



**ADSS Cymru**

Yn arwain Gwasanaethau  
Cymdeithasol yng Nghymru

Leading Social Services in Wales

## **ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES CYMRU**

### **Delivering Transformation Grant Programme 2022/23**

#### **Review of Day Opportunities and Respite/Short Break Services**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on service innovation and transformation May 2023

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## Introduction

The Welsh Government's Social Services and Integration Directorate requested that, as part of the Delivering Transformation Grant DTG Programme for 2021/22, the Association for Directors of Social Services in Wales (ADSS Cymru), undertake a monitoring exercise to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (hereafter referred to as the pandemic) on short breaks, respite services and day opportunity services across Wales.

This work was completed in July 2021. A summary of its findings can be found at Appendix I.

Following the completion of this initial review, as services recovered from the impact of the pandemic, the Welsh Government requested that ADSS Cymru undertake a follow up review to assess the degree to which services have transformed and any continued impact on service provision, those using services, those providing services and those commissioning them.

The impact of the pandemic and the future of services are naturally matters of concern to the politicians at national and local levels, local government officers, the social care workforce, as well as to those receiving services, their families, the general public and the media.

The review was to explore both the negative and positive impacts of the pandemic and seek to identify notable examples of effective practice within services.

The scope of the review covers all of Wales. However, due to limitations of resource and time, it was not possible to review each local authority individually, nor was it possible in all instances to extract data separately for each client group. The implications of these limitations are explored within the methodology chapter of the report.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to those who responded to requests for information via our questionnaires. We would also like to acknowledge the input from those who gave their time for discussion at the virtual national practitioner event and client specific focus group sessions, including operational staff, citizen groups and the national organisations representing the voice of people accessing care and support services. We would also like to thank all those service providers who generously gave their time during our service visits in which we explored those models in greater detail. Finally, thanks must also go to members of the project team, and the project reference group, who have played such an important role in supporting the development and delivery of this piece of work.

## Executive Summary

### **Purpose of the review**

This report assesses the extent to which services have been transformed and how the pandemic has continued to impact on the commissioning and delivery of services and those who receive them.

The review was designed to explore the impact of the pandemic on day opportunities and respite services. These include both opportunities, for example to introduce or accelerate new models of support to meet changed needs of individuals, and threats, for example reduction in the level of services provided and the effect of these changes on vulnerable users and their families.

## **Review methodology**

The review used a mixed methods approach. It commenced by sending out a call for evidence to services and questionnaires directed at commissioners and providers. This was followed by a national event targeted at practitioners at which initial data gathered was shared with participants seeking to identify an understanding of what had enabled change and what served as a barrier to transformation.

The national practitioner event was followed by a series of focus groups established to enable a range of stakeholders to contribute to discussions looking at specific client groups. Finally, several visits were undertaken to a range of services in different parts of Wales and spanning the various client groups included in the review.

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered was used to explore a wide range of issues that were evident during, and since the pandemic. Analysis of this data has produced a series of conclusions and a small number of recommendations for stakeholders.

## **Conclusions**

### **The need to review day opportunities, respite, and short break services**

Many agencies had, prior to the pandemic, identified the need to review and potentially reform day opportunity and short break services to ensure that the model of provision was continuing to meet current needs.

Some participants believed that a national debate on the future of day opportunities and short break services would assist in bringing about change at scale and pace. Some advocated the potential value of national guidance, whilst others felt this could stymie local initiatives and lead to unintended consequences.

### **The impact of the pandemic on day opportunity and short break services**

The provision of day opportunity and short stay services was profoundly disrupted by the pandemic.

Many services were forced to close for a period. Some having re-opened, offer a reduced service compared with pre-pandemic levels, for example offering fewer or shorter sessions. Evidence suggests that a considerable number of people have not returned to services since they reopened, and many others have reported that since returning the availability of services has reduced in terms of frequency and length of time that the service is available.

The degree to which services closed, the duration of closure and the speed of reopening varied across Wales.

The pandemic led to essential revisions to service provision resulting from social distancing requirements. Some of the changes introduced were being considered prior to the pandemic, which was perceived to have accelerated some planned changes. When reviewing services some agencies found that buildings in use prior to the pandemic were not fit for purpose moving forward.

The environments and model of service were also questioned by some. Many participants in focus groups believed that an over reliance on place-based services, i.e., those provided solely or predominantly in a specific building or group of buildings, can lead to 'institutionalised' models and develop a dependency among those that use the service and their families.

Many services described greater use of community assets during the pandemic. This includes local facilities and open spaces. Reduced access to transport and people's preferences have led to this

trend continuing for many. However, significant numbers still wish to see services revert to those offered prior to the pandemic.

In some instances, these changes have been sustained since the services entered a recovery phase as restrictions were lifted.

### **Economic and workforce pressures**

Some of the enablers and barriers identified by participants can be addressed by means of effective planning and change management, but some impediments arise from structural and economic factors outside the direct control of those responsible for providing or commissioning the services. Included within these are the inflationary pressures experienced in recent months which are felt to have exacerbated many of the challenges faced.

Workforce challenges and a lack of funding were described as delaying or preventing service change.

The provision of a central funding stream that enables local authorities and providers to be equal partners, would offer opportunities to stimulate and enable transformation to take place.

The workforce was universally perceived to be an asset in the transformation of services. However, services also identified that members of the workforce can be a barrier to change. Some staff may need additional support in the change management training and training in the application of person centredness and co-production.

### **Increased complexity among those using services**

Many services reported an increase in the complexity of people being referred to them in recent years. They also highlighted that some people who had used services prior to the pandemic, had more complex needs upon their return to services as restrictions were lifted. This is clearly an important issue in relation to partnership and joint commissioning arrangements between health and social care.

### **Employment as part of day opportunities**

The importance of supporting people with disabilities to attain paid employment was raised by some participants in the review; there is a sense that this is not always given due prominence in models of support, despite the obvious potential benefits to individuals and wider society.

Collaboration between day services and other agencies, such as businesses and employment services and education, will be required to deliver such opportunities effectively. Roles that can navigate people through the various pathways and funding streams to achieve paid employment will be important.

Equal opportunities should be applied more widely by public sector bodies and promoted in other sectors to ensure that the skills and abilities of people with disabilities are recognised and that these people can contribute to the local economy.

Resources such as Access to Work funding can facilitate improvements in this area.

### **Hub and spoke approaches**

Hub and spoke approaches adopted in different areas offer helpful, blended approaches combining centre-based support, access to community facilities and the creative use of technology to improve access and optimise outcomes for individuals.

### **Technology and transport**

When services were closed, the use of technology, especially video and telephone conferencing, increased enormously. This had a positive impact on engagement with those using services and their families and enabled people to develop and sustain their own networks using chat groups and other virtual activities. It also assisted inter and intra service communication.

For some people using services, and some staff, the use of digital technology was a challenge, due to poor IT skills and limited or no access to equipment and/ or the internet.

Transport provided by services was significantly reduced during the pandemic. This was particularly challenging for those living in rural settings. It has been reported some providers have reduced the use of transport and continue to promote access to services closer to home. This is mainly due to the preference of some of those who attend services, increased costs pressures resulting from fuel inflation, as well as the duty on local authorities to tackle Climate Change.

### **Day opportunities as respite support to family members**

A theme which ran through the review was a recognition that day opportunities and short break services frequently benefit both the recipient of the service and their families. However, when services are being planned for individuals, a tension may often arise between the interests of the individual and their unpaid carers in how this service is to be provided. It is important to recognise that the wishes of the assessed individual must come first and when that individual lack capacity, then decisions must be in the persons best interest and those arrangements must be least restrictive as possible.

### **The importance of person-centred care and the co-production of services**

When introducing and evaluating service changes, many agencies recognise the importance of person-centred planning and co-production, and there is a clear sense that such approaches are fundamental to efficient and effective service reform.

Co-production principles should also apply to the strategic planning, delivery and review of service models.

Person centeredness and co-production are not always clearly understood or applied effectively by services and their staff. Appropriate training and development are required to address this.

### **The impact of the pandemic on the mixed economy of care provision**

The impact of the current financial context on donations presents an existential threat to several third sector agencies that are dependent, or part dependent, upon charitable donations.

