

Item: 05

Title: Spotlight on children and young people: research, engagement and partnerships

Gweithredu / Action required	For information
Amseru / Timing	Routine
Argymhelliad / Recommendation	That the Board receives and notes the contents of this report.
Risg / Risk	<p>Reputational risk if Llais does not effectively hear from, or represent, children and young people as a protected group, particularly during periods of system change affecting children’s and young people’s services.</p> <p>Strategic delivery risk if engagement with children and young people is inconsistent or not embedded across Llais’ core functions, reducing the organisation’s ability to meet its statutory purpose and strategic commitments.</p> <p>Capability and capacity risk arising from the specialist skills, safeguards and resources required to engage safely, ethically and meaningfully with children and young people, particularly at scale or during increased demand.</p>
Cyllid / Finance	N/A
Amcan Cynllun Corfforaethol / Corporate Plan Objective/Amcan Rhaglen/ Programme objective	<p>This work directly supports the Llais Strategic Plan 2024–27:</p> <p>SO 01 Drive a national conversation - Amplifying the voices of children and young people, particularly those experiencing inequality and poorer outcomes</p> <p>SO 02 Push for services that meet people’s needs - Using lived experience from children and young people to influence service improvement and accountability</p> <p>SO 05. Grow and improve as an organisation - Strengthening engagement and advocacy functions</p>

	<p>It supports the People’s Principles, including being listened to, dignity, clear communication and joined-up care.</p> <p>It focuses on the delivery of our commitments in the Annual Plan 2026–27 to prioritise children and young people as a key group for engagement and influence.</p>
<p>Ecwiti, Amrywiaeth a Chynhwysiant / Equity, Diversity & Inclusion</p>	<p>This work has strong equity and diversity relevance. Age is a protected characteristic, and children and young people experience distinct barriers within health and social care systems as a result of being under 18 or transitioning into adulthood.</p> <p>Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with disabilities or neurodevelopmental needs, care-experienced young people and Welsh-speaking children are particularly likely to experience poor access and outcomes.</p> <p>Targeted engagement and advocacy with children and young people supports Llais’ commitment to reducing inequality and making sure that less often heard voices shape service improvement.</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, Strategic Director of Organisational Strategy and Engagement</p>
<p>Trafodaethau/ Penderfyniadau Blaenorol / Previous discussions/decisions</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Awdur/ Cyflwyno / Author/presenting</p>	<p>Roxanne Treacy, Director of Communication Engagement and Insight and Rebecca Lythgoe, Head of Insights and Engagement</p>
<p>Dyddiad / Date</p>	<p>07 May 2026</p>

Cefndir / Background

This paper provides an overview of Llais' growing work with children and young people, highlighting how this aligns with our strategy, responds to emerging system risks, and strengthens our ability to represent younger voices. It also sets out key developments, learning and next steps for assurance and oversight.

Our work with children and young people directly supports the Llais Annual Plan 2026–27, which identifies children and young people as a priority group whose voices are currently under-represented in health and social care decision making.

It aligns with the Plan's commitment to targeted engagement with groups experiencing poorer outcomes, particularly children and young people facing long waits for mental health and neurodevelopmental support and those affected by unsafe or poorly managed transitions between services.

The work also reinforces Llais' People's Principles by focusing on listening, dignity, clear communication and joined-up care, to make sure that children and young people's lived experience informs service improvement, advocacy and system accountability.

Our Head of Insights and Engagement, Rebecca Lythgoe, is Llais' corporate lead for children and young people and she has been developing engagement activities and tools for our teams to use in their conversations with this age group.

Manylion / Detail

The following paragraphs highlights our recent work focused on children and young people. It highlights emerging system risks identified through research and community engagement, alongside the actions being taken to help make sure children and young people's voices are heard safely and meaningfully at both national and local levels.

Our regional research and community engagement activities

Neath Port Talbot and Swansea region

As one of their key areas of focus in 2025/2026, our Llais Neath Port Talbot and Swansea regional team focussed on children and young people's experience of mental health services.

The team held an event at the Swansea Football Stadium, where children and young people got to share their mental health experiences with professionals from their region.

A short film from this event is available here:

[Llais Neath Castell-Nedd Port Talbot ac Abertawe | Llais Neath Port Talbot and Swansea's event - BSL](#)

Cwm Taf Morgannwg region

In 2025/2026, our Cwm Taf Morgannwg regional team working in partnership with the Behaviour Support Hub brought together over 130 parents, carers, educators and health and social care professionals for a powerful conversation about Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Neurodevelopmental (ND) support in the region.

We raised families' concerns with the Health Board and Social Services and Education leads across Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil, calling for clearer information, better communication and improved support around assessment.

All bodies confirmed tangible progress in response to the issues raised. This included:

- Earlier support for families
- Stronger multi-agency working
- Better communication and information, including the development of a new 'Frequently Asked Questions' resource for families
- Greater recognition of private diagnoses
- Expanded respite provision.

