

Mind over matter: Two years on

October 2020



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A follow-up report on the step change needed in emotional and mental health support for children and young people in Wales.





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The background

In **April 2018** we published our **Mind over Matter** report.

In our report we made a number of recommendations about what the Welsh Government should do to improve the support available for children and young people's **emotional and mental health and wellbeing**.

Our recommendations were based on evidence we received not only from **experts and professionals**, but **from children and young people** too.

Two years on, we wanted to know what **progress** had been made to deliver the improvements we called for in our original report.

While the **coronavirus pandemic** has delayed our report, we have continued to shine a spotlight on prioritising the emotional and mental health of children and young people throughout this **public health emergency**.

What did our original report say in 2018?

Our original report said that a **big change was needed** in the emotional and mental health support available for children and young people.

We were told that **not enough was being done** to help children and young people.

We found that this was the case whether someone **needed early help** to prevent things getting worse or **more specialist treatment to help** manage existing mental ill health.

To address this, we said:

- the focus needed to shift to **helping people earlier**, to help avoid things getting worse and to help ease the pressure on support services;
- **all services needed to work together**, not just health, but education, social services, advocacy services, the youth service, the police and others, if real change was going to be delivered;
- the Welsh Government needed to **make emotional and mental health a national priority**, to make sure support has the status and money it needs.



What are committees and what do we do?

Decisions about lots of things in Wales – including support for emotional and mental health – are made by the Welsh Government.

Committees exist to make sure questions are asked about how the Welsh Government makes these decisions and to consider the impact they have on the people of Wales.

Committees like ours are made up of Members of the Senedd

What have we done since 2018?

We made a promise in our Mind over Matter report that we would **keep a close eye** on what was being done to deliver our recommendations.

Since reporting in April 2018 we have done a number of things to **measure—and push for more—progress**.

We have **debated our work** in the Senedd chamber, **sent regular letters** to the Welsh Government asking for updates, and **spoken with experts, professionals, parents, carers and children and young people**.

All of this work has helped us draw conclusions about how much progress has been made, **two years since our original report was published**.

In March 2020, just as we were due to release our progress report, the **coronavirus pandemic** forced a nationwide lockdown. In light of this public health emergency, we delayed our planned report and Plenary debate. But our work on the emotional and mental health of children and young people did not stop. In holding the Government to account for the steps it is taking to manage the impact of the coronavirus on children and young people, the emotional and mental health and well-being of children and young people has remained at the centre of our work.

from all political parties, to make sure that lots of different views are represented.

We are here to listen to the voices of the people of Wales, so that we can present your views to the Welsh Government as clearly and fairly as we can.

Our aim is to make sure that the experiences and opinions of the general public, professionals and experts are listened to by the Welsh Government, and that it makes sensible decisions about how money is spent, how services are run, and what laws are made.

What do we think, two years on?

We see that **change is starting to happen**. We can also see that **people are very committed to making things better** in order to improve the emotional and mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

But our **children and young people are still struggling to find the emotional and mental health support they need**, whether that is at an early stage to help prevent problems developing, or later down the line, when things have become worse and specialist help and care is needed.

We think there are three important things that need the Welsh Government's attention between now and the end of this Senedd:

1

Change is not happening quickly enough

We know that what we are asking for is not always easy, and we know that money is not unlimited. But we think this is a top priority if we are going to get things right for the generations of children and young people who will shape the future of Wales. More needs to be done to make improvements more quickly.

2

We need whole-system change to be our focus

We recognise that lots of services are doing lots of really good things to improve the support available for children and young people. But we think that more needs to be done to make sure that every service is doing its bit, and that they all work together. This is vital to making sure that any child or young person - wherever they look for help - can get the support they need.

3

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic makes progress more necessary than ever

While we recognise that children and young people appear to be less susceptible to the coronavirus than adults, there is little doubt that its wider effects—and the measures taken to manage it—have impacted their lives significantly. These wider effects have been described to us as the “*collateral damage*” to children and young people caused by the pandemic, and include anxiety about periods away from school, clubs, family and friends.

Since we released our first report in April 2018 we have made it clear that we expect to see significant and sustainable change by the next election in May 2021. While we recognise the pressures placed on the Welsh Government and public services by the coronavirus pandemic, we think the collateral damage caused to our children and young people by this public health emergency means a strong focus on the emotional and mental health of children is more essential than ever. Between now and the next election, we will continue to **push for change** and to hold the Welsh Government to account for its actions in this vital area.

Our original report said we were not willing to allow this issue to be passed on yet again to a future Committee with repeated conclusions of “*more work to be done*”. We intend to keep our promise and do everything we can to ensure that the Welsh Government puts our recommendations into practice.



How did we come do these conclusions?

All the **information we have gathered since 2018** has been used to prepare this report. We have listened carefully to **Welsh Ministers** who have provided updates to us about progress.

We have also heard from the **Together for Children and Young People Programme**. This is a programme that was set up by the Welsh Government in 2016 to bring experts from different services together. The programme's focus was to work on plans to improve the mental health support available for children and young people.

In Spring 2020 we asked **experts and professionals** to rate the progress made to deliver our original recommendations as red, amber or green ("**RAG rating**"). We also asked them to tell us what they thought still needed to be done. We met with them on 13 February 2020 to discuss their views in more detail.

It was also very important to us to hear directly from **children and young people**, and from their **parents and carers**. We held workshops with them on 13 February and 11 March 2020 so that they could share their real life experience with us. We asked them to rate progress as red, amber or green too.



Welsh Ministers are the people who form the **Welsh Government**. They are supported by civil servants who are not politicians.

The Welsh Ministers make important decisions about things like how money is spent and how services are run. Civil servants help ensure that those decisions are implemented.



