

Item: 3
Title: Spotlight: Social care

Gweithredu / Action required -	For discussion
Amseru / Timing	Routine
Argymhelliad / Recommendation	To note, for information only.
Risg / Risk	Inability to effectively report on, and communicate, our findings will have reputational damage in addition to failure to meet our obligations with the Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement)(Wales) Act, 2020, and our Framework Document with our Partnership team within Welsh Government.
Cyllid / Finance	N/A
Amcan Cynllun Corfforaethol / Corporate Plan Objective	<p>01: Drive a national conversation about the future of health and social care services – through our conversations with the public via the research project and our own engagement activities, and discussions with partners.</p> <p>02: Push for services that meet everyone’s needs – through representing our findings on access to social care and our associated plan for working with stakeholders to address actions needed.</p> <p>03: Work together better – through partnership working with social care stakeholders.</p> <p>04: Help people and services to use technology in ways that work for them – through our involvement with social care partners</p>

	<p>Outcomes: Our research and engagement activities will strengthen relationships and amplify our voice and impact within the social care sector.</p> <p>Success will mean our insights have led to real changes in policies and practices, our influence is clearly visible in improvements across social care services in Wales.</p>
<p>Ecwiti, Amrywiaeth a Chynhwysiant / Equity, Diversity & Inclusion</p>	<p>Related Integrated Impact Assessments were completed for our activities.</p> <p>Through both the research project and Llais' engagement activities we have worked to reach as many communities as possible and ensure that our methods for data collection are accessible.</p>
<p>Cyfathrebu / Communications</p>	<p>Please tick one of the following boxes if this activity will have an impact on:</p> <p>Internal: our people <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>External: our customers/partners/stakeholders <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>External: our organisation's reputation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Cymeradwyaeth / Approval/Clearance</p>	<p>Ben Eaton</p>
<p>Trafodaethau/ Penderfyniadau Blaenorol / Previous discussions/decisions</p>	<p>Previous Board meetings have been made aware of the social care research project and our plans to increase our footprint in social care.</p>
<p>Awdur/ Cyflwyno / Author/presenting</p>	<p>Roxanne Treacy / Ben Eaton</p>
<p>Dyddiad / Date</p>	<p>28 July 2025</p>
<p>Cefndir / Background</p>	
<p>With our remit covering social care as well as health since becoming Llais we have needed to build new relationships and learn new areas of work.</p>	

We took a deliberate and measured approach to avoid stretching resources and compromising our core responsibilities particularly with regard to our complaints advocacy service. Building a shared understanding of how and when we can support people to raise concerns in relation to social care was essential.

Without this, there was a risk of inconsistent support, miscommunication, and delays that could have undermined trust and effectiveness during a critical period of transition.

We have also introduced a new Head of Advocacy Profession role to lead the development of our complaints advocacy service, ensuring a coordinated, high-quality approach across Wales and strengthening our ability to respond to the needs of people and further understanding our role in supporting social care complaints.

Our engagement teams have worked hard to build good relationships in social care with services providers and people using services.

In 2024-2025 of our 477 community engagement activities, 246 related to social care.

We made 155 representations relating to social care last year. These representations covered a range of issues including service changes, access to care, safeguarding, and support for carers.

Safeguarding and service quality

Representations were made in response to safeguarding concerns raised during an engagement visit. These included the behaviour of staff, the safety of vulnerable individuals, and the appropriateness of the care environments.

Concerns were shared with the relevant authorities and followed up to ensure action was taken. The result was an improved awareness and monitoring of safeguarding risks and direct engagement with care providers to clarify responsibilities and expectations.

Service changes and lack of engagement

Several representations were made where social care services were altered or withdrawn without adequate communication or consultation. These included changes to domiciliary care contracts, support services for specific communities, and the closure of care facilities.

Representation led to improved communication with service users and stakeholders, the initiation of engagement processes, or the reconsideration of implementation timelines.

Access to services and support for carers

Concerns were raised about the availability and consistency of care packages, the delivery of direct payments, and the support offered to unpaid carers.

These representations prompted review of local authority processes, improved signposting to carer assessments, and commitments to strengthen data collection and engagement with underrepresented groups.

Since April, all of our staff teams have undertaken part 1 of our commissioned social care learning programme and they are now undertaking part 2 to improve our organisational knowledge.

We now have a corporate lead for social care in Llais, Claire Taylor, Interim Regional Director of Neath Port Talbot and Swansea who will be helping to further our knowledge of the sector.

The scope of this lead role will connect with key networks, build on existing Llais insights, and align activity regionally while allowing for local flexibility. We will focus on adding value, linking to our strategic priorities, identifying policy influence opportunities, and agreeing clear, measurable outcomes.

Below details some of the work that has been undertaken in the past year building our understanding of social care and developing new relationships.

Manylion / Detail

We are making good progress in developing our work in social care:

Our partnerships

We have recently formed a co-operation agreement to work in partnership with the **National Office of Care and Support** to lead on a People's Forum.

