

**Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services:  
Keynote speech to National Social Services  
Conference – 21 June 2011**

I ddechrau, diolch ichi am fy ngwahodd i yma i siarad â chi heddiw. Mae hwn yn ddigwyddiad pwysig iawn i fi. Mae'n gyfle i ddod at ein gilydd fel cymuned gwasanaethau cymdeithasol i ystyried gwersi'r flwyddyn aeth heibio, ond yn bennaf oll i gael edrych ymlaen at y cyfleoedd a'r heriau sy'n ein hwynebu.

Tybiais y byddai'n ddefnyddiol i mi roi fy marn ar sut y dylem fynd i'r afael â'r rhain yn ystod y pum mlynedd nesaf.

Can I begin by thanking you for inviting me to speak to you today? This is a very important occasion for me. It is an opportunity for us to get together as a social services community to reflect on the lessons of the past year but most importantly to look forward to the opportunities and challenges ahead.

I thought that it would be helpful if I set out my view of how we should address these over the next five years.

Mae hon wedi bod yn flwyddyn dyngedfennol i wasanaethau cymdeithasol. Y llynedd clywsom gan yr Athro Pearson am rai o syniadau cynnar y Comisiwn Annibynnol am sut y caiff gwasanaethau cymdeithasol eu darparu dros y degawd nesaf.

Yna, ym mis Tachwedd, cawsom gyfle i ddarllen ei adroddiad terfynol. Ym mis Chwefror cyhoeddwyd Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cynaliadwy i Gymru gan Lywodraeth Cymru.

This has been a momentous year for social services. Last year we heard from Professor Pearson about the Independent Commission's early thoughts on the provision of social services over the next decade - then in November we had the opportunity to read his final report.

In February the Welsh Government published Sustainable Social Services for Wales.

Mae'r gwerthoedd, yr egwyddorion a'r weledigaeth yn yr adroddiad hwn yn allweddol ar gyfer cyflawni ein huchelgais ar gyfer gwasanaethau cymdeithasol yng Nghymru. Yr ymrwymadau ynddo yw ymrwymadau'r llywodraeth hon. Byddwn yn eu cyflawni er lles pobl Cymru.

The values, the principles and the vision it contains are key to delivering our ambition for social services in Wales. The commitments that it makes are the commitments of this government. We will deliver on them for the benefit of the people of Wales.

Since then of course we have had the referendum and new law making powers.

Now more than ever, the direction of travel for social services is a matter for us here in Wales and we need to be bold in seizing that opportunity with both hands.

We are building on strengths: We can be a small clever country. Despite a financial settlement for Wales that was neither fair nor adequate, we have protected social services. We have built a consensus about social services. We have strengthened the voice of carers.

We have introduced a Measure to give effect to the UNCRC. We have set financial limits on the cost of support. We have rolled out Integrated Family Support Teams.

We have strengthened the workforce. You will have your own successes to be proud of.

Our strengths and our achievements give us confidence to move forward. The social services voice has been listened to in Wales.

But none of us underestimate the challenges that we face. The focus on social and health care in the media over the last couple of weeks has led to profound questions.

We are part of major changes in our society. The combination of changing social expectations, demography and the very real pressure on resources has changed the landscape.

Social services and social care must change to meet both the challenges, but also the opportunities, that this new landscape presents. Standing still is not an option.

In what I have to say to you today, I hope you will hear my very strong support for public services. As we made clear in our Manifesto, 'making sure that the right kind of care is there when we need it is something far too important to be left to chance or the market'.

This means that we have to change and improve what we do. As the First Minister has made clear, this Welsh Government is one that is going to deliver.

It is a big task.

I am still concerned about the inconsistency of social care services – I highlighted some of these issues in my speech two years ago and we have not made adequate progress. The most recent Chief Inspector's report made this clear.

We also know that the system is too complex. This is why I wrote to the Chair of the Care Council for Wales and to the Chief Inspector of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate about that earlier this year. I asked them to consider how they can work together to reduce complexity, increase transparency and improve public assurance.

I have requested that they submit an overview to me, by 1 July, of how they will approach this work

Our safeguarding arrangements are too complex. I will create a national safeguarding board, independently chaired, that drives the work needed to safeguard children and adults.