"RAG" rating

Red – progress not good enough and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Amber – some progress has been made but more needs to be done in the longer term.

Green – there are no major issues at the moment.

Timeline

Spring 2018



Mind over Matter published

Following six months of evidence gathering, we published our **Mind over Matter report**.

It made one key recommendation, and 27 others.

Taken together, we believed that our recommendations could deliver the step change we called for to build a population of emotionally resilient and mentally healthy children and young people in Wales.

Summer 2018



Mind over Matter debated in Senedd

We held a **debate in the Senedd's chamber** to draw all Members' attention to our report and the need for a better response from the Welsh Government

Autumn 2018



Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group established

As a result of our work, the Welsh Government created a group chaired jointly by the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education to look at how we support our children and young people's emotional and mental health, especially in our schools.

Our chair sits on this group to make sure all the things we think are important are considered.

Spring 2018



Written updates

We requested an **update from the Welsh Government** and the Together for Children and Young People Programme on the progress achieved one year on from our report.

Summer 2019

One year anniversary: committee sessions

We called the **Ministers** and the **Chair of the Together for Children and Young People Programme** to speak with us in the Senedd.

We asked them about what they had done so far and what still needed to be done.

After these sessions **we wrote a detailed letter** outlining what we thought needed to be done next.

Winter 2019

Consultation on progress

After receiving a **further update** from the Welsh Government, we decided that we needed to **gather information from people with first-hand experience** about how things were progressing.

We started by asking professionals and experts to rate progress against each of our recommendations as red, amber or green.

Spring 2020

Two year anniversary: workshops

We wanted to make sure that **children and young people**, and **parents and carers**, had a chance to feed in their thoughts too.

We held workshops where they were asked to share their experiences and rate progress as red, amber or green.

The Welsh Government also provided an **update on its progress**.

Summer 2020

Follow-up report delayed due to coronavirus pandemic

We had planned to release our follow-up report in April 2020. This was to be followed by a Plenary debate in summer term, to mark the two year anniversary of Mind over Matter's publication.

Due to the public health emergency, we paused our report, but our scrutiny of emotional and mental health continued as part of our consideration of the **impact of the coronavirus pandemic on children and young people**.



The detail

Our Mind over Matter report made one key recommendation and 27 others.

In the follow-up work we have done, we have considered all of our original recommendations and the progress that has been made to deliver them.

The next part of this report concentrates on the areas where people, in Spring 2020, were most concerned or had lots to say.

The final part of the report talks about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic since Spring 2020, and how supporting the emotional and mental health of our children and young people is now more important than ever.

Emotional and mental health and wellbeing as a national priority

In Mind over Matter we reported that three children in every average size classroom are estimated to have a mental health issue, and that half of all mental health problems start by the age of 14.

Our report emphasised the need to **build an emotionally and mentally healthy population of children and young people.**

We need to **equip children and young people with the tools they need** to be emotionally resilient, and to **intervene much earlier** to prevent problems becoming worse.

What did we say in 2018?

Our key recommendation was that the Welsh Government should make the emotional and mental wellbeing and resilience of our children and young people a **stated national priority.**

We said that a **joined-up, whole-system approach** is needed to deliver this vision.

What have we been told, two years on?

We were pleased to hear that people felt **progress is being made** and **greater priority is now being given to the emotional and mental wellbeing to children and young people.**

People described a **step-change** in the level of discussion about children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, and that there are moves towards a **more joined-up approach**, for example between health and education.

We were warned, however, that **progress must be sustained.** We heard that while there is a will to make the necessary improvements, **not all the necessary tools are in place** and that further work is needed. People believed that **more training**, and **more effective sharing of information** to help services and organisations **work together in a whole-system approach** is required.

There was a strong view that **the new curriculum could be a key opportunity** to drive this agenda forward in schools.

What did the Welsh Government say in Spring 2020?

The Welsh Government **February 2020 update** states:

“Mind over Matter has represented an ambitious driving force to improve the ways in which we all contribute to the emotional and mental health of children and young people.”

It goes on to say its actions in recent years “...**demonstrate our commitment to improve emotional wellbeing and mental health**” and refers to mental health’s prevalence in **Prosperity for All, Our National Mission, A Healthier Wales** and **Together for Mental Health** and additional budget investments as evidence of this.

In response to the key recommendation, the update provides detail on progress made in the education sector and communities (including youth work) in particular. It also refers to the extended but refocused work of the NHS-led Together for Children and Young People Programme, which will concentrate on:

- early help and enhanced support;
- neurodevelopmental support;
- working with Regional Partnership Boards on their “*strategic role [...] in this important multi-agency agenda*”.



Prosperity for All, Our National Mission, A Healthier Wales and Together for Mental Health are all Welsh Government strategic policy documents and form part of its programme for government.

What do we think needs to happen next?

We welcome the Welsh Government's acceptance of our **August 2019 follow-up recommendation** that the Together for Children and Young People Programme (T4CYP) be extended to help ensure **sustainable improvements** in access to mental health support services. We expressed our view that this was needed to deliver the **whole-system approach** that is essential to realising the **step-change** in emotional and mental health support for our children and young people. We remain concerned, however, that many key workstreams no longer sit under the Programme.

The evidence we have gathered in 2020 leads us to conclude that **continued commitment to—and leadership from—the Welsh Government and sector leads** is essential to drive this agenda forward and to facilitate joint working.

Improved communication is still needed between all partners, including developing a shared language and cross-sector core training, a better understanding of common purpose, and identifying and sharing what works.

Our conclusions, as detailed in the rest of this report, demonstrate that while we are **reassured that progress in education is visible and can be evidenced**, we are **far less confident that the pace of change in health and local government (including social services) is sufficient**. Significant and urgent progress is needed there to ensure that the **foundations of the whole-system approach we have called for are in place by the end of this Senedd**.