Key partners will include carers and community group colleagues on the Advisory Group, and other organisations working in the sector. They will be involved in planning and delivering engagement activity to make sure we make the most of all opportunities to engage the public on social care related topics, avoid duplication of existing activities, and involve as many people as possible.

Social Care Wales

As sponsors of this year's Social Care Accolades, awards that recognise, celebrate and share good work in social care and childcare, play and early years in Wales, our Chief Executive delivered the opening speech, bringing Llais to a large social care audience of service providers and third sector partners.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/rkNWZIkQdF4>

Care Inspectorate Wales

We are developing an information-sharing agreement with Care Inspectorate Wales that will include a structured and timely exchange of insight, intelligence, and concerns between both organisations. It will be supported by a standardised proforma and clear processes for sharing and receiving information.

The Memorandum of Understanding agreement also covers regular CEO meetings, a dedicated operational working group, and quarterly updates on inspection activity and shared priorities. It will be underpinned by joint awareness-raising activity, clear governance, and

any necessary formal arrangements, ensuring the agreement becomes part of routine, effective collaboration.

Association of Directors of Social Services

We became founding members of ***The National Social Care Conference (NSCC) Network***. The NSCC Network is a transformative space that brings the social care community closer together; to offer exclusive insights, examples of innovative practice, and a supportive community driving social care excellence.

Evolving from the collaborative spirit of the National Social Care Conference, the Network is made up of social care leaders across public, third and private sectors in Wales. Through our events, newsletters and networking, we are fostering meaningful relationships, encouraging growth and innovation, and driving positive change for individuals and communities.

As our activities relating to social care have increased, we are gaining greater insights into the experiences of people using those services.

What we have been hearing about social care through our complaints advocacy service:

Concerns

594 social care concerns were raised in the past year by people who have made formal complaints through our service. The concerns raised cover a range of aspects of care, including:

Care homes and end-of-life care:

A number of complaints deal with care provided in nursing homes, both regarding the quality of care and end-of-life support. Concerns include mistreatment of patients, lack of proper assessments, and negligence in handling medication or care plans.

Mismanagement of death certificates and post-death care have also been raised by some.

Discriminatory treatment by social service providers:

Some complaints mention clients feeling bullied or discriminated against by social services, including claims of being forced into decisions regarding child protection or having their needs misrepresented in reports

Communication failures and lack of integration of services:

Many complaints relate to poor communication between healthcare providers, social services, and families. There is frequent mention of a lack of follow-up, miscommunication about care plans, or failure to respond to inquiries.

Social services workforce:

Several complaints relate to how social workers are handling cases involving children, particularly around child protection, foster care, and the needs of children with special needs. Complaints range from delayed or inadequate responses to complaints about the behaviour and decisions of social workers.

Other complaints include inconsistent access to Social Workers and issues related to the continuity of care and the availability of social work professionals, including insufficient support for people in vulnerable situations, such as those with disabilities or complex needs.

Lack of adequate support for people with mental health issues:

Complaints about social services not providing sufficient support for individuals with mental health issues.

Long waiting times for mental health assessments and support, long waiting lists for treatment and poor communication from health and social care providers.

Many complaints are about mental health services not responding quickly or adequately to severe mental health conditions, including suicide attempts, self-harm, and crisis situations.

A number of these complaints relate to children and young people's mental health services.

Psychological impact of inadequate care provision:

Several complaints highlighted the emotional strain on families trying to secure adequate care for their loved ones.

What we have been hearing about social care through our engagement activities

Our staff and volunteers have been out and about visiting people where they are receiving social care services to listen to their experiences.

We have made on-site social care engagement (visits): 21 to social care premises and 12 to premises that cover both health and social care.

What's working well

Staff dedication

Many praise staff for being kind, committed, and supportive, especially during difficult times.

Better communication in some areas

People value clear explanations, regular updates, and being involved in care decisions.

Effective local support

Where services are well coordinated, such as in community mental health or carer networks, people feel better supported.

Examples of joined-up care

Some describe smooth experiences where health and care services work closely together.

Early signs of progress

Initiatives like mobile health services and joint discharge planning are showing promise and are welcomed by communities.

When people have told us that things are working well, we have driven change by sharing the things that work for people with other services.

During visits to 2 care homes within the same local authority, we observed a marked difference in resident experience and environment. One home stood out for its homely feel, warm atmosphere, and strong approach to activities and family engagement.

In contrast, the other lacked these features.

When we shared this feedback with the local authority, they were open and receptive, agreeing to explore how the good practice from the first home could be used to improve the other, particularly around creating a more welcoming environment and strengthening resident engagement.

We shared learning and good practice from the Voices of the Valleys project with HIVE, highlighting the positive impact of creating a consistent, clear pathway across social care and health. This included the introduction of proportionate initial assessments, enabling people to be seen 5–10 working days earlier and supporting joint decision-making from the outset.

As the project closes, this new approach is being embedded into business-as-usual, with HIVE committing to ongoing quarterly reviews throughout 2025 to monitor impact and share outcomes with Llais and partners.

