

# THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE

## SUMMARY REPORT



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

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This report has been prepared  
for presentation to the National  
Assembly under the Government  
of Wales Act 1998.

The Wales Audit Office study  
team comprised Mark Jeffs, Rachel  
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direction of Matthew Mortlock.

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

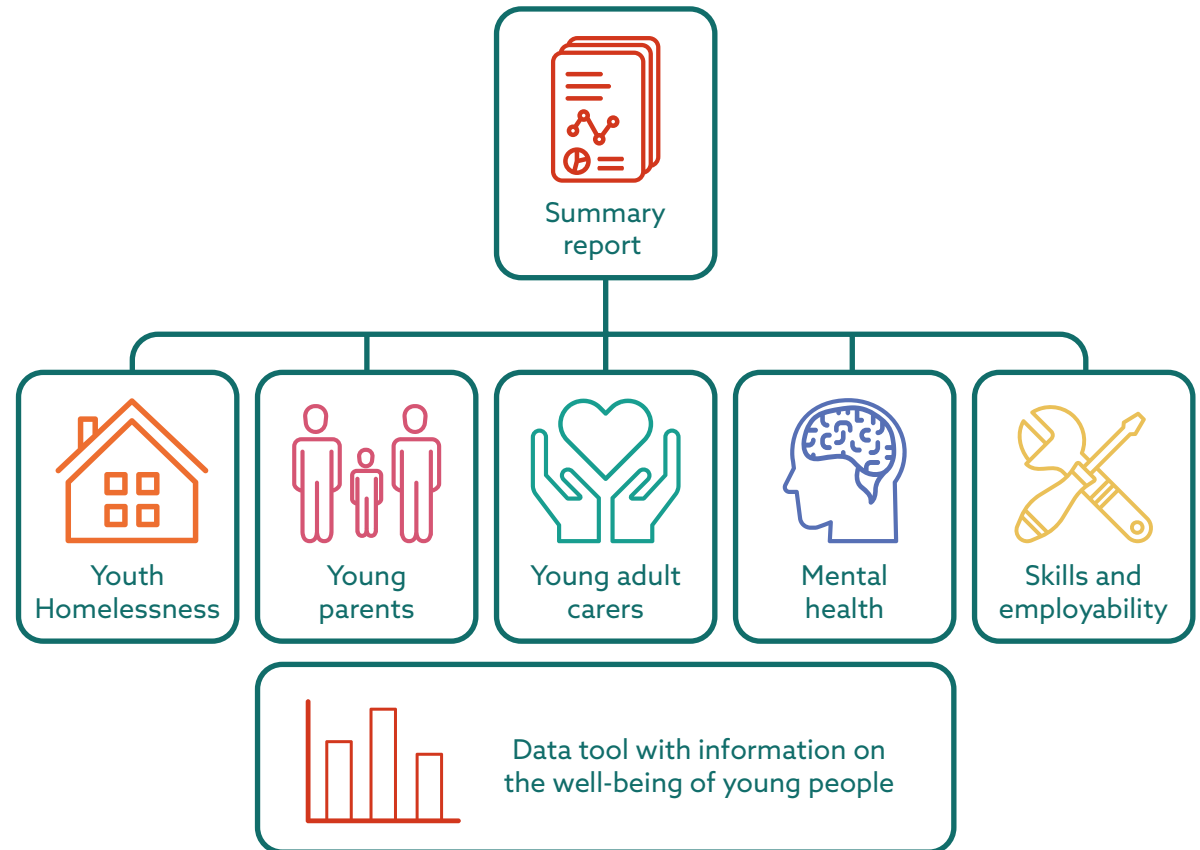
About our wider work on the well-being of young people

## Joint-working

We have been working with other organisations to examine a common theme of 'Youth'. The education inspectorate Estyn published its report on **youth support services** in July 2018. Healthcare Inspectorate Wales published its **review of healthcare services for young people** in March 2019. Care Inspectorate Wales published its **report on care experienced by children and young people** in June 2019.

## Our work

We looked at the Welsh Government's work to support the well-being of young people in Wales. Well-being is a broad concept, so we have focussed our work on five topics: youth homelessness; young adult carers; young parents; mental health; and skills and employability. We are publishing seven products based on our work, including this report. The diagram provides a link to each product.