### **Commissioning day opportunity and respite services fit for the future**

Whilst the variety and diversity of service provision has improved, levels of provision are reported to have declined following the pandemic. However, the review team found it difficult to quantify this reduction in provision due to the lack of standardised and consistently prepared quantitative data on service provision and use.

Greater collaboration within, and between agencies, is necessary to commission a range of support that includes community resources outside the direct control of social care and health services. This includes services that support progression to paid employment.

The necessity for collaboration is particularly critical as people transition through different stages in the life course. For example, when leaving school or college, transitioning into services suitable for young adults, or those suitable for older adults at a later stage. To avoid unnecessary disruption to people's lives, some services have begun to take a through-age approach, based upon individual need, not chronological age.

Models of effective practice were identified within the review. Learning can be gained from exploring what these services have achieved and how they did so. However, it is important to recognise that directly replicating such models to other areas will not always be appropriate; for example, some approaches may be better suited to urban rather than rural environments. Replicating existing models in a different area will always require planning and the effective change management.

Some participants believed that the fact that day opportunity and some short break services are not regulated is inappropriate and that this can place these services at a disadvantage.

### **The need for effective engagement**

Services identified that to increase the use of local community facilities, better engagement with local communities and community leaders will be required. There are examples from our service visits where this has worked well.

It is essential to ensure that people using services, those referred to services and their families, are fully involved in the processes of assessment, planning, delivery and review, especially when changes to the nature of provision are proposed.

### **Enablers of, and barriers to, innovation**

Some contributors reported that the pandemic demonstrated that changes can be made without applying undue bureaucracy or process. The necessity of making rapid changes led to a sense of 'permission' to take positive risks and introduce creative models. This provides a precedent for more nimble service development moving forward.

Stakeholders were generally aware of the barriers and enablers to service reform identified within the review. Those representing children and young people felt that language used, and issues identified, were not always applicable to their area. Accordingly, the report has attempted to address those issues and services specific to children and their families.

## **Recommendations**

1. Commissioners and providers should use strengths-based, person-centred approaches to support the planning, delivery and transformation of services. These approaches should also be reflected in care planning processes to ensure choice, control and creative options for the individual. Co-production should underpin all approaches.
2. Service reviews undertaken by both commissioners and providers, should consider the potential of hub and spoke and through-age approaches, which utilise local community services, open spaces and other local resources.
3. Local authorities, together with partner organisations, should review service provision and develop commissioning strategies for the provision of local day opportunity and short break services. These should identify opportunities for a regional approach to commissioning and delivery of services. For children with complex needs, Welsh Government's policy initiative in relation to the elimination of profit, should be considered and acknowledged in any future planning.
4. Enabling people to attain paid employment should be considered as an outcome for individuals and greater emphasis placed on how this might be achieved. Local authorities and their partner agencies should consider how they may assist in removing barriers to employment. This can be achieved by raising aspirations to attain employment with the individual and their family at an early stage. Consideration should be given as to how Local Authorities and their partner agencies can directly employ people themselves. Relationships should be developed and nurtured with employment services and employers in the wider community, to foster alternative and navigable career pathways.

5. Across the spectrum of service commissioning and delivery, strategies should be developed to include appropriate workforce training and development to assist recruitment, retention, innovation and service improvement.
6. The use of digital technology to enhance services and facilitate collaboration between agencies, should be optimised.
7. Welsh Government could consider opportunities to promote the use of existing funding, such as the Regional Integration Fund, to support transformation and innovation in this area and explore the potential for dedicated Capital and revenue funding for this purpose. It could also explore how equal power sharing in the allocation of funds, between all stakeholders could be achieved.

## Methodology

The scope of the review was extremely broad, covering a wide range of client groups and all local authority areas. The review included local authority provision (often referred to as 'in-house') as well as services commissioned from external providers.

However, as stated in the introduction, due to limitations of resource and time, it was not possible to review each local authority in Wales individually, nor was it possible, in all instances, to extract data separately for each client group.

The report identifies variances across different parts of Wales, for example in relation to the pace or extent of reopening day services and how this differed across statutory and third sectors.

Whilst there were many issues that were reported to be common to all, others were more specific to geographical areas, client groups and in some instances individuals.

The authors have sought to make these differences clear throughout the report and in reaching conclusions gave greater weight to those experiences that were most commonly held and reported whilst reflecting issues less frequently raised.

To elicit the views of the broad range of stakeholders a mixed methods approach was utilised. The review began with a call for evidence being distributed via local authorities, to identify services and developments that would inform the project objectives and focus lines of enquiry. The call for evidence also sought information on any formal reviews that had been undertaken by services that had been undertaken in the period following the initial phase of work undertaken in 2021/22, as well as notable developments had been implemented since the pandemic. Such developments were the focus of site visits, details of which are provided later in the report. We were not able to visit all areas where such developments were identified. However, we sought to ensure a geographical spread and coverage of each client group accessing day opportunity services.

Based upon discussions with Welsh Government and project reference group, questionnaires were formulated to gather evidence from service commissioners and providers. The questionnaires were designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data capture sought to identify the degree to which service capacity had been impacted by the pandemic; specifically, whether more or fewer services were available and whether those services had increased or reduced the availability of support offered to individuals and families.

The qualitative data sought to capture the views of commissioners and providers on the provision of services; how they had managed during the pandemic and, following the easing of restrictions, how they were re-establishing services in the light of the learning gained during the pandemic.

Having extracted data from the call for evidence and the questionnaires, a national event for practitioners was held on 9th February 2023, attended by a range of stakeholders affected by the review and presenting emerging themes from the initial stages of our work. This was followed by



group and plenary sessions. The output from the national event was used to establish key issues that were then explored in client group specific focus groups.

In total 6 focus groups were held, and 18 services were visited or engaged via service specific interviews (see Appendix V for details).

The data gathered using these mixed methods has been used to formulate the review's findings and recommendations. The outcomes of each stage of the review are set out in detail below.

## Call for evidence

On 8th November 2022, a call for evidence in support of the review was sent to all local authorities, as service commissioners and to a group of over 40 stakeholder organisations and bodies across Wales. They represented a broad range of organisations including academics, national advocacy organisations and service providers in the voluntary sector. A copy of the call for evidence is attached at Appendix II.

As well as setting out the scope of the project, three key questions were asked of all stakeholders:

1. Whether they were aware of any published service reviews of day opportunities and or respite services undertaken by local authorities or provider organisations since July 2021
2. Whether they were aware of any published reports by relevant stakeholder organisations that provide evidence of how day opportunities and respite care services have, or have not, been reintroduced since July 2021
3. Whether they were aware of, or had any examples of, notable practice that was helping to transform day opportunities and respite care services.

19 responses were received. While there were no published reports submitted by local authorities regarding their own reviews of day opportunity and respite care services, we were made aware that there were some reviews being undertaken at the time the call for evidence was made. We were also made aware by one third sector organisation, Mencap Cymru, that they were due to undertaking a survey of day opportunity services on behalf of the Learning Disability Consortium, in early 2023.

Analysis of the responses received from the evidence call identified key themes which are set out below.

## Key issues identified in the call for evidence

### Local Authorities

- The need for service change was identified and had commenced in many local authorities pre-pandemic but the pandemic was seen as the catalyst for redesign
- Local authorities adapted existing services to provide new, more personalised provision, with more outreach and use of new digital technology
- There were fewer people returning to some services than had received them prior to the pandemic, with anxiety and a loss of confidence cited as key reasons for people staying away
- A wide range of day opportunities (including paid employment) were being explored and co-produced with users and their families in line with the social model of disability and, in some local authority areas, using a strengths-based approach
- There was an expanded use of community-based facilities, in a bid to shift the focus from building-based support
- Some local authority assets were deemed no longer fit for purpose in a post-pandemic care environment

- There were other barriers to service delivery, including access to transport, as well as workforce/volunteer recruitment and retention challenges.