Over the last two years we have made clear our strong view that a single point of national coordination and accountability is needed to drive this whole-system approach. We think this is essential to the delivery this (now stated) national priority.

We remain deeply concerned that, with the extended but refocused T4CYP remit, the new division of responsibilities leaves the strategy and accountability fragmented. This should be placed in the hands of one, dedicated entity, and we believe this should be a more broadly defined Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group on the Whole-System Approach (as opposed to Whole-School Approach alone).

Whole-school approach

Our Mind over Matter report identified schools as a key place to help **promote mental wellbeing and build resilience**.

We recognised that **schools could not do everything** on their own, and that other places – including home, college or university, and youth services – were also important.

But we also felt that **schools were ideally placed to have a big impact** on reducing stigma and promoting good mental health, and called for a whole-school approach to be adopted in Wales.

What did we say in 2018?

We called on the Welsh Government to develop:

- a **map** that showed how health and education could work together to inform the new curriculum;
- ways of **measuring wellbeing** in schools;
- emotional and mental wellbeing **initiatives** in schools;
- **staff** capacity to support emotional and mental health and wellbeing.

What have we been told, two years on?

People were happy to see more recognition of the **important role education has to play** in our children's emotional and mental wellbeing.

They also welcomed the work that is beginning to happen to provide the **tools and training** needed to deliver this.

But people are still worried that the opportunity provided by the **new curriculum** to make mental health a really important part of a child's education could be missed if it is not made a really clear priority.

They also feel that opportunities to look at a **whole-system approach** are being missed.



Statutory guidance

Statutory guidance sets out what schools and local authorities must do to comply with the law. The law says that schools and local councils must promote the welfare of children who are learning (whether in school or in a setting other than school). This includes meeting their mental and emotional well-being needs. The guidance on the whole-school approach will be statutory, so schools and local authorities will have to take it into account in everything they do.

What did the Welsh Government say in Spring 2020?

The Welsh Government provides a detailed response in its **February 2020 update**.

Guidance on the whole school-approach

The **development of statutory guidance to support schools to develop a whole-school approach** to emotional and mental health, for learners and staff, is the main area of progress. For schools that already put well-being at the heart of their work, the guidance aims to help them to get even better. For schools that have not yet begun this journey, the guidance aims to be a starting point for supporting the well-being of children and young people.



Whole-system approach

Just like a jigsaw, we think that our approach to the emotional and mental health of our children needs all the right bits to be in the right places for things to work properly.

Schools alone cannot fix everything. Neither can doctors, nurses, youth workers, psychologists, the police or any other professional succeed on their own.

We think that all of these services need to work together for us to provide the best support we can to our children and young people. This is why we call it the “*whole-system approach*”.

What did the Welsh Government say in Spring 2020 (continued)?

The new curriculum

The Welsh Government's plans for the new curriculum include a focus on health and well-being. One strand of this work concentrates on developing pupils' understanding of mental health and emotional well-being. The Welsh Government states that the CAMHS in-reach project is *"already supporting"* the health and well-being elements of the curriculum *"through their delivery of training with school staff and others to utilise and implement mental wellbeing resources and delivery"*.

Working beyond schools

The whole-school statutory guidance recognises that:

"...schools are but one part of a wider system which includes the family, and friends, of children and young people as well as a myriad of general and specialist support services designed to support the child and wider family."

It also states that *"schools should not be left holding the baby"* and should be able to access appropriate support, particularly from health. The Welsh Government says *"work is already underway in many parts of Wales to provide a more collaborative, joined-up approach"*.



The new curriculum

The curriculum sets out the kind of education children and young people should have. A new curriculum will start being introduced in Wales from 2022. We think this is a great opportunity to make sure that children and young people learn about their emotional and mental health.



CAMHS in-reach project pilot

CAMHS stands for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. The pilot CAMHS in-reach project aims to help school staff – through training – to build skills, knowledge and confidence to support pupils' mental health and well-being. It also aims to improve schools' access to specialist advice when it is needed, by providing access to mental health experts. It is being piloted in parts of north, west and south-east Wales.

What do we think needs to happen next?

We commend the work done to implement a whole-school approach to the emotional and mental health of children and young people, and to develop **comprehensive statutory guidance** to make sure this happens. The consultation on this guidance closed on 30 September 2020. Once any final changes to the draft guidance (to reflect the consultation's findings) are made, the final guidance should be made available as a matter of priority.

The Welsh Government must **monitor the whole-school approach guidance's implementation and report to this Committee** before the end of this Senedd. Furthermore, **professional learning** – both in terms of initial teacher education and continuous professional learning – **is a crucial foundation for the whole school approach guidance**, and must be an **area of priority for the work of the Task and Finish Group**.

We will be scrutinising the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill during winter 2020 and spring 2021. We will explore the extent to which provision for the emotional and mental health of children and young people is made in the **new curriculum**, and will make our recommendations after considering all evidence available to us.

Significant progress has been made by the education sector to deliver our recommendations, but schools cannot do this alone.

The whole-school approach must form part of a wider **whole-system approach**, and we think that more focus is now needed on delivering that in other sectors such as health and local government.

Missing middle

Mind over Matter describes the “*missing middle*” as those children and young people **who need mental health support, but who may not be poorly enough to need—or meet criteria for—help from specialist services.**

We found that there are **a large number of children and young people** who fall into this group. While they may not need more specialist support (for example from a psychiatrist), they are often unable to get the help they do need because alternative services are not available.

Being able to access support at an early stage is crucial and can **prevent problems getting worse.**

What did we say in 2018?