I will act swiftly on the recommendations from the report on adult protection and, when I receive them, on those from the national children's safeguarding forum.

I am very concerned that capacity is too dissipated.

I have already questioned whether having 22 Directors of Social Services is the right model. I am clear that one Director can exercise their statutory role in respect of more than one authority.

Consortia of local authorities working together to commission, procure, and deliver services makes sense to me and I urge you to take this message with you today.

I have not expressed a preference for any particular configuration but I will expect colleagues to take into account the boundaries of other key services such as health and education and I am expecting to see new thinking and a serious commitment to change.

This is why I wrote to council leaders in March asking them how they were going to lead and implement those parts of Sustainable Social Services that fall to them. In particular, I want to hear how they will use the capacity they have in a more efficient and effective way.

I have high expectations about the response from local government on how they intend to deliver these priorities and I look forward to receiving the progress report by 1<sup>st</sup> July. I will remind you once more of what we said in our Manifesto. We said that ‘our ambition for the future of social services will require much closer and smarter collaborations between local authorities.’

I am absolutely committed to achieving such smarter collaborations.

I know that some progress has been made. For example I know, Parry, that you are working to scope the potential of a very different model for Ceredigion and Powys and I wish you well in that.

But I do not believe that we are seizing every opportunity and I shall be working closely with the Minister for Local Government and Communities to see how we can be sure that we, and you, deliver ever more efficiently.

Social services cannot stand alone. We all expect services to be integrated. Sustainability will depend on it. We must therefore achieve better integration and collaboration.

I am now the Deputy Minister for children as well as social services. By bringing together the social services and children's agendas we have an opportunity and an obligation to achieve better leadership, improve our expertise and make our systems more efficient.

That must lead to even better outcomes for the people who use our services.

We have already made progress through the delivery of new service models, by the integrated roll-out of IFST and through Families First.

Organisational, structural and financial barriers have been dismantled and that must be better for children.

Everyone here knows the importance of getting the relationship right between social care and health.

Some good work has already delivered results in this area. I welcome, for example, the work on dementia through a joint programme across social care, health, housing, the third sector and service user interests.

I was pleased with the study conducted by SSIA and NLIAH on new models of service delivery to promote independence and well being. We must build on the good work that has been started to ensure that integrated models of service like these are delivering tangible improvements for people.

I had high hopes for the Memorandum of Understanding that was established between the key partners and I have given its development my strong support.

However, I am very concerned that recent events have had a destabilising effect on its impact and progress.

When I hear that professional colleagues and public bodies are seeking to resolve difficulties in meeting people's needs through the courts I am deeply concerned. The courts are not the place to discuss how we meet people's needs.

I will be meeting urgently with Care Forum Wales, the WLGA and ADSS Cymru to hear from them how they intend to get matters back on track, to work together effectively in the interests of the people who use services. It would not be acceptable to allow the benefits of the Memorandum to be lost.

The performance of some services and some local authorities is frankly not good enough.

Some recent CSSIW reports do not make comfortable reading. This is not defensible. Where services need targeted support to overcome difficulties they will not find us slow to take decisive action, including making full use of our powers of intervention. Where the Chief Inspector needs to act to protect people she will have my support.

I have made clear that we are building from strength but I have also laid out the pressing need for change. How can we seize this moment and transform social services and social care to make them sustainable for the next decade?

If we are to navigate this new landscape successfully, we need to be clear about our direction. That comes from the vision and values that we have forged here in Wales and that are stated clearly in Sustainable Social Services.

Whilst we cannot predict the future our values and principles can be the compass that keeps us going in the right direction. Social care is a matter of social justice and it is a public good.

Delivery should be through strong, efficient and effective public services and which builds on new forms of social enterprise and community organisations.

Our vision is one that sees everyone, whether young or old, having a much stronger voice and real control over services. It is one that recognises the importance of the Welsh language. It builds on our commitment to mutuality.

It draws on the strengths of individuals, their families and their communities and it is one that wants to see high quality care provided on the basis of need, not on the basis of ability to pay or by the accident of where you happen to live.