### **Stakeholder Organisations**

- Some individuals had day opportunities stopped and now provision was significantly reduced or had not restarted
- Some individuals had to make a financial contribution to services even where they were not being accessed at the height of the pandemic
- There was a perception that local authority provision had been the slowest to restart, whilst independent and voluntary sectors had been more agile in getting back on stream
- Whilst some individuals had adapted to new models of support, this did not mean that they had no desire to return to the services they had pre-pandemic
- Whilst some local authorities reported they had embarked on service redesign, there was little evidence of this having taken place
- Remote, online or hybrid services were not considered suitable for everyone, and they presented barriers to some groups
- The volume and consistency of engagement between local authorities, people using services and their families, had been 'patchy' and needed to be developed further
- The constriction of charitable funding for voluntary sector providers was putting some service provision at risk; this was further exacerbated by cost-of-living pressures
- Workforce recruitment and retention was proving challenging for service delivery and continuity.

The project review team also received some examples of good practice to examine in more detail and, in some cases, extended offers to visit these services were made.

### **Service Commissioner and Provider Questionnaires**

On 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022, electronic surveys were issued to commissioners and providers seeking an updated position as to how day opportunity, respite care and short break services were being commissioned and delivered for all groups identified within the project scope.

Qualitative surveys included very similar questions about the impact of the pandemic on service delivery, what changes were made, whether those changes had been maintained and the main current pressures on services. The surveys and details of responses are provided in Appendices, III and IV.

A quantitative survey was also issued to local authority commissioners. This sought to obtain comparative data in relation to session numbers and session locations pre and post pandemic. The survey was intended to enhance our understanding of the shift between face-to-face and digital service provision that may have taken place across Wales and to understand what services were being offered currently. We also wanted to get an impression as to whether services were seen as having increased or diminished in quantity or increased and to ascertain whether day opportunity capacity reduced. Details are provided in Appendix III.

For respite care and short stay services, the survey sought to compare and contrast the number of respite care units and bed days pre and post pandemic to understand the impact of the pandemic on this service provision. Details are provided in Appendix III.

Unfortunately, responses to the quantitative survey were incomplete and inconsistent. As a result, it was not possible to undertake meaningful analysis of this data. However, the high level analysis of the qualitative surveys can be found [here](#).

In subsequent discussions within focus groups, some participants stated that they had found it difficult to quantify provision in the way that the questionnaire had sought. The level and varied response rate to these questions suggests that quantitative data are not being routinely and systematically collected throughout Wales. There is no standardised data set for capturing day opportunity, respite and short break services. However, the complexity of the landscape may account for this. Therefore, it is important for local authorities to utilise Population Needs Assessment, Market Stability reports and use of census data to quantify and plan future demand for these services.

## Key issues identified within questionnaire responses

### Qualitative responses from Commissioners

A third of local authorities responded with coverage over 5 Regional Partnership Boards

They provided a narrative for 36 service areas which were a mixture of in-house and externally commissioned services. These were broken down to 58% day opportunities, 28% residential respite care and 14% short break:

- 55% of commissioners said that they had made commissioning changes during the pandemic, with change in location and fewer places commissioned being the top two changes
- 30% of responses stated that change was wholly pandemic related, with 30% stating other factors like shifting to new innovative models of care, such as more remote, out-reach, or 1:1 bespoke care
- 66% said the changes made during the pandemic had been retained, with only 22% wanting to return to their pre-pandemic service specification
- 91% identified other challenges to service delivery, with workforce shortages, food and fuel inflation being the top three issues. Other matters referenced included budget pressures, access to transport, market stability, insurance costs and ability to pay the workforce the Real Living Wage.

### Qualitative responses from Providers

30 responses from providers were received, delivering services within 12 individual local authorities and 4 responses from providers delivering services across multiple local authority areas (5 additional local authorities were identified). There was coverage across all Regional Partnership Boards. They provided a narrative for services delivered across 6 service areas, these were broken down to 65% day opportunities, 20% residential respite, 6% short break, 3% for carers support, 3% for supported living and 3% for facility/community- based support

- 79% of providers said that they had introduced service changes during the pandemic, with fewer places commissioned and changes in location highlighted as the most frequent changes
- 50% said the pandemic was wholly responsible for change, 20% stated that changes were pre-planned with a further 11% saying it was a contributory factor, but other factors were at play, including finance and increasing complexity of service user needs
- 74% stated that the changes were still in place, 59% stated they had no plans to revert to previous service models but 29% stated they wanted or would consider a return to pre-pandemic arrangements. There were caveats to these changes, including funding, safe access

to facilities and whether sufficient numbers of people using the service could be generated to make the service sustainable

- 82% identified other challenges to service delivery with workforce shortages, food and fuel inflation being the top three issues. Other matters referenced included, funding and budget pressures, access to transport, improving pay, terms and conditions, staff registration costs and the retirement of host families for respite care and short breaks.

## The national event for practitioners

To consolidate information gleaned from the call for evidence and focus groups, a virtual national event was held for practitioners on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2023. Participants were advised of key themes emerging from the earlier stages of the review and presentations from selected stakeholders. Throughout the day, participants were invited to reflect on the presentations and to contribute additional evidence working in groups and in plenary.

A copy of the full programme for the event is provided in Appendix V.

## Key learning points

Participants valued the presentations provided on service developments and on the use of co-production approaches.

They agreed that the initial findings gathered from the questionnaires broadly reflected their own experiences.

Many of the issues identified at the event were common across client groups and throughout different parts of Wales. However, there were some important differences.

Common themes were identified as enabling change and service reform, these were:

• The pandemic – seen as a driver for accelerating change
• The workforce - involving staff as early as possible in the process was recognised as a good starting point for change
• Values and principles - need to be innovative with recruitment, and the role of marketing to accurately reflect the importance of day opportunity and short break services
• Collaboration - shared commissioning priorities with partners and joint working on delivery
• Keeping it local – focusing on the local community and working with them
• Data and evidence – capturing local data was seen as crucial, including for example, demographics, showing numbers of people who are likely to need some form of support
• Funding and resources – critical to optimise opportunities for innovation
• Person-centred delivery
• Digital Technology

Common themes were identified as creating barriers to change these included:

• Resources - finance and people, particularly the impact of cost of living for all stakeholders, lack of investment etc
• Ability to change – entrenched positions among staff and families, as well as the time it takes to make change happen
• The workforce - sector competition, for example, from retail and hospitality, and issues around staff resistance to change
• Public/ community communication - is the public fully aware of the role and impact of social care?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Power dynamics – there is a lack of co-production because many players do not genuinely understand what it means and/ or how to do it properly</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Individual/ personal barriers – individuals experiencing a lack of confidence due to the pandemic</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wider economic and societal challenges - challenge to achieve supported employment for people because businesses are struggling financially, or are unaware of the opportunities for employing people with disabilities</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inability to understand and/ or manage need - complex needs are hard to manage and cater for</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The needs of people using services and their families, can often be quite different and this can create a tension in deciding the appropriate model of support</li></ul>

The themes identified within the national event were summarised for use as discussion points within the client specific focus groups.

## Focus groups

Following the national practitioner event, a series of focus groups were arranged. These events provided an opportunity for experts within the various service areas to provide more detailed analysis of the issues identified earlier in the review. The focus groups covered all population groups and facilitated contributions from different sectors and regions across Wales.

A total of 6 focus groups were held between 27<sup>th</sup> February and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

The following sections are not intended to be a full reflection of the discussions held in each group but rather to identify several common themes that spanned the groups and the factors identified by participants, which they believe will enable or act as barriers to transformation.

### Common themes

During the pandemic agencies were frequently forced to reduce their service offer, despite the fact that the complexity of need was growing.

One service practitioner reported that 160 people in their area had experienced a 58% reduction in hours received. Furthermore, it was stated that where the use of a building is taken away, people do not just lose the facility but, potentially, established social connections.

Short break residential services were seen as essential in supporting the wellbeing and sustainability of unpaid carers and families.

Residential short break service demand was reported as having been higher than ever during the pandemic in some areas, due to additional pressure on families. However, demand was reported to have reduced in some instances, because for example, some family members had more time to provide care due to furlough arrangements. Some people chose to avoid care settings to reduce their risk of contracting COVID-19.

Whilst many short break services closed entirely throughout the period in which restrictions were in place, in some areas, services only closed where there was an outbreak of COVID-19 within a location. In many areas, it had taken until 2023 for services to return to normality.