We emphasised the importance of basing access to specialist services on the level of distress experienced by a child or young person, rather than on whether someone is displaying the symptom of a diagnosable disorder.

We called on the Welsh Government to set out how it would make sure that:

- appropriate support services were in place for the children and young people described as the “*missing middle*”;
- these children and young people’s needs were are being met.

We said this needed to be done urgently.



Single point of access

A “*single point of access*” describes a situation where all services share one “*front door*”.

All queries and referrals are dealt with by a single team to avoid the person who is looking for help having to go to lots of different places to get the different types of support that they may need.

What have we been told, two years on?

We were told about some positive examples of services and initiatives, including **projects being run in schools**, and in some parts of Wales a “**single point of access**” making it easier and quicker for children and young people to access the right support.

People said that things that have been shown to work well should be made available to more children and young people across Wales. We were very disappointed to hear that, overall, **children and young people still have limited options** for mental health support. Where services are available, there can be **long waiting times**.

We heard that much **better information is needed** to signpost children, parents and carers, and professionals who work with children and young people to the range of support services available, and to explain how these services can be accessed.

People also told us that often, children and young people are **not comfortable visiting formal health settings** such as GPs and hospitals to access support. We were told that children and young people should be **involved in the design of services** that will better meet their needs and make it easier for them to seek help.

What did the Welsh Government say in Spring 2020?

The Welsh Government’s **February 2020 update** recognises the need to address “*mild to moderate cases characterised as the ‘missing middle’*” and states that there has been:

“...a shift in emphasis to a preventative based model in line with the priorities of A Healthier Wales, while continuing to deliver for our most vulnerable children and young people who are supported by specialist services.”

The **whole-school approach statutory guidance** is described by the Welsh Government as:

“...facilitating a move away from a ‘refer on’ culture, to one where staff feel confident enough to be able to ‘hold on’ [...] The value of this approach to the “missing middle” of CYP is demonstrated by studies which show that for CYP in such situations, the everyday ‘little things’ that teachers do to nurture students can have far-reaching outcomes for student wellbeing.”

What did the Welsh Government say in Spring 2020 (continued)?

The Welsh Government also refers to the Together for Children and Young People's focus on **early help and enhanced support**, **neurodevelopment** and **regional partnership boards**, stating that they will:

"...be key to deliver improvements for those young people who do not meet the threshold for specific services. The program will develop a framework to support this approach, to result in improvements in service delivery."

Early help and enhanced support



This is advice, support and direct interventions at the earliest point of identified need. Its aim is to support children and young people in a way that prevents problems escalating, and to provide choice and a range of offers that best meet a child's and family's needs in a timely way. The aspiration is to avoid referral to other services.

Neurodevelopment



Neurodevelopment is the brain's ability to develop the pathways responsible for the brain's ability to do things like learn, focus, develop memories and interact socially. Some children, young people and adults have neurodevelopmental conditions. These include (but aren't limited to) things like Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Regional partnership boards (RPBs)



RPBs have been established to improve the well-being of the population and improve how health and care services are delivered. They bring together health boards, local authorities and the third sector. There are 7 in Wales.

What do we think needs to happen next?

In 2018 we said not enough had changed since our predecessor's report of 2014 for this group of children and young people. Two years on, in 2020, we are still hearing **too many reports of limited options** for children and young people who need help but do not meet the threshold for specialist mental health or neurodevelopmental services. The capacity of **local primary mental health support services** remains a significant concern to us.

We welcome the work that is underway to develop a **National Early Help and Enhanced Support Framework**. This **needs to progress with pace** – without it, demand for specialist services will continue to outstrip supply, threatening their sustainability and effectiveness, and leaving too many children and young people without the support they need.

In its response to this report, and to enable us to review progress before the end of this Senedd, the Welsh Government should outline the steps taken this autumn term to deliver the National Early Help and Enhanced Support Framework, and provide a plan (including timescales and deadlines it is setting itself) for how a consistent support offer for the whole of Wales will be achieved between now and dissolution.



Dissolution

Before an election, the Senedd is dissolved. This means there are no longer Members of the Senedd or Committees. This is to make way for new candidates to campaign for election and become MSs.

Crisis and out of hours support

Children and young people experiencing a mental health crisis are in need of **urgent help**. At such times they may be at **risk of hurting themselves or other people**.

Our Mind over Matter report welcomed the setting up of **crisis teams** in each health board area, but we found that 24/7 support was not always available across Wales. We also found there was an **over-reliance on A&E departments** and **the police** to respond to young people in serious distress.

What did we say in 2018?

We called on the Welsh Government to:

- look at how mental health professionals can **support the police** when responding to calls;
- consider how crisis teams can provide **training to frontline services**;
- make sure there are designated **under 18s hospital beds** for young people in crisis;
- make available a **single point of access** to specialist services across Wales;
- outline what more needs to be done to deliver a safe and cost-effective **24/7 crisis care service** in all areas of Wales.

What have we been told, two years on?

People told us their concerns about a **lack of consistent, 24/7 access to crisis support across** Wales, and that young patients and their families feel let down because they are **unable to access help at the time it is most needed**.

We heard that crisis services are **too adult-focused** and better provision for children and young people is needed. We were told that an adult setting such as an emergency department can be a very distressing environment for a young person in crisis (young people age 16 and over attend adult A&E departments). We were concerned to hear that young people are often **responded to insensitively or judgmentally**.

People told us **improved training** for those in frontline services would help ensure a more compassionate response to young people in distress.

We also heard that some success has been seen from **triage models** where mental health professionals provide advice to police when responding to calls about young people in crisis.

What did the Welsh Government say in Spring 2020?

