

# Impact Update: Spring Edition

## Croeso!

Since January, over 3500 children and young people have told us how they feel about the issues shaping their lives through our new monthly discussion pack, *Monthly Matters*. Keep reading this quarterly update to find out what they said about school dinners, priorities for the new First Minister, and proposed updates to the school calendar. From our policy team, we have a new national summary of the issue of children's mental health, and close scrutiny of how the Welsh Government are progressing on changes I've called for across several aspects of children's lives. We've continued to hear first-hand worries about vaping, and there is a brand new name and approach for our Children's Rights Advice service.. read on!

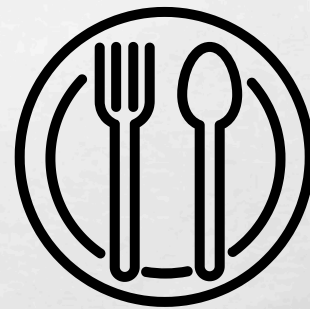


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## Here for all children

**Our engagement team puts children's voices at the heart of our work, hearing views and experiences from every corner of Wales.** Through *Monthly Matters*, our new discussion pack for schools, thousands of children have told us about the following issues:

## School dinners



- Only 19% of children and young people taking part in our survey said they are full after their meal
- Almost half (44%) said they can't have more food if they ask for it
- 24% of children said they can't always have vegetables if they want them
- 22% said they can't always have fruit if they want them
- 490 children and young people aged between 7 and 18 answered the survey individually. A further 1250 children took part in groups, with teachers and youth workers submitting a summary of their views. These submissions supported the views shared by children directly

We've sent the information to the Welsh Government calling on them to prioritise their review of school meal guidance, and to keep listening to children and young people's views on this vital subject.

Children's voices on this issue have been covered in news pieces over the past week, including in [this BBC Wales article](#).

## A new First Minister - what would young people change?

- The cost of essential everyday items, housing costs, and low wages were frequently mentioned - money continues to be a big worry for young people.
- Local environment featured heavily. Many wanted more bins to help keep their local area cleaner.
- We heard calls for better and cheaper public transport
- Waiting times for healthcare was a common concern
- There were lots of ideas related to education, including a broader range of lessons and more activities
- On activities outside of school, young people wanted more to do for free



These views formed the basis of a letter the Commissioner sent to the First Minister following his appointment, adding these views to the existing evidence on children's priorities and key issues.

The [Commissioner's recent blogpost](#) provides more analysis and reflection on what young people told us they would do if they were at the helm.

## Proposed changes to the school calendar

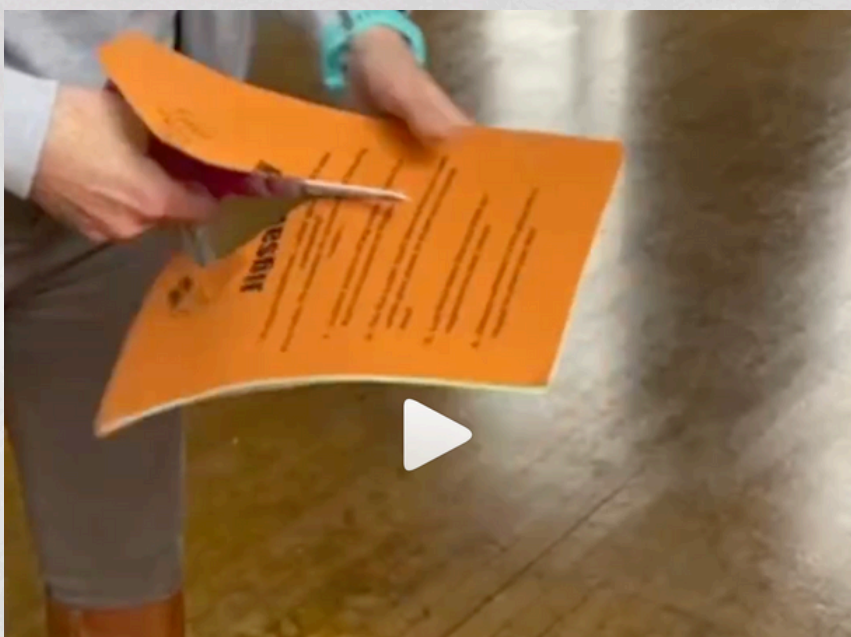
- Thinking of the current summer holidays, young people liked spending time with friends and family, having time to prepare for next year, relaxing, not worrying about school, and having time to focus on hobbies and interests
- A significant number said there were no negatives to a long summer holiday, but dislikes included needing to get back into a routine after the holidays end, being bored, and missing their friends.