Further developments are also planned for 2026. A second listening session will be held soon, focusing on hearing directly from young people aged 11–18. A short film from the event is available here:

<https://youtu.be/soBgkxzA0-Q?si=PE0MNDp8S8R7AtVI>

The team worked with a social research consultancy to carry out a research study on nursing in special schools. Following concerns raised with us from members of the public regarding the ‘Nursing in Special Schools Framework (2018)¹’, we carried out research covering all 7 areas supported by the special schools.

This research was a qualitative study. It used an anonymous survey, in-depth interviews, and focus groups to hear the voices of parents, carers, and school leaders. It looked at the impact of the framework and its effects on healthcare and support for children and their families in the special schools.

Across all groups that we heard from, they told us that school nurses are highly valued by parents, school staff and children.

They were clear that children with high levels of complex need rely on nursing provision to access education and attend school

However, we also heard a range of challenges:

- Across all schools, nursing hours have been reduced with no permanent onsite nurse operating in each setting since the implementation of the School Nursing Framework
- Many daily nursing duties, including administering medication, are now managed by teaching staff who are not medically trained
- Greater distance between nursing teams and school settings has led to poor communication between schools, parents, and the nursing team
- The lack of nursing provision has led to pupils with high levels of complex care need missing school

We are continuing to work with services to drive improvement in response to the issues raised.

¹ [a-school-nursing-framework-for-wales-part-2-nursing-in-special-schools-november-2018.pdf](#)

A national focus

Research on the impact of removing profit from children's care in Wales

At the end of 2025 we asked researchers to explore the early impacts of the Health and Social Care Bill on Looked After Children (LAC) in Wales, with a particular focus on lived experience, care quality, placement stability, and emotional wellbeing.

We wanted to do this because our North Wales region had heard of experiences from people in their region that indicated the Bill was having unintended consequences that was having a negative impact on children and young people.

The aim of the research was to provide Llais with robust, qualitative evidence to support advocacy, influence national discussions on care reform, and assess how the legislative intentions set out in the Bill are impacting on services on the ground. The research has now been completed.

Here is a summary of the findings:

The removal of profit from children's care is strongly supported in principle across children, care leavers, carers, local authorities, and third-sector providers. It is widely seen as an ethical reform that has the potential to refocus the system on children's needs rather than financial return.

However, the research highlights that the reform is being introduced into a children's care system already under significant strain, and that the short-term risks are substantial if implementation is not carefully managed.

What children and young people said matters most

- Stability, relationships and feeling listened to are far more important to children than who provides care or whether it is for profit.
- Children described positive experiences where care was stable, relational, child-centred and trauma-informed.
- Placement moves - especially sudden or poorly prepared transitions - were experienced as frightening, destabilising and emotionally damaging.

- Separation from siblings, stigma associated with being in care, and poor transitions to independence were recurring harms, particularly for care leavers aged 16–18.
- Children did not generally understand or prioritise the concept of “profit”, but were very sensitive to uncertainty about placements, staff changes, and future plans.

System pressures and risks

Participants consistently described a system facing:

- Too few safe, suitable placements for the number of children who need them, with demand already exceeding supply before reform.
- Risk of instability around placements during transition, particularly if for-profit providers withdraw, delay decisions, or exit Wales altogether.
- Workforce fragility, driven by low pay, high emotional demands, recruitment difficulties and high staff turnover.
- Inconsistent quality of care, described as “a lottery”, with concerns that financial pressures - whether in private or public provision - can undermine standards if not addressed.
- Limited engagement from the for-profit sector, creating a critical planning risk and increasing uncertainty for children and local authorities.

The opportunities identified from the change

Despite these risks, participants identified clear opportunities if reform is well implemented:

- Reinvestment of funding directly into care, workforce development and quality improvement.
- More consistent and equitable commissioning, reducing extreme fee variation.
- Expansion of small, local, community-based, Welsh-language provision, improving continuity, identity and wellbeing.



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- Potential to improve workforce stability through better pay, training and professional recognition.
- Stronger oversight and accountability, particularly through local authority provision and regulation.

The central message was clear: children's voices must be heard.

Across all groups, there was strong agreement that children's voices must be central to implementation, not treated as an add-on. Advocacy, trusted relationships and tailored communication were seen as essential to preventing harm and ensuring reform is safe and effective for those directly affected.

We will use what we have heard through this research to make representations to the new Welsh Government, and will continue to work with others, including other representative and advocacy bodies to continue to focus on the views and experiences of young children as things progress.

Our strategic lead for children and young people

Our Head of Insights and Engagement, Rebecca Lythgoe, is Llais' strategic lead for children and young people.

