

Children’s Commissioner for Wales

Budget estimate 2017/18

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1. Background to this estimate submission

I submit this budget estimate to Welsh Ministers as required by paragraph 6 (2) of Schedule 2 of the Care Standards Act 2000. It sets out the resources required to discharge my statutory functions. Full details of my salary are contained in my annual report and accounts, which is available to read and download from www.childcomwales.org.uk

2. Role and functions of the Children's Commissioner for Wales

Established by the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children's Commissioner for Wales (CCfW) is an independent children's rights institution. My remit is laid down in the Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001, which amended the Care Standards Act 2000. My principal aim is to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. This must be my overriding objective when undertaking my functions.

A child is defined in the 2000 Act as a person under the age of 18, although I am able to act when a young person is older than this when certain conditions are fulfilled. For example, I can act on behalf of a young person who has been placed in care and for whom the local authority has a continuing duty under the Children Act 1989.

In exercising my functions, I must have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – an international charter which sets out the minimum standards for children and young people wherever they live. The UNCRC underpins all of my work. To ensure children's rights are upheld in Wales, I can review the functions or exercise of functions of various public bodies and of Welsh Government, and review and monitor the arrangements which certain public bodies have in place to safeguard and promote the rights of children in respect of dealing with complaints and representations, ensuring that proper action is taken in response to whistleblowing, representing the views and wishes of children, and providing children with advice and support.

My remit covers all areas of the devolved powers of the National Assembly for Wales insofar as they affect children's rights and welfare. I can also make representations to the Welsh Ministers about any matter affecting the rights and welfare of children in Wales.

3. Governance arrangements

As corporation sole, responsibility and accountability for the activities of my office remain with me, and as Accounting Officer, I am responsible for maintaining a sound system of governance. As a public office in receipt of public funds, I am committed to implementing rigorous and transparent accountability and decision-making systems. My Governance Framework comprises the systems, processes and values by which I direct and control the activities of my office. The following elements are key components:

- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

Members of this Committee provide advice and assurance in respect of corporate governance, risk management and control within the Commissioner's office and the adequacy of the internal and external audit arrangements.

It meets at least bi-annually and is made up of non-executive members and senior staff of my office. It is independently chaired by a non-executive member.

- Young People's Advisory Panel and Commissioner's Advisory Panel

This year, I have established two independent advisory panels to provide support and advice for me and my team. These non-statutory forums will provide specific advice and support on the:

1. vision, values and purpose of my office
2. strategic direction and planning
3. accountability to citizens for the public funds it receives; and
4. internal control and risk management arrangements.

- Internal Audit

This year, as a joint procurement exercise with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, I have appointed Deloitte to provide internal audit for the office. They operate to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and submit regular reports, which include the independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's system of internal control. To date, they have provided me with reasonable assurance that there is adequate and effective internal control process to management the achievement of the organisation's objectives.

4. Accountability

- External Audit

On an annual basis, my organisation's accounts are examined and certified by the Auditor General for Wales, in accordance with paragraph 9 of the Schedule 2 to the Care Standards Act. The Auditor General is responsible for providing an opinion on whether the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the organisation. They consider a number of matters both qualitative and quantitative relating to the accounts. To date, the Wales Audit Office has yet to raise any significant concerns about the qualitative aspects of our accounting practices and financial reporting and have yet to identify any material weaknesses in our internal controls. In 2016, the Auditor General for Wales gave an unqualified opinion on our 2015/16 accounts.

5. Efficiency

- Staff structure

Upon taking up my role in April 2015, internal and external developments pointed to a need for some re-organisation of the structure, in order to respond to the continuing demands placed upon my team. They included the recommendations of the independent Shooter Review of my office, the 10% cut to my 2016/17 budget from the Welsh Government, societal and governmental changes since the establishment of my office and my consultation - Beth Nesa' I What Next - of children, young people and professionals about the future direction of my office.

My new structure – see separate document – has been in operation from 1 April 2016. This streamlining of the team had the aim of devoting as much of the resource as possible into delivering positive outcomes for children's rights in Wales, while fulfilling all duties in relation to excellent financial, data and people management.

Joint working

I continue to be open to exploring the possibility of greater collaboration and my office is already engaged with the Public Services Ombudsman, the Older People's Commissioner, the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Future Generations Commissioner about this. Independence is a defining feature of any rights-based organisation and is viewed by the UN as a source of legitimacy and authority. With this in mind, I am supportive of joint programmes of work that will assist in driving improved outcomes for children and young people.