Many contributors to the review highlighted the importance of what may be described as the social value of day opportunity and respite short break services. In commissioning these services, consideration should include what additional value can be gained through contracts with providers in furthering their social value to those in receipt, their families, and local communities. This can be further assisted through a collaboration between partnerships and networks with an increased

appreciation of what good quality support looks like and focusing on the principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (SSWBA) 2014, preeminent in-service design and driving local authority activity.

The increased use of technology brought several benefits. For example, staff working from home were able to join team meetings remotely, even when they had childcare commitments. Engagement with families and carers was reported to have improved in some areas, with the ability to meet and/ or participate in shared activities online. This had provided the opportunity for richer conversations regarding current and future support needs of individuals.

Contributors also reported having sped up their programme of community-based opportunities as centre-based support was withdrawn or reduced. Communities were said to be more open to this engagement with commissioners, with access to venues being reported as improving in some instances.

Provider services worked closely with families to identify what provision they were most comfortable with. It has taken a while to rebuild confidence among some people and their families. However, whilst some service uptake decreased, more recently, an influx of referrals has been received, frequently with increased expectations and need due to greater complexity among those more recently referred.

Complexity was reported to have risen dramatically. One service practitioner reported 80% of people attending now require 1:1 or 2:1 support compared to 50% prior to the pandemic. New referrals were reported as having significantly greater levels of need. Equally, the needs of many of those returning to services following the pandemic, were reported in many cases to have increased.

## Client group specific issues

### Services for people who are neurodiverse

Services for this cohort were described as somewhat different from other client groups, with a greater need to collaborate with NHS colleagues in relation to the adaptation of services both during the pandemic, and in its aftermath. An important element to highlight here is the work of the Neurodivergence Improvement Programme, which will require joint endeavour to implement, particularly creating sustainable services, as well as developing infrastructure and workforce capacity.<sup>i</sup>

### Enablers of transformation

Connecting with people online had been helpful in terms of improving access to services. Examples included provision of electronic tablets and other technology which had enabled people to join WhatsApp groups. Subsequently many had felt able to attend services in person post-pandemic, where they may not have done so in the past.

For those on the autism spectrum, especially where combined with sensory difficulties, engagement with services can be difficult. Technology was described as having had a major impact in improving this. People were described as trying things they would not usually attempt to do and making new friendships.

Technology has been important to staff and teams. Some staff had developed their skills in the use of technology. One service provider stated that staff who had difficulties with IT, now had access to a workforce 'tech surgery', which provided them with training on different devices.

Some work had been undertaken with families to build confidence in the use of local facilities and community resources.

### **Barriers to transformation**

Whilst some changes were generally perceived as beneficial for many users, frequently families were reported as wanting services to revert to pre-pandemic models.

Diagnosis had been an issue in terms of referrals to services. During the pandemic the diagnosis of neuro diversity problems slowed.

The issue of eligibility was also highlighted. Thresholds applied in adulthood were described as higher than those used in services for children. Need and wellbeing should be the criteria upon which service provision is determined to ensure continuity of support, as the needs of people and their families needs change.

Transition from childhood to adulthood was described as a huge challenge. Cut off points from children and young people's services were described as hit and miss, impacting upon continuity and giving rise to potential service gaps.

Services have had to rely on additional funding to resource provision of information technology.

## **Services for people with a Learning disability**

### **Enablers of transformation**

Person centred approaches were considered important and needed to be core rather than an additional layer applied to 'usual' services. Similarly, a clear understanding of the concept of choice, and the key role of those working closely with individuals in establishing what was important to them, was highlighted.

It was highlighted that hub and spoke approaches were of significant importance for people with behaviours that challenge.

Establishing through-age services was considered important to avoid disruption at stages of transition.

The importance and potential impact of day opportunity services was highlighted. Understanding the full value of what effective services can achieve, including preventative support and impacting people's connectedness and wellbeing should not be underestimated. Instead, these factors should be amplified to demonstrate the importance of these services.

### **Barriers to transformation**

Co-production approaches require time for staff and people using the service to establish what matters and the identify personal outcomes desired by individuals, in line with the requirements of the SSWBA 2014. Some participants raised a potential tension in the use of co-production approaches with the timescale standards for assessments within the Act. For co-production to succeed, it was suggested that a wider systems approach was required, including contributions from within the wider community. The key to success was seen as taking time and skilling up support workers to work in a co-productive way.

Choice may be limited by resources, with the potential for delivering identified outcomes restricted in some cases.

Concerns were raised by one third sector organisation about day services not being regulated. They asserted that as a result, staff do not benefit from higher rates of pay received by those working in regulated services nor did they receive the COVID bonus. They added that this was making recruitment more difficult, and services were losing staff to regulated areas undertaking similar work. It should be noted that others disagreed with this analysis.

Some members of the group questioned whether existing commissioning processes were conducive to co-produced approaches.

## Services for Unpaid carers

Long standing issues identified as affecting unpaid carers were, understanding what constitutes being a carer, and what services are available to them. It was stated that family members see themselves as such and do not make the connection with being an unpaid carer. To seek support, the breadth of the caring role and the services available need to be understood by all stakeholders.

### Enablers of transformation

Being an unpaid carer can include a broad spectrum of needs requiring a range of support. Addressing what may be considered low-level needs can prevent challenges from escalating. Stakeholders in the review felt that universal access to high quality support, was critical and would be facilitated by development of a 'community' of carers and a campaign raising awareness of the role and associated needs. This should include support in the workplace. Provision of the range of support required would be assisted by a community development approach. A co-produced approach to developing support was seen as key.

A Wellbeing Hub has been established by Carers Wales and the Hope project, established by Age Cymru, was also identified as undertaking research, signposting people and undertaking introductions for unpaid carers to relevant services.

Unpaid carers felt that it should be recognised that short breaks are important to their own wellbeing as well as those benefitting directly from the services.

### Barriers to transformation

The group emphasised the findings from the recent annual survey undertaken by Carers Wales that, for many, services had not restarted.<sup>ii</sup> Unpaid carers felt that this should be recognised and addressed.

'Sitting services' were seen as a particularly useful resource to unpaid carers. However, these services were not always available. Where people do seek support in their caring role, it was not always clear what they were entitled to and choices that were available to them. This can severely impact on the potential for early intervention.

A greater awareness of what is available and accessible should be provided, together with more general information. Unpaid carers should know what rights they have but this knowledge was not always present.

## Services for Children with complex needs

Members of the focus group stressed the specific needs of children, which had not been fully reflected in the issues emerging from the call for evidence and subsequent questionnaires. For example, the needs of day opportunities were different for children still in education. It should also be recognised that the policy of eliminating profit from children's services being taken forward by Welsh Government, could well be an enabling mechanism to transformation. However, there could also be unintended consequences that may mean that it becomes a barrier.

### Enablers of transformation

To meet needs holistically, there is a requirement for more than just local authority social care and third sector providers to be involved. Meeting needs effectively will require joint working across social care, health and other local authority departments, like education and leisure. We heard that whilst COVID-19 recovery money did allow organisations to try things out and to be experimental



with service design and delivery, this had not been sustained and adequate funding was vital to see change embedded and consolidated moving forward.

In some cases, improvement was not about introducing new models of support, but about enhancing the quality of existing approaches.

### **Barriers to transformation**

The registration system can be a challenge for child and adult service providers because services for children and adults have different registration systems. Also, because the voice of the child can be difficult to elicit, the shape of respite services can end up being based upon the needs of the parents rather than those receiving services.

A clear message was that the needs of children were becoming more complex, with behaviours that concern and challenge, which are, in some cases, exacerbated by the social environments in which children live.

Thresholds applied to individual services can be prohibitive in that they disregard overall levels of need and in some cases fail to reflect the combined levels of need experienced by children and their families. Those levels would justify access to services which are, in practice, denied to individuals.

Families opting for Direct Payments (DPs) are reported frequently to be experiencing difficulty in accessing Personal Assistants (PAs).

Overall resources available for services was raised as a critical issue, with demand often outstripping available supply even before the pandemic. Required staff/ user ratios and lack of clarity over respective responsibilities of funding across health and social care, add further pressure. Health is seen in some cases as 'walking away' from their responsibilities in terms of funding. Employee training can be expensive. Staffing challenges in respect of recruitment and retention apply to this population group as well as to others. Not surprisingly in this context, the need for more investment was viewed as a critical issue.