Our reports on each of the five areas listed above give background information about the topic. They include relevant facts and figures, an overview of what the Welsh Government is trying to achieve, and details about which organisations and professionals are involved in supporting young people. The reports also identify opportunities for improvement. This report reflects common issues we found in our topic specific work.

**Our interactive data tool** uses data from different sources to show how well young people are doing in different areas of their lives. The tool includes comparisons across Wales, by gender and by age group where possible.

# SOME KEY FINDINGS FROM OUR WORK

Our work focusses on 16-24 year olds. All young people need support as they grow into adults. Some need help at important times in their lives. Others might have problems from time to time that can be overcome with the right support. Some young people face complex problems which may be linked and get worse if they don't get the right help. Most young people will get the support they need from family, friends and universal services like schools and colleges. But others need more specialist help.

We framed our work in the wider context of public service transformation as set out in various Welsh Government plans and laws, like **Prosperity for All**, the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014)** and the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015)** and the supporting **Future Generations Framework for Service Design**. In these and other documents the Welsh Government has set out that public services should work together to focus on 'what matters' to people and work on the basis of co-production<sup>1</sup>. The Welsh Government recognises that working in a more collaborative and integrated way will involve a 'radically different way of working', for example through Public Services Boards and Regional Partnership Boards<sup>2</sup>.

The Welsh Government aims to develop policies and services to reflect the needs of everyone in Wales. Nevertheless, it recognises that different population groups have different needs and are impacted by policies in different ways. We focussed on services for young people in five areas to understand how well the Welsh Government is joining up across its policy areas and what impact its approach to strategic planning is having on young people themselves.

Many organisations support young people. While the Welsh Government does not deliver front-line services, it has an important leadership role, for example setting policy and guidance, making certain funding decisions and considering how well public services are performing. We have not undertaken a comprehensive audit of the well-being of young people in Wales and the services that support them. However, drawing in part on the findings from other reviews, our work identified a lack of support in some key areas which public services need to address.

## ■ FOOTNOTES

- 1 Co-production is about involving people in decisions and the provision of public services. It is often defined as being about working 'with' people rather than doing things 'to' them. It is also closely linked with 'asset based' approaches that encourage public services to work on the basis of the strengths in people's lives rather than the things they are lacking.
- 2 Our recent report on the **Integrated Care Fund** considered the role of Regional Partnership Boards and we are currently doing a review of Public Services Boards. The Welsh Government is also working with the Welsh Local Government Association on a wider review of strategic partnerships.

We found that those working with young people are often frustrated they can't provide support in the ways they want to. At times staff feel they have to make decisions that are not in the young person's interests because of a lack of appropriate provision. Vulnerable young people find themselves having to join together the threads of fragmented services. We tried to understand why this is happening and found some common issues across different policy areas. We focussed on what the Welsh Government does to improve the well-being of young people but recognise it is reliant on other organisations to deliver services and support improvement and the Welsh Government's aim that service providers have flexibility to respond to local needs and priorities. Our reports on individual topic areas provide more detail.

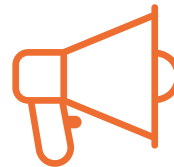
Overall, we think there are three broad areas where there are opportunities for improvement as set out below. Many of the issues raised by our work are relevant to wider public service delivery. They also resonate with findings from our broader programme of audit work over recent years. In setting out these opportunities, we recognise that the Welsh Government is already working on ways to better integrate its own approach and continues to work with the public sector to join up services. It is also reflecting on its own role, and the role of other organisations in ensuring that services are meeting the needs of the population.

### **Being curious**



Finding out more about what matters to young people and their experiences, what support is available and how much of a difference it is making.

### **Being purposeful**



Communicating a clear purpose for public services that inspires and empowers people to work together to improve the well-being of young people.

### **Being brave**



Encouraging experimentation, taking well-managed risks and celebrating success.