The Welsh Government's **February 2020 update** refers to work underway to better understand:

- the **current demand for urgent access to mental health support**, including among children and young people. It says that this work *“is fundamental to improving the crisis pathway”* and that the findings are expected from the **NHS National Collaborative Commissioning Unit** by April 2020.
- **what services are provided locally and the pathways to access support**. It says that this work, being led by the **NHS Delivery Unit**, *“will inform future action to move towards more standardised support”*.



Triage

This is a word that describes how the order of treatment is decided and/or how the urgency for support is assessed. It comes from the French word *“trier”* which means *“to sort”*.



NHS National Collaborative Commissioning Unit

This Unit supports work to measure the performance and quality of NHS services. It does this in a number of ways, including by: advising on how things can be improved; analysing performance information; and encouraging people to work together.



NHS Delivery Unit

This unit provides professional support to the Welsh Government to monitor and manage performance delivery across NHS Wales, and works with the NHS to make improvements.

What do we think needs to happen next?

We welcome the positive reports of **collaboration between the police and mental health services to help support people in crisis**. This work needs to continue with pace and with support from the Welsh Government where required.

The information provided by the Welsh Government about steps being taken to improve crisis and out-of-hours support is disappointingly thin. We accept that current demand and existing services need to be understood in order to inform future services and support, but it is **taking too long to establish this baseline information**. In our 2019 follow-up work we said that it was not acceptable that, over a year after Mind over Matter's publication, the Welsh Government could not give us an accurate picture of how 24/7 access to crisis and out-of-hours looks across Wales. Another year on, we are no clearer and that is deeply worrying. This is not good enough.

Children and young people in need of crisis and out-of-hours support are some of the most vulnerable members of our society. In its response to this report, and to enable us to review progress before the end of this Senedd, the Welsh Government should outline the steps taken this autumn term to improve crisis and out of hours care, and provide a plan (including timescales and deadlines it is setting itself) for how 24/7 access to age-appropriate crisis and out-of-hours will be achieved between now and dissolution.

Inpatient services

There are two inpatient units in Wales, one in north Wales and one in south Wales. These are available for young people with **serious mental health problems who need to be looked after in hospital**.

In our work for Mind over Matter in 2018, we found that there was **not enough capacity** in these units to meet the demand for inpatient care, particularly in north Wales. This meant that some patients, including those with complex or very specialist needs, were sometimes admitted to a hospital a **long way from home** and sometimes over the border in England.

What did we say in 2018?

We called on the Welsh Government to make sure that there are **enough spaces in specialist hospitals, as close to home as possible**, for children and young people who need them.

We also asked the Welsh Government to **improve the step-up and step-down support** provided for children and young people entering or leaving inpatient care.



Step-up and step-down support

This is support that helps children and young people move into - and out of - hospital care smoothly and safely.

What have we been told, two years on?

We were told that more work needs to be done to make sure that the inpatient mental health units in Wales have the **right numbers and skill mix of staff**.

People are still very concerned about the numbers of children and young people with **complex or specialist needs** who still cannot be looked after in hospitals in Wales and who are admitted to hospitals across the border.

People told us that inpatient services must reflect the needs of children and young people today, and that these may be different to the needs of young patients in the past. For example, we heard that mental health services are seeing people who need **inpatient care at ever younger ages**.

We heard that the different organisations and agencies involved in looking after children need to **work together better**. We were told that a clear understanding of what inpatient services need to provide is required, and **alternative solutions to inpatient care and secure accommodation** need to be developed.

WHSSC told us that, by April 2021, a new Tier 4 service specification should be implemented in full and revised capacity commissioned, including new enhanced/high care beds. It said that implementation was to be managed in two phases, with the aim of the new specification applied to existing services from April 2020.



Secure accommodation

Children and young people who are believed to be a serious risk to themselves or to others are usually looked after in secure accommodation. This means that their freedoms are restricted for specific reasons. These reasons may be established via the criminal justice system, outlined in a court order, or decided by specialists whose job it is to consider a child or young person's welfare.

What did the Welsh Government say in Spring 2020?

The Welsh Government **February 2020 update** reiterates its commitment to developing **community services** so that young people do not need to be admitted to inpatient services.

In relation to the situation in the **north Wales** inpatient unit, it states:

“...significant improvement to workforce issues have been made, which has brought the north Wales unit back to full staffing levels and full commissioned capacity”.

In **south Wales**, necessary work to ensure that Tŷ Lliard is able to accept children at risk of suicide and self-harm is reported as complete.

In relation to the **distances travelled by inpatients to access specialist support**, the Welsh Government says:

“Whilst we continue to acknowledge there will be times when young people, requiring high need care will be cared for at very specialist centres in England which provide services for the whole of the UK, we remain committed to ensuring that young people requiring inpatient care receive this as close to home as possible and in one of the two Welsh CAMHS inpatient units whenever possible”.

The Welsh Government also lists the following developments:

- the creation of a **national framework for hospital-based mental health care** for adults, children and young people, to be working by April 2021;
- the expansion of beds to **manage complex cases closer to home** and within Welsh units, reducing the need for out-of-area placements and supporting step-up and step-down support;
- planning for the creation of a **specialist all-Wales service** to support children and young people who do not meet inpatient admission criteria but whose needs are too complex for local authority residential care.

What do we think needs to happen next?

We welcome the work undertaken to ensure that the inpatient units in Abergele and Tŷ Lliardiard are better able to accommodate children and young people in need of hospital admission. Nevertheless, we remain concerned that **workforce and safety issues** have arisen in the last two years, periodically **reducing capacity and disrupting the support** available for Welsh patients.

We also remain deeply concerned that some children and young people appear to be admitted to inpatient units not because they are the most appropriate setting for them, but because **suitable alternatives** are not available.