Perhaps resulting from the above challenges, concerns were raised about the availability of services to some families.

Another issue raised was that health services specify when they can provide a service. We heard that timing can be based around when staff can provide the time, not when the family needs it.

## **Services for older people**

### **Enablers of transformation**

During our discussion, one local authority reported having remodelled services to include more choice in the community, as people were asking for seven day a week support. The local authority subsequently built on its existing digital leisure app available to the public to promote the availability of services for older people.

The growth in the effective use of technology, techniques, and clinical practice through the development of virtual wards and hospital outreach services in a person's home is critical, as it provides opportunities for support outside of formal services and physical settings. It was highlighted that nowadays virtually everything can be addressed outside an institutional/ residential setting. If preventative services are not in place, families may find themselves in a crisis. Intervening in a crisis costs local authorities more money than managed care. Invest to save is considered important for long term solutions and greater efficiencies.

The Eco system for a new model of long-term support is not just health, housing, and social care but an extensive network of components. Autonomous systems need to be created and include workforce, waste management, planning, circular economy, education, advanced materials, design etc. To create what's needed there must be a move away from the traditional mindset of health and social care alone.

### **Barriers to transformation**

As with other client groups, staffing and workforce is a significant issue. It was reported that fewer people were applying for jobs within this part of the social care sector. As such, fewer people are available to meet any additional demand.

It was highlighted that achieving the aspiration of a seven day a week offer would have considerable workforce implications. Trades Unions have been involved in the discussions with regards to the workforce and potential changes to working hours and it was questioned to what degree the existing workforce is able or prepared to be more flexible in delivery. The importance of these services must be seen as essential to support individuals to remain as independent as possible for as long as possible and not a 'nice to have' service.

The question of the potential for regulation of day opportunities was raised and some queried whether formal standards would assist in driving change and improving quality. Contributors to the review also questioned whether regulation would help protect day opportunity and short break services from cuts or being withdrawn altogether. They were concerned that currently, when budget cuts were applied, these are the first services to be cut because they are not statutory.

## **Services for people with physical and sensory disabilities**

### **Enablers of transformation**

We heard of several examples of local authorities making concrete moves towards rethinking services. One local authority, recognising that existing models need to be refreshed, is scoping a review of its day service with a particular focus on engaging with hard to reach groups. It has recently established a group which is scoping a review of day services. Another is developing localism and a community assets-based model as part of a wider Live Well approach. The idea here is that people live in communities and a range of opportunities exist within specific localities. Some areas are involving Supported Living providers in such endeavours, focusing on helping individuals attain what they see to be a 'good life'. Partnership with the third sector is also potentially valuable. Within this context of change, it is important to note that some individuals prefer the safety and security of a centre, hub or other building.

In one region, just before the outbreak of the pandemic, several local authorities were reviewing their day opportunity services, realising that the services were potentially institutionalising people within the community. One of these local authorities linked their day services to community meals provision, providing training and employment. The pandemic then forced a move to a hybrid model. The hybrid model increased referrals significantly. Day opportunity services are now offered on a sessional basis throughout the day, including evenings. The local authority is now delivering a mix of day opportunity and community-based services, using assistive technology, providing a mix of support, such as 1:1, and peer support. The feedback on the changes made, have been positive.

We heard that when the pandemic commenced, people adapted and found alternatives to the services previously provided. Some people with physical disabilities and sensory impairments reported positive experience of DPs which they used to fund new opportunities to live the lives they want to live.

Work is ongoing in some areas to train and support staff to think differently and beyond the four walls. However, a legacy of institutional thinking exists, which we heard can be difficult to shift.

Commissioning was identified as important to enabling transformation. A holistic approach to commissioning support to enhance lives for individuals, rather than focusing on sessional care in specific settings, was advocated by a number of participants. It was recognised that services have a long way to go to commission for outcomes rather than service inputs, monitoring performance, safeguarding and regulation. Some felt that agencies should also be supporting people to be their own commissioners through the use of direct payments or self-funding options.

Co-production was seen as key to transforming services. Practitioners need to give those using services and their families a share in decision-making, assisting people who use services to drive forward the changes they need for themselves. Such approaches can effect change even within existing resources.

Through-age services provide opportunities in avoiding the necessity for people to transition between services at key stages.

It was recognised that national approaches may be useful for commissioning, in providing exemplars but this should not be too prescriptive and must reflect local need.

### **Barriers to transformation**

We heard that service planning and communication was a challenge, particularly in terms of how professionals engage and enable the participation of people with a range of different needs. Perhaps as a result of communication challenges, we heard from unpaid carers who were concerned about changes being introduced and the impact on their loved ones using services.

Some participants acknowledged that a service gap exists for young people and younger adults with physical and sensory impairment, who are frequently grouped with older adults.

Some people expressed concern that the move from day centres to more community-based facilities can be unsettling. It was suggested that this is more so among older adults and those for whom disabilities were experienced later in life, due for example to stroke. As a result, some individuals have lost their confidence and are seeking to rebuild it, attending a familiar space with others in the same situation was described as reassuring.

For those with complex needs, in terms of personal care/peg-feeding etc. providing community services in this way can also be more problematic.

Some people were concerned about irregularities regarding regulation and how this might impact person-centred service delivery, for example, going from the hub doing IT activities, which are unregulated, to swimming which is regulated. Furthermore, it was added that a short break in a caravan under 28 days is unregulated, whereas a stay over 28 days requires regulation.

Transport challenges were identified, particularly in rural areas and this can create a barrier to participation.

### **Visits and service specific interviews**

Following a positive response from our evidence call from a range of providers, including local authorities, third sector and private providers, a series of service visits were arranged. It was not possible to respond to every request; however, a sample was selected to ensure a good geographical spread and, where possible, different types of service. We did visit a higher number of learning disability services than any other client group, since a higher number of these services responded to the evidence call. The services selected were thought to provide a varied insight into the types of opportunities available for this specific group across Wales.

In total, we carried out 18 visits, which included a mixture of physical visits and online interviews. These included 9 learning disability services, 2 transition projects for children with complex needs,

4 services for older people, 2 unpaid carers services and 1 service for people with physical impairment.

Where possible, the visits involved those using the service, the staff and management, enabling them to reflect on the changes that have been made since the pandemic and their impact.

A full list of visits undertaken is provided in Appendix VI. Key learning points from service visits and interviews

### **Service change and development**

Our service visits across Wales provided evidence that the pandemic has brought about significant change for all client groups. Many stakeholders reported that the reduction in bureaucracy and need for rapid responses as the pandemic took hold, meant that they were able to make changes quickly, be creative and look at things differently.

For example, a transition service delivered by a local authority now offers access to virtual opportunities and outdoor spaces, which did not happen before the pandemic. It has made people explore the blue and green spaces within the local area and appreciate the benefits they offer. Currently, rather than sending people out of the county, the focus of the service is now about creating local opportunities for people, keeping them closer to home where important social connections and relationships exist and can be consolidated.

Other services, such as a privately run day service for older people, have seen the opportunity for change as a positive development. The service's links with the local community is now far greater, giving potential users an insight into the other services on offer by the organisation, including residential care and respite. This has resulted in a greater awareness in the local community of the services that could be available to them as they grow older and their needs change. A person who currently attends the day service might become a resident of the 'hotel with support' as and when the time is right.

It was evident during one of our visits how the pandemic had provided a good opportunity to expand the use of supported employment for people with learning disabilities, with a reported growth in the number of work opportunities made available across the county during the period when the pandemic was at its most prevalent. Projects established during that time focused on those providing sustainable income generation within the local economy, such as cafes, gift shops and groundwork services. We understand that this has resulted in significant savings for the local authority of around £600k and, most importantly, impacted positively on outcomes for those accessing these opportunities.

The manager of this service highlighted the importance of establishing a culture where strategic leaders trusted the ability of managers to be able to think outside of the box about what the potential might be in terms supporting people into work. This included working alongside people in supported employment to think about the future of the service, exploring opportunities for additional funding streams and ensuring directorates in the local authority, worked together to maximise the benefits for all stakeholders.