## Being curious



We think there is a need to listen more to young people and to understand what matters, how they experience public services and how well services are meeting their needs. This could include making better use of existing information and research, for example to understand national trends emerging from local area assessments and analysing more questions in the **National Survey for Wales** by age. To inform its own policy making, we also think the Welsh Government could work with other organisations to understand better the views of frontline staff, the impact of its plans and guidance and the way they are used.

We think there needs to be a better understanding of what services exist and where, including by helping to identify gaps and duplication. The Welsh Government could do more to collate information from partner organisations on local services and ensure services have sufficient capacity before publishing new plans giving those organisations and individuals extra responsibilities.

After a decade of budget cuts, many services are feeling the pressure. Many people we spoke to felt that young people have been particularly hard hit by austerity, with funding cuts to many services that young people rely on. We recognise that there is no perfect balance and that it would be difficult for the Welsh Government to work out exactly how much is spent on young people. Nevertheless, in the areas we examined we felt that the Welsh Government could do more to understand in broad terms what is being spent on specific services for young people as part of assessing the impact of its funding decisions.

We think the Welsh Government could better measure what difference public services are making and do more to understand its own contribution. Our 2015 **Picture of Public Services** highlighted efforts in Scotland to use a 'personal outcomes' approach linked to organisational, regional and national measures of impact. It is positive that this approach is being adapted for work in social care. However, the Welsh Government's aspirations for a public service based around 'what matters' to individuals suggests a need to focus more on the extent to which people are better off in ways that matter to them.

## Being purposeful



The Welsh Government set out its objective to 'support young people to make the most of their potential' in Prosperity for All. The objective is framed around employability and skills but is relevant to most, if not all, of the work that public services and partners carry out with young people. Beyond this, visions and priorities for issues that affect young people are set out in various national and local plans and guidance documents. We do not think that the Welsh Government should necessarily produce a new strategy document for young people. But we do think it could do more to ensure communication about what it wants to achieve, along with relevant guidance, is filtering through partner organisations to frontline staff. We found instances where this clearly wasn't the case.

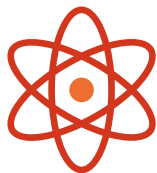
We think the Welsh Government should work with partner organisations to assess whether its legislation, partnerships, plans, performance management frameworks, contractual conditions, and other arrangements hamper or support people to work together to a common purpose. It should be clear to those working at the frontline that they are encouraged, empowered and supported to do the right thing, in line with the purpose, even where that means challenging organisational silos and processes that get in the way.

Being clear about accountabilities, linked to a common purpose, is essential. We think the Welsh Government could learn from what has and has not worked in the past and be clearer about:

- a** its own role and what exactly it is responsible and accountable for;
- b** how it will know if it has done a good job itself – including greater consideration in evaluations of its own role in creating the conditions within which programmes succeed or fail;
- c** whether and how it will hold other organisations to account; and
- d** the balance between flexibility and consistency, given that a focus on 'what matters' to each individual implies variation in the nature of services but not necessarily the quality.



## Being Brave



We found that people working at the frontline are keen to work differently and there are many examples of local innovation. But some organisations struggle with new ways of working. In trying out new approaches, public services, including those charged with external review and scrutiny, will need to embrace well-managed risk taking and accept the possibility that some things may not work out.

The Welsh Government is already supporting experimental ways of working including through specific funding programmes. Nonetheless, in the topic areas we looked at we felt the Welsh Government could have a more active role in encouraging and enabling innovation and experimentation. It could communicate an inspiring message about the importance of trying new ways of working. It can also create conditions that make people feel safe to experiment with new ways of organising and collaborating, supporting change without necessarily prescribing what services should look like.

We also think the Welsh Government could experiment with the practical options available to it as a government. The Welsh Government's response to an issue has often been to write a strategy or a law or set up a new grant scheme targeted at local services. But we think the Welsh Government could try other ideas to change its own approach. This could include being more directly involved in understanding how services really work, and working with public services to unblock barriers and share learning.

The Welsh Government has useful information from evaluations of programmes like **Families First** and **Flying Start**. We think it could do more to share such learning beyond the teams or departments responsible for that programme. As well as sharing lessons internally, we also think the Welsh Government could do more to share and celebrate the lessons from successful work that has had an impact.

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.