We need to base our approach on the continuity in people's lives, to think about a life journey, a life course, not artificially separating people in categories called children and adults, older people and so on.

This is what takes us to the commitment in our manifesto to “integrated social services departments with a strong family orientation”.

We do not believe that a supermarket approach to choice delivers real choice, control or even necessarily, good quality care. Social care is a public service to meet public needs and one that we expect to operate in accordance with our Welsh public service values.

As a practical example of these principles I can announce today that I am setting up a focus group to advise me how best to meet the accommodation and care needs of older people.

The group will consider the underpinning resource models within the framework of our values and principles. I will announce the terms of reference and membership in due course.

I am looking for a step change in the way we deliver social care

I want to reiterate the message in Sustainable Social Services that we need a new accord between social services partners.

I will set a strong national purpose, a clear national direction and firm expectations.

I will introduce a National Outcomes Framework for social care and will publish a set of indicators that will allow users and providers to understand and have their say on the nature and quality of services in their area.

The Welsh Government is prepared to play its part in leading change, but these are not matters for government alone.

We are not accountable for delivery, you are.

Identifying need and securing the right pattern of services, delivering good quality, sustainable, safe and effective services that build on people's strengths are the responsibility of those of you who commission and provide services.

Quality services and the scale of transformation we need will require strong leadership. This is why I will chair a National Social Services Partnership Forum.

It will have two main responsibilities - to provide Ministers with advice on policy and priorities, and to deliver practical leadership and action on our programme of change.

It will be made up of the political leadership of the key national stakeholders as well as service users and carers. If this Forum is to lead effectively I believe that it must be across the main political parties in Wales.

I will therefore be seeking membership from cabinet members in local government from each of these parties alongside the Chair of the Care Council, the leadership of the independent sector and from the third sector.

There is also a need for us to strengthen professional leadership.

Rob will talk in more detail tomorrow about the need for us to achieve a step change in professionalism in the service but I want to emphasise once again the importance of the Statutory Director of Social Services.

Directors have a pivotal role: they are the focus of professional leadership in the service. I am sometimes asked which makes the most difference - political leadership or professional leadership.

The answer is both.

That's why I welcome the growing confidence of ADSS Cymru. I shall continue to value their objective professional advice and will, Parry, be expecting even more in the future.

How do we pull this together? To be successful we will need to change the legislative framework for social services. The First Minister has made a commitment to a Social Services Act for Wales.

This would be a major undertaking, but legislation will ensure that people really do experience change in their lives.

I want us to:

- be explicit about the values and principles that

- run through our vision;

- be clear about citizens' rights and entitlements;

- support the delivery of integrated, family-based

- services;

provide a coherent and simplified legal framework for social services and social care;  
provide the necessary legislative underpinning for integrated service delivery based on a people model and not one that separates children from adults;  
recognise the specialist expertise that some individuals need.

However, legislation on its own will not be enough.

It needs to be supported by a new approach to improvement. Whilst there is much that is good about improvement arrangements in Wales we still need to:

- Develop a strategically driven new and evidence-based approach to improvement in social services;
- Implement a three year improvement plan
- Review existing funding arrangements and establish the Social Services and Social Care Improvement Fund;
- Ensure that there are robust measures to measure progress and to introduce challenge where that is needed;
- Consider the place of a standards and compliance unit; initially in relation to services for looked after children and young people.

I continue to believe that objective external scrutiny and regulation remain of fundamental importance, especially when they are built on service users' and carers' real experience.

We have already modernised the way that local government's social services duties are inspected, being clear that the service is accountable for the evaluation and publication of its performance. The Chief Inspector is now leading the further modernisation of regulation. These important changes are pressing.

To conclude:

I know that none of this is easy but I am not prepared to be daunted. Why? Because the people who need these services cannot afford us to be.

Last year I said that I remained ambitious for social services. I still am. If we are prepared to be ambitious, we will succeed. If we do not set the bar high, we will fail.

I am optimistic. Why?

Because of the commitment, skills and knowledge of each of you in this room;

Because we have a clear sense of direction;  
Because we have a plan to get there;  
Because we are clear about the part each of us  
needs to play.

Thank you

(2,718 words)