Whilst there was evidence of enhancements to supported employment in several of our visits, the extent to which it had been established across the country was varied. There was a sense among commissioners and providers that there was a need to know more about the potential of specific approaches to create more supported employment opportunities within local economies across Wales.

One day centre for older adults we visited had begun expanding its range of support with an increased community presence prior to the pandemic. An entrepreneurial approach adopted by the

manager of the service, with support of the staff, has enabled the development of partnerships with local churches, businesses, and other community facilities to enhance the offer.

During the pandemic, such supportive relationships were not only sustained, but were strengthened. The garden located in the day centre became a resource to the community and allowed users of the service to attend on a restricted basis. The food and clothing bank that had been established prior to the pandemic continued and although closed to users, the resource continued to operate as a hub that was accessed by other parts of the community.

This outreach into the community has significantly increased the presence of the service. Many of its initiatives have expanded and further plans are underway. The growth of the service has been incremental with additional options being added over time. The service has worked with fewer users over the last decade, with a focus being placed on managing people with greater complexity.

The opportunity for change has also reaffirmed the importance and value of co-production in supporting and leading the development of services. An example of this is an unpaid carers respite project that operates throughout mid Wales. During the pandemic, three key principles were applied to support the delivery of service – listen to carers, only do what you are comfortable with and stay within the law. In light of the co-productive and person-centred culture that exists within the organisation, unpaid carers have remained actively involved and, in some cases, are leading on ongoing service changes.

Not all users have viewed changes to day opportunity and respite services positively. For example, on several occasions we heard examples of how, since the pandemic, people are now being offered less hours in contrast to those provided previously. The reasons for this were varied and included intentional service remodelling, a lack of transport provision, or staffing issues. This obviously causes some difficulty for individuals and their families when they may have historically had a five-day a week, all day provision. However, such changes suited other individuals better, in that they involved less interaction over a shorter period of time, each week.

Pre-pandemic, in one day service for older people, there was opportunity to provide residential respite where people would come to the day service, become acquainted with the staff and service provision in a safe environment, and then would stay in the adjacent residential care setting. Since the pandemic, this has happened less and less because the beds that were respite are now being used to manage hospital discharge.

A concern raised by some of the services visited and by those participating in the focus groups, was that, in contrast to other service areas, Welsh Government guidance for day opportunity services on how to provide continuity during the pandemic was provided too late. One reason given for this was the assumption that services were closed and, therefore, did not require such guidance. There was a failure to recognise the lengths that services went to sustain contact and revise the offer in line with restrictions.

The staff of a day opportunity service for people with complex learning disabilities, reported how services were reconfigured during the pandemic when the centre had to close. Staff delivered non-personal domiciliary care, which included the delivery of food parcels, collection of prescriptions and undertook visits to people in their own homes. This support was welcomed by many families. However, some families felt this was obtrusive or feared the transmission of COVID-19 into the household. Where this was the case, visits were curtailed. People were also taken out into local community facilities where possible, building on existing community links and this has been maintained as services have re-opened.

There was also evidence to suggest that more commissioners and providers were thinking more broadly about how to provide access to a range of support services based on a through-age model that would include a mix of people of different ages and abilities, rather than designing services for

a specific client group. One local authority spoke about work to set up an inclusive steering group for the development of their community hubs, with the focus being about people of all needs and abilities making the most of the physical space. The lens used was one of providing opportunity for integration in the community with the aim of supporting people to build relationships and social capital, in contrast to creating a reliance on service provision and professional support.

In a further example of this approach, one 'in house' day opportunity provider for people with learning disabilities, spoke about the importance of making sure people they worked with knew about activities that were taking place in the community, which were not run by traditional services, and facilitating genuine opportunities for interested individuals to attend and be involved.

### **Impact of the pandemic on people accessing support and unpaid carers**

There is no doubt that many people of all ages and abilities accessing support are still feeling a negative impact from the pandemic. Several carers we spoke to during our visits reported that the individuals they support had experienced loneliness, loss of social skills, reduced motivation and impaired fitness, even as they reconnected with services.

Several providers of day opportunities for people with learning disabilities reported high levels of anxiety among users returning after the pandemic, with some individuals still afraid of coming into physical contact with others and being nervous about visiting indoor spaces. This is understandable, as for several months, people were told that they could not be socially connected to others in person. Therefore, for some, the need to revert to social norms will be difficult, if not impossible and services will need to respond accordingly.

These issues will undoubtedly continue to affect the outcomes people are able to achieve whilst attending a day opportunity, respite or short break service, and providers have needed to take account of this when considering how to respond to the needs of the individual. In an extreme case, one person lost the ability to walk, and other people were impacted in terms of losing relationships and connections, with increasing dependence being placed on family and unpaid carers.

However, whilst there were cases of people being negatively affected by the impact of the pandemic, it is important to acknowledge that, for some individuals, there were positive outcomes. In one example, we heard about how one group of people using services became involved in delivering PPE. This equipment was stored at one of the hubs and the team who provided the day opportunity service, saw this as an opportunity for individuals to be part of the delivery service. This resulted in two people being nominated for and winning, the COVID Volunteer Heroes award, which will no doubt have a lasting impact in recognition of the contribution they made.

There is no doubt that the burden on unpaid carers was particularly onerous during the pandemic. With the continued reduction of provision within day opportunities and limited availability of domiciliary care, short break provision remains a vital service for unpaid carers. Continued access to respite care is required to ensure they can continue to support their loved one. In one example, we heard how one individual had cared alone for her husband for 2 years. As soon as her husband, who was living with Parkinson's, was able to visit a day service once again, she gained weight, reconnected with friends and felt she could confidently continue to care for her husband in the foreseeable future.

At one local authority day service for people with physical disabilities, support was maintained by staff during the pandemic with assistance provided to attend appointments and to access digital technology to connect with their friends and take part in virtual activities such as exercise classes. The service noted that some people physically deteriorated during lockdown and found it hard to re-mobilise as in-person services were reopened.

Importantly, at this service, several people reflected upon the significance of the social connectedness of group activities. Some individuals who attended the centre and had experienced a stroke during the pandemic, commented that the service had literally saved their lives as they recovered. Hopelessness turned to a new lease of life when they found purpose through skills development and friendship with others going through the same or similar experience. Friendships were supported to be sustained during the pandemic and even whilst services were disrupted and, in some cases closed, the strong relationships were not broken.

### **Person-centred support**

During our visits, several examples were given by practitioners regarding person-centred support. The importance of having conversations with individuals about the activities they chose to engage with during their time in their day opportunity was highlighted in most service areas, as well the improved engagement and continual dialogue with family members since the start of the pandemic. It was generally noted that family members are now far more proactive about their engagement with services.

In one local authority it was reported that day opportunities for older people are now being delivered closer to home. Therefore, individuals are spending less time travelling on community transport, and local services are better utilised. Furthermore, people can spend more time engaging in purposeful activity whilst accessing a service, developing relationships with others in their local community that have the potential to reach into other aspects of their lives, away from a more formal day opportunity setting.

The opportunity to refresh and reaffirm the use of person-centred planning tools and the availability and awareness of examples, such as, the 'Growing in relationships' map,<sup>iii</sup> was welcomed by some managers working primarily in the context of learning disability.

The involvement of service providers in person-centred reviews was also considered important to ensure the needs and wishes of an individual were appropriately met. During our visits we heard of examples of where providers had been included in people's reviews and this had been a positive experience. However, we were also given examples where providers had not been included. Generally, it was felt that as services providers had trusted relationships with the individuals they supported and were amongst those who knew the individual best, their involvement in people's person-centred reviews as standard practice, was intrinsically beneficial.

### **Co-production**

Two service specific interviews were held with projects that were developing co-production approaches. One focused on supporting groups of people to pool Direct Payments (DPs) to model and commission services for themselves, with support from their families.

One example from the project, was the support offered to a group of people and their families who were dissatisfied with the offer of services locally. This was due to either their service not having re-opened following the lifting of pandemic restrictions, or the nature of the services being offered not meeting the ambitions of those individuals and their families.

The programme is developmental. It works within the parameters of the use of DPs which have not always been embraced by local authorities. Some risks have to be managed, for example, maintaining a service resourced using pooled DPs where one participant withdraws. Despite these risks, the approach allows people to be creative in the use of their DPs and to empower people to work together to develop services tailored specifically to meet an agreed need.