We acknowledge that, in specific and complex cases, the most specialist care may be some distance from a child or young person's home. However, we believe that these should be the exception. We welcome the Welsh Government's stated commitment to ensuring that young people requiring inpatient care receive this **as close to home as possible** and in one of the two Welsh units whenever possible.

In its response to this report, and to enable us to review progress before the end of this Senedd, the Welsh Government should outline the steps taken this autumn term to improve inpatient care, and provide a plan (including timescales and deadlines it is setting itself) for how the new service specification and revised capacity will be implemented in full between now and dissolution.

Psychological therapies

Psychological therapies (often referred to as ‘talking therapies’) are a crucial **form of support/treatment** for many children and young people with emotional and mental health issues.

Our Mind over Matter report highlighted that without a full range of child-appropriate psychological therapies available across Wales, children and young people may not get the **most suitable support** for their needs and their mental health could get worse.

We were also worried that there was also a risk that they may be **prescribed medication** but go without the psychological support that should always accompany this.

What did we say in 2018?

We called on the Welsh Government to publish a **national plan for psychological therapies for children and young people**.

We said that this should also look at the **workforce** and **funding** needed to deliver the range of therapeutic services across Wales.

We also requested that more work be done on how **medication is prescribed** to children and young people.

What have we been told, two years on?

We heard that **recruitment** in this area is still a challenge. We were also told that we needed a better understanding of the psychology workforce and skills required.

People told us that access to psychological therapies must be improved for **looked after and adopted children**, who often struggle to access the therapeutic services they need.

We were told that many children and young people may have complex issues and/or don't have a ‘neat’ diagnosis. It was argued that this means **more evidence is needed about the kind of services that are most effective** for these children.

We heard again that **children and young people should have a voice in the design of services**.

What did the Welsh Government say in Spring 2020?

The Welsh Government **February 2020 update** states its continued commitment to improving access to psychological therapies. This, it says, is demonstrated by its inclusion as a priority within the **Together for Mental Health delivery plan 2019-2022**.

Service developments

Matrix Plant – a guide designed to help develop, plan and deliver a Wales-wide approach to providing psychological therapies for children and their families – has been issued for consultation.

It does not recommend specific models of service, because models may vary and change over time. However, it states that services should be designed to ensure that they can meet the needs

of the child at the earliest appropriate opportunity and at the earliest possible stage in their development.

Workforce developments

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) and Social Care Wales (SCW) will work with the third sector, local authorities and the NHS to produce a workforce plan for mental health. The plan will cover children and adults, and will involve all the different professionals needed as well as voluntary and public services.

Prescribing

The Welsh Government has *“begun to explore options for further work involving prescribing for children and young people with emotional, behavioural, and mental health problems”*. It states that further information will be provided to the Committee *“when we are in a position to do so”*.



Delivery plans

The Welsh Government has a series of delivery plans, across a wide range of subjects. Their purpose is to outline the Welsh Government's priorities and planned outcomes in any given policy area..



HEIW and SCW

HEIW is part of NHS Wales. It makes sure the healthcare workforce in Wales is educated, trained and developed.

SCW sets standards for, and develops, the care and support workforce.

What do we think needs to happen next?

We welcome the publication of the draft **Matrics Plant guidance** for consultation. Given its importance to driving improvements in psychological therapies, and the Welsh Government's Director of Mental Health's comments in June 2019 that it is "*badly needed*", we believe that the final guidance needs to be made available and implemented as a matter of priority.

We further welcome the Welsh Government's action to implement our **August 2019 follow-up recommendation on psychological therapies** that it should work proactively with HEIW to ensure that the mental health workforce is prioritised. Maintaining a stream of sufficiently trained therapeutic practitioners to support children and young people is key. A timeline for the development and implementation of the **workforce plan for mental health** needs to be provided.

In our Mind over Matter report in 2018, and in our follow-up recommendations in 2019, we stated that a national review of **prescribing trends** is needed. Two years on, we are not reassured by the statement that options for further work on prescribing for children and young people with emotional, behavioural, and mental health problems are starting to be explored.

In its response to this report, and to enable us to review progress before the end of this Senedd, the Welsh Government should outline the steps taken this autumn term to implement the Matrics Plant guidance, develop a workforce plan for mental health needs, and undertake work on prescribing trends. It should provide a plan (including timescales and deadlines it is setting itself) for how these three areas will be addressed fully between now and dissolution.

Transitions

The term “*transitions*” is used to describe a **person’s movement** from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) into adult mental health services.

Although there is **guidance for services** which recognises that a move from child to adult services should be based on an **individual’s needs** (rather than an arbitrary age), the guidance is not consistently implemented and **many young people are automatically transitioned at 18**.

The transition from children’s to adult mental health services can be a frightening time for young people. At this age, young people may be **particularly vulnerable** and they may also be experiencing other transitions (for example, in education).

As reported in Mind over Matter, some young people said **transition from child to adult mental health services felt “like jumping off a cliff edge”**.

What did we say in 2018?

We called on the Welsh Government to make sure the **guidance on transitions is implemented**.

We also said that health boards and local authorities across Wales should **regularly report** to the Welsh Government setting out how they are complying with the guidance.

We called on the Welsh Government to look at options for **improving transitions, including extending CAMHS to age 25**.

What have we been told, two years on?

We heard about the importance of a young person having **consistent, ongoing support from a professional they trust**. People told us that the way the current system is structured means that there is **no continuity** for the young person involved, and that struggling young people can feel abandoned at this point.

We heard again that **18 is a very vulnerable age**, and that moving a young person to adult mental health services at this stage of their development may not be in their best interests. Transitions should be **decided on an individual basis** and **in consultation with the young person concerned**.

We also heard that extending CAMHS services up to age 25 would have significant **resource** implications.

What did the Welsh Government say in Spring 2020?