This year, we are leading on two pieces of joint work with the Older People's Commissioner for Wales on an intergenerational project and with the Future Generations Commissioner to embed children's human rights into public services in Wales. I have also seconded two members of staff to the Future Generations Commissioner: a policy advisor to implement the programme of work in relation to embedding children's human rights into public services, and our Human Resources Officer to provide day-to-day HR support in compliance with statutory obligations and best practice.

My office is also part of two networks: the British and Irish Network of Ombudsman and Children's Commissioners (BINOCC) and the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC). Membership of these networks allows us to exchange knowledge with similar organisations and enables us to work collaboratively in holding others to account in the delivery of children's rights, including the UK Government. I am currently developing a joint resource on children's rights with the Scottish and English commissioners' offices for children with additional learning needs.

- Efficiencies this year

Whilst my finance team ensure that the finances and resources of the organisation are managed efficiently and effectively, every member of my staff team, via our project management approach, must now take responsibility for making sure as much of our resource as possible is being directed towards promoting and safeguarding children's rights. We have delivered prudent savings this year whilst continuing to protect and promote children's rights. These include:

- Significantly less spend on travel and subsistence
- Less spend on office administration.

5. A Plan for All Children and Young People 2016 - 2019

I aspire to a Wales where all children and young people have an equal chance to be the best they can be.

Over 7000 children and young people took part in our largest-ever consultation in 2015. It enabled us to draft a three-year strategic plan, which was firmly rooted in the opinions and wishes of those who we're here to serve. Included in 'A Plan for All Children and Young People 2016 – 2019' are the following priorities:

1. Mental health, wellbeing and tackling bullying
2. Poverty and social inequalities
3. Play and leisure
4. Safety (in the community, school and at home)
5. Raising awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and promoting its adoption across public services
6. Transition to adulthood for all young people requiring continuing support and care.

I will be targeting these rights issues at three levels:

- **Underpinning policies and laws for children's rights**

I will work to influence and change these so that they fulfil the Welsh Government's commitment to putting children's rights at the centre.

- **Effective implementation of these policies and laws throughout Wales and for all groups of children and young people**

I will monitor how children's rights are fulfilled, promote best practice and challenge those who do not respect rights.

- **Children and young people's experiences and outcomes**

I will listen to children and young people and seek real changes in their everyday quality of life and equal chances to fulfil their potential.

Where required, I will use the powers set out for me in legislation to hold Government and public bodies to account on how they deliver human rights to children and young people.

6. Budget estimate for 2017/18

Summary

The budget requirement for 2017-18 is £1,543,500.

Estimate and indicative budget level for the next three financial years:

	Estimate	Indicative	Indicative
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-2020
	(£)	(£)	(£)
Salaries	1,052,656	1,080,961	1,079,672
Premises	95,480	95,480	95,480
Office costs	104,000	104,000	104,000
Training and recruitment	32,100	30,600	30,600
Travel and subsistence	24,800	24,800	24,800
External audit fee	18,853	18,853	18,853
Internal audit fee	10,500	10,500	10,500
Communication	46,600	46,600	46,600
ICT	18,500	18,500	18,500
Project costs	108,434	105,934	105,934
Capital and Depreciation	10,000	10,000	10,000
Total Expenditure	1,521,923	1,546,228	1,544,939
Funding from Welsh Government	1,543,500	1,543,500	1,543,500
(Over)/Under Spend	21,577	(2,728)	(1,439)

7. Effect on reserves

The 2015/16 Annual Report and Accounts reported that our levels of reserves was £78,000. The table below estimates the impact on my reserves of the movement between the 2015/16 balance and the budget/funding for the next three years:

Impact on Reserves of funding

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Reserves at the beginning of the period	78,000	56,712	78,289	75,561
(Over)/Under Spend	(21,288)	21,577	(2,728)	(1,439)
Reserves at the end of the period	56,712	78,289	75,561	74,122

As per my reserves policy, I consider it necessary to retain a minimum of five percent of the annual budget in reserves for any unforeseen events. This equates to approximately £77,000. However, increases in some expenditure areas, although off-set against savings, will result in the need to use the reserve balance to meet additional expenditure over the period of this Estimate.

Sally Holland
Children's Commissioner for Wales

October 2016