The other project working within one local authority sought to expand and enhance the application of co-production approaches. Central to the project was the importance of the narratives of those people using the service, the importance of learning from the process and how relationships and

connectedness between those using the service and those delivering it, can enhance people's experience. The work demonstrated the necessity to shift the service mindset, moving from being 'done to' and using reflective practice. The approach focussed less on the nature of activities undertaken within day opportunity services, and more on the importance of conversations and reflection on experiences of activities.

The project recognised that a genuinely co-produced approach can be frightening for those people involved and requires a great deal of thought, reflection, and adjustment for it to become fully embedded. The process is not simple, but people can learn together as they move forward.

One experience used to illustrate the way in which people can learn, related to a 'group walk' organised for several people who had learning disabilities. During the walk the group got lost. They then worked together to find their way back to a place that they recognised to complete the walk. The process of finding their way home was more important than taking the walk. The experience allowed all the participants, those using the service and staff, to play an equal part in finding the way. This example is not only an example of shared experience but acts as a metaphor for the application of the co-production approach more generally.

### **Rethinking commissioning**

Local authorities told us about how they had worked in closer partnership with each other and the third sector during the pandemic, and this had continued following the lifting of restrictions. This is said to have improved relationships between all agencies involved in the delivery of support to vulnerable people.

In our conversation with one external provider of a learning disability day service, we learnt that if a person does not attend their planned placement without notice, they are unable to make a claim for the daily placement fee despite fixed costs, such as staffing and rent, remaining unchanged. This was not the case for services delivered internally, as budgets remained unaffected when people were unable to access a session at short notice. The provider expressed concern that this arrangement was having a financial impact on the sustainability of their organisation, and given the rising costs associated with providing services, managers were having to make choices about if they could receive a salary on a month-by-month basis. The implications of such contractual arrangements should be thought through carefully. However, it should be noted that this practice is not applied by all local authorities.

Nevertheless, these decisions were placing providers in situations where they were having to consider other ways of generating income to ensure that established and valued services could be maintained. In projects which were underpinned by principles of co-production, these changes were particularly challenging, especially when strong working relationships had been formed between individuals accessing the services and the workforce.

There is an opportunity here for commissioners and providers to rethink commissioning arrangements, post-pandemic. This will ensure that organisations can continue to meet the needs of the individuals they support in a way that ensures choice and control for the individual, but also future sustainability of provision.

Such issues might be resolved through more supportive and flexible financial arrangements between providers and commissioners. However, there is also an opportunity for more joined up working concerning knowledge of and, access to, other funding streams. For example, Access to Work Funding that can be used by people of working age, was recognised as an opportunity for service development in various locations across Wales.

As one commissioner highlighted, when considering how services would evolve post-pandemic, there could be a need to be able to run existing and new services in parallel. This would enable new models to become established before an existing service is decommissioned and provide



those directly affected, including those who use and work in services, to better understand why and how their lives will be affected as the change process progresses.

## **Regulation**

The issue of regulation was highlighted during a number of conversations which took place as part of the review, with some contributors expressing the view that the complexity of needs presented by individuals accessing day and respite services warranted the need for some form of regulation.

Some of these questioned how the support they were providing in a day opportunity setting was any different to support that maybe provided to an individual at home, which was part of a regulated service. Furthermore, the view was expressed that some aspects of personal care provided as part of these services are by nature invasive and, historically, would have been provided by healthcare services. This potentially strengthens the case for enhanced scrutiny and assurance which could be provided through regulation.

However, equally some contributors highlighted the risk that regulation of day opportunity services would limit the potential of what could be achieved by some individuals. Whilst services are not regulated in a traditional care sense, the more forward-thinking services are having to deal with the implications of regulation every day, for example, health and safety regulation, food hygiene and employment.

## **The use of Digital Technology**

Increased use of digital technology in response to the pandemic is seen generally as a positive development. Many contributors across services identified benefits of its technology in terms of improving connections with families and, in some cases, being seen as something of a 'lifesaver' during the periods of lockdown.

Technology plays an important role in a centre, which delivers opportunities for people with profound learning disabilities and multiple needs. Resources from the Regional Integration Fund have enabled the provision of state-of-the-art technology to stimulate and provide interactive facilities. The service is able to provide a range of support services, meeting the needs of many who may otherwise require placement out of county. During the pandemic, the digital communication technology used by service providers, allowed continuity of provision by means of virtual connectivity.

There were several examples given during our visits of where video conferencing technology, such as Zoom, is still being used to keep people connected out of daytime hours, when traditional services would not typically run. One project reported how their weekly Sunday film night is still regularly attended by their members and families. Another project gave an example where a Zoom meeting between two groups for older people had reconnected individuals who had not been in contact for a long time and were subsequently supported to meet in person.

Technology also presents enhanced opportunities for person-centred reviews where participants cannot be physically together. Whilst this was highlighted in a limited number of services we visited, and in relation specifically to learning disability services, benefits could be realised more widely.

Contributors also spoke about how digital platforms and applications, such as WhatsApp groups, had been a 'saviour' during the pandemic, in allowing them to communicate more effectively with staff who, before the pandemic, and sometimes because of the nature of their work, may not have had access to a work email address.

## **Workforce**

During our visits, several issues were raised concerning workforce matters. Many providers spoke about the flexibility of their staff during the pandemic, which ensured that services were able to provide a response to the most vulnerable users. However, as services have moved towards new ways of working by building on these developments, there have been challenges as some staff who have resisted the shift to alternative ways of working.

As with all parts of the sector, the challenges of recruitment persist, and, in some cases, this is affecting the ability of services to provide a truly person-centred service due to insufficient staffing levels.

This is also impacted by the levels of personal care that individuals require and the time that is spent supporting this. An analysis of staff time in one service identified that support workers spend up to 9 hours per week on personal care, which equates to 25% of their contracted hours.

## **Transport**

In respect of getting people to and from services, transport was also repeatedly highlighted as a current barrier. Whereas previously, those without transport would be picked up and dropped off at the start and the end of the day in a minibus, the ways in which some services are now configured, with people accessing shorter sessions on a flexible basis, means that the use of shared transport becomes unsustainable from a staffing, logistical and value for money basis.

As a result, some services are no longer providing transport, which presents a significant obstacle to people being able to access services they require. One manager of a day service recounted that despite an individual being assessed as needing a service, they could not attend because there was no way of getting the person to the service location and therefore, they were unable to meet the person's needs.

Consideration could be given to the use of Personal Independence Payments and mobility allowance to address this need. Some families have Motability vehicles but do not routinely use them to transport family members to services. The lack of availability of taxis with wheelchair access was also raised, with anecdotal evidence in one rural location that the reason for this was because all the accessible taxis were commissioned for use by the NHS.

## **Examples of innovative practice**

On our visits across Wales, there were several examples of innovative practice that the project team considered appropriate for inclusion in this report. The examples that have been included are seen to have made a positive impact on the people being supported and those working within services.

The ability to recruit hospitality staff had been challenging for Age Connects Morgannwg, who provide services to older people. Their community hub, Cynon Link, has an onsite café, and this difficulty impacted on the availability of subsidised hot meals for older people and other members of the community. The service is co-located with a range of through-age services, such as a counselling service, a GP practice and a family 'stay and play' centre. Therefore, the opportunity to provide employment for people who were accessing other services in the hub was actively pursued. The supportive environment has meant that individuals, who may have otherwise been unable to work, have successfully maintained their employment and the café has been able to continue providing a vital resource for the local community.

During the pandemic, day services for older people in Pembrokeshire used Zoom to reconnect individuals who, due to frailty, had lost touch. As regulations were lifted, some of these individuals were able to meet in person. This opportunity has only been made possible with the introduction of

video conferencing technology, which would not have happened had it not been for the pandemic, which forced the incorporation of virtual working into practice.

The transition service Camu 'Mlaen for young people operating in Ceredigion is set up to deliver activities 52 weeks per year. These include volunteering, independent living skills and four pillars of learning. The project also looks at employability and being united and connected socially. This has a significant impact on the young people and families accessing the service as they transition from school, which typically provides support during the term time only.