The Welsh Government **February 2020 update** states:

- draft **transition guidance for all health services**, including mental health, is being issued for consultation (this **consultation** has since ended, on 27 July 2020, but its results are not available at the time of writing this follow-up report);
- an independent **review of evidence of all-age mental health services** has been completed and will report shortly (this **review** has since been published, on 3 June 2020).

The Welsh Government also says:

- **children and young people have contributed** to this work, some of whom have lived experience of accessing mental health services;
- health boards will be expected to review transitions annually, share best practice, and **monitor implementation** of the new guidance (including through asking for user feedback);
- health boards will be required to **review** their approaches after two years to ensure that they are fit for purpose, and the Welsh Government will also conduct a review after two years to ensure consistency across Wales;
- some health boards are considering plans to allow the extension of current CAMHS services to **age 25**.

What do we think needs to happen next?

Our **August 2019 follow-up recommendation on transitions** urged the Welsh Government to consider all options for improving transitions, including exploring the extension of CAMHS up to the age of 25. This was to provide an extended period for young people to move into adult services, rather than immediately transferring at the age of 18.

We note the findings of the **independent review of evidence of all-age mental health services** in June 2020 that “...*optimal transitions’ between child and adult mental health services are the exception rather than the rule*” because:

- the timing of the transition often comes at a particularly vulnerable point in young people’s lives;
- there is fear and anxiety associated with the transition, and CAMHS may have offered safety and support during a very difficult period in young people’s lives;
- cultural, structural and organisational differences exist between children and adult mental health services.

We therefore welcome the work that has been undertaken to create transition guidance. Given the vulnerability of many young people as they transition from child to adult services, we believe that the final guidance needs to be made available and implemented as a matter of priority. We also believe that consistency should exist across Wales in terms of the age or stage at which young people transition from one service to another.

In its response to this report, and to enable us to review progress before the end of this Senedd, the Welsh Government should outline the steps taken this autumn term to improve transitions. It should provide a plan (including timescales and deadlines it is setting itself) for how a consistent approach across Wales to transitions will be achieved between now and dissolution.

Vulnerable children and young people

Looked after and adopted children have a much higher prevalence of mental health issues, often as a result of neglect or trauma. Many have lived in families where they have been exposed to mental illness, substance misuse or domestic violence. A significant percentage will have experienced abuse and/or neglect.

Our Mind over Matter report highlighted other potentially vulnerable groups, who may also need specific emotional and mental health support. These include young carers, youth offenders, homeless young people, black and minority ethnic children and young people, care leavers, and those with substance misuse problems.

What did we say in 2018?

We expressed our particular alarm at reports from children's services, adoption services, and local authorities that services for looked after children were "*at breaking point*" and "*in crisis*".

We called on the Welsh Government to make sure the **emotional and mental health needs of children and young**

people are assessed when they enter the care system or youth justice system, and that they are regularly assessed after that.

We also asked the Welsh Government to do some specific work to look at the **provision of emotional, behavioural and mental health support for looked after and adopted children.**

What have we been told, two years on?

We heard that **greater priority needs to be given** to the emotional and mental health needs of looked after children and young people, to ensure they receive the support they need at an early stage and to prevent problems worsening or developing further ahead. People reported that **children entering care are not systematically assessed** (or reviewed regularly). We were told that **care plans** should address a child or young person's emotional and wellbeing needs.

People told us that the **different agencies involved need to work better together**, and develop a shared

language and understanding about how services should be supporting children and young people. It was reported that **battles about what is a "health" issue and what is a "social" issue** can mean looked after and adopted children with complex and challenging needs can struggle to access appropriate care.

We were told that **trauma informed services** need to be developed across the whole system.

There are pockets of good practice but these are not shared effectively. Additionally, it was argued that **the short term nature of funding** for initiatives means many projects are not sustainable.

What did the Welsh Government say in Spring 2020?

The Welsh Government **February 2020 update** states:

- all children and young people in care have a **right to have a health assessment and plan** “*which should include an assessment of mental health needs*”;
- the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 requires social care and health professionals to **work together** to “*ensure the good health of LAC and that their health is checked on a regular basis*”;
- the mental health and well-being of children in care is a **key priority** in the Improving Outcomes for Children Work Programme, which is overseen by the **Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group**;
- a **whole-system, cross-government approach to budgeting** for looked after children has been adopted with a view to delivering positive action and outcomes for them;
- a **Whole System Collaborative Group** has been established to ensure effective working across health, education, social services and Together for Children and Young People



Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG)

This group advises Ministers on ways to improve the lives of looked after children. It is chaired by David Melding MS and its members come from relevant agencies.



Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

This piece of law reforms social services in Wales. It sets out everything local councils have to do to help people in need of (or who provide) care and support, and to improve their well-being.

What do we think needs to happen next?

Our **August 2019 follow-up recommendation on support for vulnerable groups** called for more detail about – and evidence of – relevant workstreams and programmes working in tandem to ensure that the most vulnerable children and young people are having their emotional and mental health needs assessed and can access support promptly.

We welcome the steps the Welsh Government has taken so far to seek to deliver this recommendation. Nevertheless, the evidence we have gathered suggests that the work being undertaken at a strategic level to work more effectively across services is **not always translating into joint-working on the ground**. While this is the case, the deep concern we expressed in 2019 about the provision of emotional well-being and mental health support for care-experienced children remains.

Looked after children and young people are some of the most vulnerable members of our society. In its response to this report, and to enable us to review progress before the end of this Senedd, the Welsh Government should outline the steps taken this autumn term to improve support for looked after children. It should provide an outline of its and the MAG's priorities in this area, and a plan (including timescales and deadlines it is setting itself) for how they will be achieved fully between now and dissolution.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic

In March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic led to a series of **unprecedented restrictions on our daily lives** in order to **protect public health**.

