

The National Organisation for Children's Mental Health

Preventing. Supporting. Campaigning.



21st March 2019

Dear Janet Finch-Saunders AM,

Ref: Petition number P-05-857 calling for a National Task force for Children's Mental Health

We would like to thank you and all the members of the Petitions Committee for your continuing consideration of this petition which received support from every electoral region in Wales, positive coverage in the press, and support from a number of Assembly Members. Furthermore we would like to thank Vaughan Gething AM for his response to the points we raised in our feedback about the Minister's initial letter.

It is unclear from the Minister's letter dated 12th March 2019 why he does not wish to consider the proposal laid out within the petition, particularly as he is currently 'considering how best to take [the work of the Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group on the Whole School] forward and the resource implications over the Life of the Task and Finish Group, which is expected to conclude in Spring 2021'. As this Task and Finish Group has a stakeholder reference group we believe that the process of evolving it into a National Task Force would be straightforward. Furthermore, our previous submission highlighted the reduction in resources that might ensue from the adoption of the proposal and the improvement in outcomes for children and young people with, or at risk of, mental health conditions. Additionally, the currently fragmented approach, described by the Minister as the 'broader arrangements' could be much more effective and financially sustainable if brought together into the coherent structure that a National Task Force could provide.

The Minister states that he wishes to 'knit the various strands of activity together; highlighting gaps in provision; and ensuring energy and resources are targeted to have the maximum benefit'. The establishment of a National Task Force could provide the clear and comprehensive means by which these objectives could be achieved. Available evidence suggests that the current approach is ineffective and inadequate. For example, the Welsh Government's own statistics demonstrate that the number of referrals to CAMHS has doubled over the past few yearsⁱ, and the National Assembly for Wales has reported that 'the pieces of the jigsaw that need to be in place to enable children and young people to be supported outside the most specialist settings are simply not there'ⁱⁱ. Programmes, committees, and Task Groups might have been changed but the blueprint remains the same. This segmented approach has resulted in a disconnected strategy that is costly both in terms of children and young people's mental health and financially for the taxpayer. Furthermore, its direction of travel is the complete opposite from the objectives and aspirations laid out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

We welcome the response from Lynne Neagle AM, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education committee (CYPE). However, it is unclear from her letter precisely how a National Task Force for children's mental health would duplicate the work of her committee and the JMFT Group. Nevertheless, if as outlined above, the numerous strands of work were brought together into a single

comprehensive strategy and body (i.e. The National Task Force), then their work to date could be incorporated and utilised, potentially to much greater effect. Consequently, we remain convinced that the creation of a National Task Force for children's mental health remains a viable opportunity that could have a significant impact on preventing the continuing increase in mental health issues being experienced by children and young people throughout Wales.

If I can be of any further assistance in helping the committee reach its conclusions regarding this petition, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Geraint D. Evans

Managing Director

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- ⁱ <https://gwedhill.gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11522/cr-ld11522-e.pdf>