The Learning Disability service in Torfaen, has been testing a digital person-centred planning tool, called 'ForMi' (previously Here2there). The digital application allows individuals to keep a real time record of goals and activities and to engage with their 'circle of support' to share progress and receive feedback. The project team were given a demonstration of the application by a person who uses ForMi. It was very clear that the individual had benefitted, specifically in participating in weekly video calls with his key worker to keep his support plan and the application updated.

Technology has enabled people to communicate on an individual and group basis and a range of activities have been delivered through this medium. In particular, the award-winning Insight Application has allowed closer working between commissioners and third sector organisations.

To embed a person-centred culture, the Carers Project, Credu, in Powys, shared their experiences of working with Social Care Wales' Outcomes Champions group and undertook 'collaborative conversation' training with Rhoda Emlyn-Jones and Mark John Williams, who are both recognised trainers in outcomes-based delivery across the sector in Wales. As a result, a number of unique, person-centred outcomes have been achieved through events such as the Bubblehub and Credu Big weekends, which are festival type events for unpaid carers and the people they support.

Pembrokeshire Learning Disability service has used the changes brought about by the pandemic as an opportunity to expand their supported employment offer for people, by connecting with other local authority directorates. For example, the service now works closely with the Culture and Heritage department to provide work opportunities within a range of tourism and heritage sights across the county which, prior to the pandemic, had not been available.

Early on in the pandemic, the learning disability service provider, Mencap Mid Wales, developed their '3 Rs' approach. This translates to (what do we) Retain, (what could we) Restore and (what can we) Re-invent? They introduced this co-productively with staff and users of the service, ensuring that everyone involved understood why changes were needed and what they would mean in practice. A notable moment during our visit was when a service user called in, via video call (which had been a specific learning outcome during the pandemic), as she was ill with COVID-19. The sense of belonging, camaraderie and friendship was palpable, as was the independent nature of the call and how the person greeted everybody via the technology.

Mencap Môn is a support service for people with learning disabilities and their families based in central Llangefni on Ynys Môn. Its prime location aims to ensure that people with a learning disability are connected into their community. The building hosts a number of small businesses, which provide supported employment opportunities enabling people to serve the wider community and contribute to the local economy.

On the days when the part-time service is not open, the hub is used by other groups such as children with complex needs and their families. This service provides a toy library for children, giving parents the opportunity to provide their children with toys that are generally expensive without having to buy them. The hub has also been identified as a warm space and pantry, encouraging other members of the community who may be vulnerable, to connect and receive support.

## The future of day opportunity and short break services

Many of the issues identified within the review might be resolved by improving the commissioning of these services.

Effective services should be evidence-based but the evidence used to model and remodel services needs to be sufficiently sophisticated to plan services that are efficient, effective, empowering and equitable.

The review sought qualitative data on the availability of services as part of the questionnaire provided to service commissioners and providers. Whilst the reflections of some who completed the questionnaire suggested that providing the data in the form requested was challenging, it was evident that across Wales, quantitative data is not regularly and consistently reported. Many participants stated that where data is collected, the metrics used may not adequately identify the value of services provided.

The clearest example of this shortcoming is the numeric data collected related to attendance. The value of services was said to relate to how many people attended, how often and for how long. This approach does not recognise the value in the achievement of outcomes by those who attend or the additional costs per person that relate to the complexity of an individual's needs. As a result, the potential exists for services to provide more of the same service to more people. The risk is here that services might be induced to focus on the least demanding cases rather than targeting those in greatest need, and whose complexity of care may increase the unit costs incurred by the service and seeking to tailor services to meet individual needs.

Variation was noted between in-house local authority provision and those provided by the independent sector in terms of the reward for service provision. In independent provision, payment for services provided is often based upon the number of attendees on a particular day. If somebody does not attend for any reason the service loses this income. As a result, the metric that is important to such a service is attendance rather than outcomes gained. This approach can impact on the viability of some services when attendances drop and their ability to be flexible in terms of enabling people to move on begin to use other aligned services.

Many examples of service reform observed have resulted from gradual, evolutionary changes, rather than revolutionary reform. This has enabled a gradual change to the offer of service with additional service components being added through changing relationships with local communities and partner agencies.

Evolutionary reform is likely to be less controversial than revolutionary change. However, where services are no longer sustainable in their present form or are substandard or sub optimal, it may be necessary to bring about rapid and large-scale change. Where this is the case, such a process must be carefully and sensitively managed, embracing the principles of co-production.

Developing new models whilst serving existing users presents challenges associated with parallel running of services. This has obvious capacity and financial implications.

The delivery of day opportunity, respite and short break services are the subject of significant political interest at both national and local levels. This is both in terms of the general 'politics of social care services arising from public and media interest and the active involvement of elected politicians in the planning and evaluation of these services.

The reform and decommissioning of services can be politically charged in both senses of the word. Individuals, their families, the workforce, and wider community can all be concerned when services are subject to change.

These sensitivities are understandable, as many people using services have significant needs and their families that support them may require these services to sustain the caring roles that they fulfil.

People are frequently suspicious of change and may believe that any changes relate to cost savings rather than service improvements. Given the impact of austerity and the current financial climate facing social care and health services and local authorities as a whole, these suspicions are understandable.

However, these perceptions should not prevent services from reforming and seeking to deliver the most appropriate services possible. Instead, any plans need to be clearly and transparently communicated to all stakeholders in order that the intended improvements, the reasons for them and the way they will be delivered are fully understood.

Using person-centred and co-production approaches, and engagement with those individuals using services, can help elicit the nature of what that they wish to experience and the outcomes that they want to realise. These approaches will inform the provision of services for each individual and by aggregating this intelligence in the manner in which the service needs to develop as a whole to meet these needs.

The workforce should also be engaged at the earliest opportunity regarding any proposed changes. This will enable them to prepare for adjustments to their working week, shift patterns, working environments. It will also prepare them to develop new skills or enhance those that they possess, to meet the challenge required by service improvement.

Families and especially unpaid carers, also need to be informed of service change in order that they can be involved in any discussions providing a carer perspective. They need to be provided with clarity about why the service needs to change and how their needs can continue to be met. They need to be enabled to prepare for any changes, fully understanding the timescales within which change will take place and the plans to meet the logistical challenges arising from that change.

The public needs to be engaged in order that greater access to community resources can be enhanced. This may require adjustments to be made in order to enable the use of facilities which may impact on others using them. To best ensure that people are welcomed into community facilities, preparation, consultation, and engagement can ease the potential for difficulties arising as services move from place-based services into more community integrated arrangements.

Some participants in the review believed that national guidance on the provision of day opportunity and respite short break services would be helpful. Others felt that this may lead to unintended consequences such as the over prescription of services which may limit local autonomy and fit. A central fund to support transformation and innovation could be introduced to as part of, or in addition to the Regional Integration Fund, enabling services to sustain change and introduce new models alongside more traditional models of service. This could enable the provision of a new offer to younger attendees or others who may wish to use more local community facilities and those offering greater potential for paid employment. Dedicated Capital funding streams would also have obvious value.

The review also highlighted that frequently the provision of day opportunity, respite, and short break services, is seen as the business of social services and health, with their partners. This approach fails to recognise the benefits of engaging with wider local authority provision, such as education and lifelong learning, leisure, library and recreation services, sustainable transport services, alongside faith communities, employment services and employers and local businesses. Engaging all these agencies, if considered in the planning and commissioning of services, would

enable greater connectivity with local communities, the most effective use of local resources and the efficient use of public money.

This approach requires effective collaboration within and between agencies. Social services would require the development of partnership approaches with other directorates and departments within the local authority, as well as relationships and, potentially contracts, with other agencies that provide services within its locality. These are challenging tasks, but the potential rewards are great and would potentially provide greater choice and a far more integrated models of service, that will continue to make a difference to the lives of many living in communities across Wales.

## References

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<sup>ii</sup> Carers UK, *State of Caring 2022: A snapshot of unpaid care in the UK*, November 2022.

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<sup>iii</sup> Stephen Stirk and Helen Sanderson, *Creating person-centred organisations. Strategies and tools for managing change in health, social care and the voluntary sector*, 2013.