As a Committee, we immediately launched an **inquiry on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on children and young people**, including students in further and higher education. This work continues.

As part of this inquiry, we prioritised consideration of the **pandemic's impact on our children and young people's emotional and mental health**.

What are our main conclusions to date about the main impacts of the coronavirus on our children and young people's emotional and mental health, and what did we call for to address those?

The wider effects of the coronavirus - and the measures put in place in to manage it - have **impacted children and young people's lives significantly**.

Children and young people have been at much greater risk from the **"collateral damage" and the unintended consequences of the lockdown restrictions**, than from the disease itself.

*"Children are probably unlikely to be directly affected by the virus with physical illness— that's uncommon in terms of severe illness, but as an inflammatory condition, which we see, but it's very uncommon. What they have been affected by quite greatly is, if I could call it, **collateral damage**—their schools have been closed, their clubs have been shut, they can't socialise. All those things have affected children, and they're very anxious, because there's a lot of worry about coronavirus, which they're hearing about—their grandparents might have died, or they're hearing that thousands of people have died."*

Dr David Tuthill, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, **9 June 2020**

Education

While school closures were a necessary part of managing the pandemic in the early months, it was clear that the **impact on many children's well-being of being away from school was substantial.**

On this basis, we said that— from September 2020—children must have **consistent, high quality contact with their teachers**, and that opportunities to progress their education must be maximised for all children in Wales.

We emphasised that this would **enable schools to play their vital part in the whole-system approach to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.** We said that the guidance we had called for on a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health should be published for consultation as a matter of priority (this was subsequently **published** on 8 July 2020).

We think the pandemic makes this guidance more important than ever, and its **implementation should not be delayed.**

We welcome the continued prioritisation of the Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group on the Whole-School Approach. We also welcome the investment of £5 million from Education and Health budgets in 2020-21 for the whole-school approach.

We think spending must be in line with **whole system reforms, and must be monitored.**

Health

The **usual referral routes (eg. schools/ GPs) have been less accessible during the pandemic** and children and young people need to know where they can go for help.

We need not only better signposting but, crucially, to address the gaps in service provision for lower level/ therapeutic support for the **missing middle.**

We are concerned that too many children and young people have been **unable to access the mental health support they need.** While the Welsh Government states that mental health services remained open and able to support children and young people, including those whose needs are at tiers 0 and 1, the evidence we gathered did not suggest that this was their experience.

As such, and in line with our previous calls, we need **more transparent data** on children and young people's access to mental health services during the pandemic and going forward. The Welsh Government's commitment to resuming the **publication of routine data** by the end of this year must be delivered, and an indication given of when work with the Royal College of Child and Paediatric Health to establish a **useful outcome indicator** for children accessing services will happen.

We heard concerns about the ability of children and young people to access appropriate support when experiencing a **crisis** during the lockdown period, and asked Welsh Government how this was being monitored and what steps it was taking to ensure crisis care support is available for all children and young people across Wales who need it.

Individual cases drawn to our attention as a committee suggest that issues continue in this area, suggesting that **further work on monitoring the quality and availability of services is needed.**

It is too early for data to show what impact the pandemic is having on **suicide rates**. However, **factors which contribute to suicide rates and suicide risk** (eg. economic factors, loneliness and isolation) need to be **monitored closely**.

We would welcome more information about the work to investigate young suicide and probable suicide during the pandemic, led by the NHS Delivery Unit.

Individuals' **needs and preferences for the delivery of mental health services vary - one size does not fit all**. We requested assurance that plans are in place for a safe return to face-to-face health services where this is the most appropriate option, and that there are clear principles for determining where a continuation of remote support may be beneficial. Alongside this, we said the Welsh Government should monitor how many children are currently without access to the digital infrastructure

necessary to access health and support services.

We are **not reassured that sufficient provision for face-to-face health and support services are in place** for situations in which lockdown restrictions are in force.

We were concerned that while the physical health needs of the population were necessarily a priority in the early stages of this pandemic, **services to support children's mental health and wellbeing were at risk of de-prioritisation**. The virus has not gone away and there is a real possibility of further waves of the coronavirus - we called on the Welsh Government to ensure **children's mental health services are protected** in order to avoid the long-term consequences that would follow from a lack of timely, appropriate support.

We would welcome further detail on how the **single points of access** are operating and a response to our request for information about **enabling parents to refer directly**.

We asked for **clarity about the repurposing of mental health funding during the pandemic**, and assurance that sufficient funding is available to prioritise the service transformation required in children's mental health in Wales.

We would welcome an update on how **evidence of the impact** of the first allocation of £3.5 million has been collected and assessed, and how the second allocation of £3.5 million (for

which health board proposals were required by 7 September) **will be spent.**

There were concerns about the impact of the coronavirus on CAMHS **inpatient units.** We were given assurances that children and young people had only been discharged from inpatient care when this was clinically appropriate. We **wrote to Healthcare**

Inspectorate Wales for an update on its arrangements for visiting and inspecting inpatient facilities.

The Welsh Government states that £2 million has been invested in mental health inpatient capacity and we would welcome an outline of **how much has been spent on children and young people mental health services specifically.**

What do we think needs to happen next?

Managing the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people needs to be a **clear priority** for the Welsh Government and all its associated public bodies.

Children's rights must be at the centre of the approach to managing the next phase of the pandemic.

Maintaining – and in some of the areas listed earlier in this report, increasing – momentum for the **delivery of our Mind over Matter recommendations** must be a priority between now and the election.

In its response to this report, and to enable us to review progress before the end of this Senedd, the Welsh Government should **outline the steps it is taking to address each of the points above.**