both process and practice that improves the provision of social care in Wales and enables practitioners and the public to learn about and share the best experiences and ways of working. The committee could become an advocate for encouraging the sharing of best practice and consider the best ways of promoting these examples across Wales.

Well-being of Future Generations Act

1.15 The Well-being of Future Generations Act national indicators have now been agreed, the scrutiny of the indicators will be crucial in helping shape the national milestones. Of particular importance is the impact of financial capability/inclusion on people's health and well-being. The committee should keep a watching brief on the well-being indicators and scrutinise the Welsh Government's response to them, including the need to revise indicators and implement policy changes where necessary.

Longer-term work programme

1.16 We support the areas outlined in the longer term work programme for the committee, in particular, the integration of health and social care services and primary care, and gambling addiction, including the provision of support services, and the steps that could be taken to reduce harm.

1.17 In recent years gambling has changed beyond recognition, in 2016 it is available 24/7 and viewed as an acceptable form of leisure. In times of austerity vulnerable groups are more likely to turn to risky behaviour as a way to escape their situation or to fund their lifestyle. Newport Citizens Advice offers a Gambling Support Service providing free advice and information for anyone who is worried about gambling. The service is available to those experiencing problems with gambling, family and friends and anyone who may be at risk of developing a problem. We would be happy to discuss this service in more detail should the committee undertake an inquiry into gambling addiction.

About Citizens Advice Cymru

1.18 Citizens Advice is an independent charity covering England and Wales, operating as Citizens Advice Cymru in Wales with offices in Cardiff and Rhyl. There are 19 local Citizens Advice in Wales, all of whom are members of Citizens Advice Cymru, delivering services from over 375 locations.

1.19 The twin aims of the Citizens Advice service are:

- to provide the advice people need for the problems they face
- to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

1.20 The advice provided by the Citizens Advice service is free, independent, quality assured, confidential and impartial, and available to everyone regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, age or nationality.

1.21 The Citizens Advice Service has responsibilities for consumer representation in Wales as a result of the UK Government's changes to the consumer landscape¹. Since 1st April 2014 this includes statutory functions and responsibilities to represent post and energy consumers.

For further information or any queries please contact:

Michelle Lewis email: michelle.lewis@citizensadvice.org.uk

Policy Officer / Rheolwr Polisi

Citizens Advice Cymru / Cyngor ar Bopeth Cymru

¹ On 1st April 2013 responsibility for consumer representation was transferred from Consumer Focus to the Citizens Advice Service (including Citizens Advice Cymru) following the UK Government's review of the consumer landscape. From 1st April 2014 this includes statutory functions and responsibilities to represent post and energy consumers