Concerns

Poor hospital discharge practices in relation to care following a hospital stay, arranging care packages causing delays.

Support for unpaid carers and planned care is not good enough.

Lack of community services, with limited access to day centres and wellbeing activities for older and disabled people.

Lack of availability of respite services for carers, particularly parent carers and those caring for people living with dementia.

Lack of access to social workers, and limited staff continuity for service users within social services.

Long waiting times for residential care places, with issues obtaining a place close to family and often leading to delays in hospital discharge.

Access to mental health services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, unable to get assessment or counselling, long waiting times.

Across both health and social care, we are consistently hearing about:

Lack of integration of health and social care services, with a failure of services to work together in a person focused way.

The value people place on the care and support provided by hard-working health and social care staff, both when things go well for them as well as sometimes when there are problems overall.

Issues with communication: both the accessibility of information provided, (particularly for people with learning difficulties or disabilities), and the inability of health and social care providers to communicate in the person's language of choice.

Additional difficulties faced by those in rural areas, including long travel times to healthcare facilities, limited access to carer support and lack of local health and social care services.

What we have been hearing about social care through our research

SCL Agency's research for Llais draws on existing literature, a survey conducted with 44 social care providers, a focus group with one local authority social care team, and twelve storytelling interviews with service users and unpaid carers, conducted between February and April 2025.

What it told us included the following themes.

Social care in crisis:

Workforce shortages and high turnover.

Financial pressures and budget deficits across local authorities.

Fragmented service delivery and governance inconsistencies.

Rising demand due to an aging population and increasing complexity of needs.

Unpaid carers undervalued:

Exhaustion, mental health issues, and insufficient respite.

A need for more training, recognition, and flexible support.

Innovative models exist but are isolated:

Promising models include micro-care enterprises, integrated reablement teams, community hubs, and digital tools - these are often localised and lack consistent funding or mechanisms for scaling.

Children's social care needs urgent reform:

Shortages in in-county placements lead to costly and disruptive out-of-county placements.

High staff turnover and poor continuity harm children's well-being and trust in services.

Barriers to access:

Difficulties include long waiting times, unclear communication, limited respite, and cultural insensitivity.

The direct payments system is inconsistent, with some users feeling unsupported or even abandoned.

People's voice / coproduction inconsistent:

Despite co-production efforts, many people feel unheard.

Feedback loops are weak, and there is a perception that user involvement doesn't influence real decisions.

Preventative care and mental health services are underdeveloped:

Prevention and early intervention are policy goals but lack investment.

Mental health needs across the life course are growing and not being met adequately.

The report highlights future areas of focus including:

Hospital prevention/discharge which we recently gave evidence to the Senedd on.

The rollout of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill must be kept under review, especially the move to not-for-profit children's care.

Protecting community care services, which will come within the second all Wales project *Integrated Community Care Services*.

The report also highlights the need for appropriate care for underserved groups (e.g., neurodivergent people, ethnic minorities, rural communities). We will look to target some of our social care events at these communities to hear more about their needs.

Main themes across the 3 activities:

Staff shortages and carer struggles

Not enough social care staff.

Unpaid carers are exhausted and often feel unsupported.

Poor communication and services not working together

Families aren't kept properly informed.

Health and social care don't join up well.

Hard for people to get the help they need

Long waits for support like mental health help and care placements.

Services harder to reach in rural areas.

Emotional toll on families and carers

Families feel stressed, upset, and worn down trying to get good care.

Systemic problems

Not enough funding or joined-up planning.

People feel their feedback is ignored.

Good ideas exist but aren't shared widely.

Future work relating to social care outlined in the Annual Plan 2025-2026

1. Listening to social care voices

Social care is acknowledged as often being less visible than health services in our work.

The Annual Plan commits to creating more ways to hear from people who use social care services, including 2 dedicated events in each region.

We have 2 social care events planned in partnership with the National Office for Care and Support:

Royal Welsh: Roundtable discussion on the future of social care

Eisteddfod: A national social care service panel discussion.

This year each region will hold 2 social care events to further establish our presence in the social care space.

Our first All-Wales project this year *The health and social care we want* will help us to hear from people across Wales about what they want from social care services.

These voices will be shared with decision-makers to push for changes where needed.

2. Integrated community care hubs

An All-Wales project in the second half of the year will explore how people experience care through Integrated Community Care Systems (ICCS).

It will assess how well local hubs and joined-up services work for individuals and communities.

Focus areas include travel, digital access, and availability of local services.

3. Regional Health and Social Care summits

These summits will bring together NHS bodies, local authorities, social care providers, and others to:

Tackle shared challenges

Develop coordinated solutions

Improve services for people across Wales.

4. Promoting digital inclusion in social care

We are joining the DiSC (Digital in Social Care) Delivery Group, a cross-sector collaborative board working together for better digital, better social care, and better lives. We will add value and people's voices to the sector's efforts to deliver 'A Vision For Social Care' programme.

We will champion digital inclusion and, alongside other partners, support the development of digital tools with user needs in mind.