With a professional background working with children and young people, in recent months she has been building on her existing children and young people networks, for example connecting with Cardiff Health Board's Youth Board and Nest/Nyth to identify opportunities for closer working, and attending the Children in Wales' Young Wales conference to focus on 'Putting Participation at the Heart of Change'.

Upcoming national engagement events

- **Urdd** - The Urdd National Eisteddfod is an annual Welsh-language youth festival of literature, music and performing arts organised by Urdd Gobaith Cymru. It is one of Europe's largest youth festivals.

We will be hosting a series of activities at this year's Urdd in Ynys Mon to hear from children and young people.

During the week we will partner with Mwy na Geiriau for two interactive roundtable sessions focused on the People's Principles:

1. A morning session is aimed at children and young people looking at why their voices matter and what the principles mean for the future of health and social care services.
2. An afternoon session is looking at the importance of children and young people being able to access health and social care services in the Welsh language.

Informing and influencing national policy on children and young people

In recent months we have looked to influence national health and social care policy affecting children and young people in a range of ways, including:

Children and young people and the new programme for government

Our 2026 manifesto set out clear concerns about systems that too often fail to listen to children and young people. While not framed as a standalone theme, children and young people were referred to throughout our calls for reform, particularly where systems are failing to listen, support transitions, or protect those who are most vulnerable.

With a new government now in place, we will focus on working constructively with policy makers and public service leaders to turn these calls into action. We will continue to use what we hear from children, young people and families across Wales to help shape and influence priorities, plans and service redesign, particularly in the following areas:

Stronger rights and advocacy for Children and Young People

- **Fixing the 'cliff edge' between Child and Adult Services** – so there is continuity of care for young people moving from child to adult services, and particularly across mental health, neurodevelopmental services, social care, and ongoing treatments.



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- **Addressing access and inequality affecting children and families –** focusing where children and young people face long waits for diagnosis and support, including ADHD, autism, and mental health services.
- **Early intervention and prevention –** advocating for earlier support, rather than waiting until children, young people, or families reach crisis point. Focusing on protecting and expanding community and prevention services that support wellbeing, including mental health support for younger people.
- **Person-centred care and being listened to –** Introducing “What matters to you” conversations standard in care and treatment planning, including for children and young people where appropriate. Reflecting what young people consistently tell Llais: that they want to be listened to, treated with dignity, and involved in decisions that affect them.
- **Integrated services that work around young people –** working to make sure there is better joined-up working between health, social care, education, and other services.

Responding to the [draft national unpaid carers strategy](#)

Our response to the previous Welsh Government’s consultation on its Draft National Strategy for Unpaid Carers places strong emphasis on the experiences of young carers and young adult carers, recognising them as a group with distinct rights and needs. It highlights the significant impact caring responsibilities can have on children and young people’s wellbeing, mental health, education and future life chances, particularly where caring roles are not identified early or adequately supported.

We stressed that transition points, especially between children’s and adult services, present heightened risks for young carers, many of whom lose support at a critical stage. We said that without targeted action there is a risk that children and young people’s voices are overlooked within wider carers’ policy and system reform.

The consultation ended on 13 April 2026. We will pick up the matters we raised with the incoming Welsh Government.

Our response to the Welsh Government’s consultation ‘Phase 2: Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Delivery Plan 2026 to 2030

Through our response to this consultation, we emphasised the importance of children's rights to be listened to, supported early, and provided with clear, joined-up pathways for speech, language and communication support.

Our response calls for fair, bilingual and preventative approaches, strengthened workforce capability, meaningful co-production with children and families, and better continuity of support - particularly at transition points - to make sure system reform leads to real improvements in children's experiences.

The consultation ended on 30 April 2026. We will pick up the matters we raised with the incoming Welsh Government.

Development activities:

Introducing Llais' children and young people branding

We worked with children and young people and a design agency to co-create Criw Llais – a look and feel made especially for younger people.

This matters because many children and young people don't see organisations like ours as being for them. If we look and sound too formal, they may not feel comfortable getting in touch, even when they really need to be heard.

Criw Llais helps make Llais feel more welcoming and easier to approach, while still clearly being part of our wider Llais brand. It's there to reassure children and young people that it's safe to share what matters to them, and that we will take them seriously.

The style is warm, clear and inclusive, with Welsh language build in from the start. It is designed to work for a wide age range.

Overall, this gives us a stronger way to reach children and young people, help them recognise us and support them to use their voice in health and social care in a way that works for them. We will launch our new brand identity at the upcoming Urdd National Eisteddfod.



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Listen to us guides

During May 2026 we will launch a range of guides to support organisations and groups to engage effectively with people from different communities. These guides have been co-designed with representative organisations.

So far, we have produced guides to support engagement with Deaf and BSL users, LGBTQ+ people, unpaid carers, women with chronic illnesses, people with learning disabilities and minority ethnic communities.

During the year we will work with children and young people to develop a similar guide for both our own use and sharing with other organisations and groups working in and focused on health and social care in Wales.