Children and young people's views were at the heart of our own consultation response to Welsh Government's proposal. We also encouraged young people to share their views directly with the Government.



## Ideas for your own work with young people



Want tips or activities for engagement work with young people?

Our team posts regular videos on social media that might help you. Here's a simple warm up-activity you can use - all you need is some paper and a scissors. (link opens in Instagram)

## 2 A challenger

**Our policy team challenges and scrutinises the government on the key issues affecting children and young people.**



## Mental health - a resource for professionals

“ The current workforce is struggling to meet the demand. Children and young people are too often waiting too long to get the support they need. ”

We know from our own research and the work of others, that mental Health and wellbeing is one of the biggest issues children are concerned about. This is also true of parents and carers, and professionals supporting children and young people.

Our [new mental health policy page](#) sets out the challenges, and some of the specific issues relating to supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. We hope it will be a helpful resource for anybody interested in this hugely important issue, including those planning to respond to Welsh Government's consultation on their draft mental health and wellbeing strategy.

## Welsh Government progress on our recommendations

Each year through our annual report we make recommendations to the Welsh Government on key policy issues that we want them to address over the next twelve months. During the year we follow up on those recommendations through meetings with Ministers, lead officials, and other stakeholders, including children and young people.

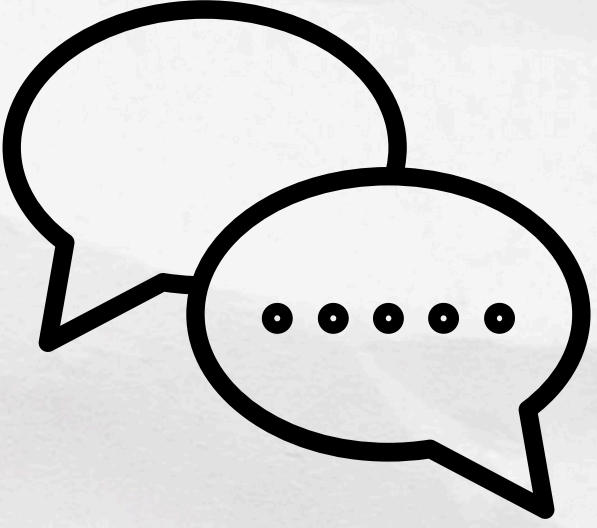
We'll shortly be publishing a document analysing how Welsh Government is progressing each of those recommendations. [Sign up to our monthly newsletter](#) to receive a copy directly.

Topic	Recommendations	Current RAG rating	Comments
Poverty	The Welsh Government must create a child poverty action plan alongside a clear monitoring framework with measurable, time-bound targets, and a robust accountability mechanism to enable sensitive input from children and young people.  This must be published within the 2023/24 Senedd term.	Red	This recommendation has essentially not include an action plan.  Welsh Government has committed framework and we will continue to
Climate emergency	To address both child poverty and the climate emergency, the child poverty action plan should include a commitment to a free public transport pilot for children and young people under 18 within this Senedd term.	Red	This recommendation has been r
Mental health and wellbeing	The Welsh Government should ensure that the needs of children and young people are clearly reflected and addressed in their new Mental Health Strategy, and that the recommendations from the Senedd Ieuencid's Young Minds matter report are reflected in this strategy.	Yellow	Welsh Government consulted developing the new draft ment consultation on the draft visio online survey. However, of th demonstrate how many resp  The government also consul with the National Youth Sta draft strategy in summer 20 autumn 2023 with the Nat Parliament.

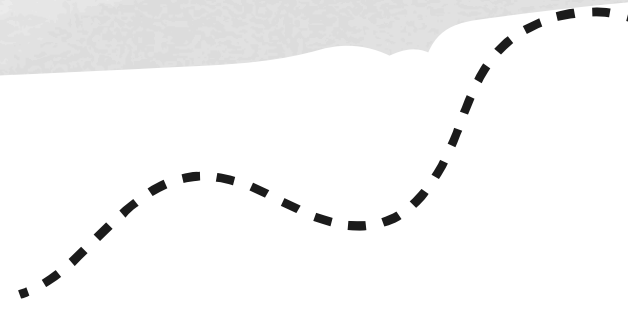


# A truth teller

We work hard to shine a light on children and young people's real-life experiences and to use them to influence change.

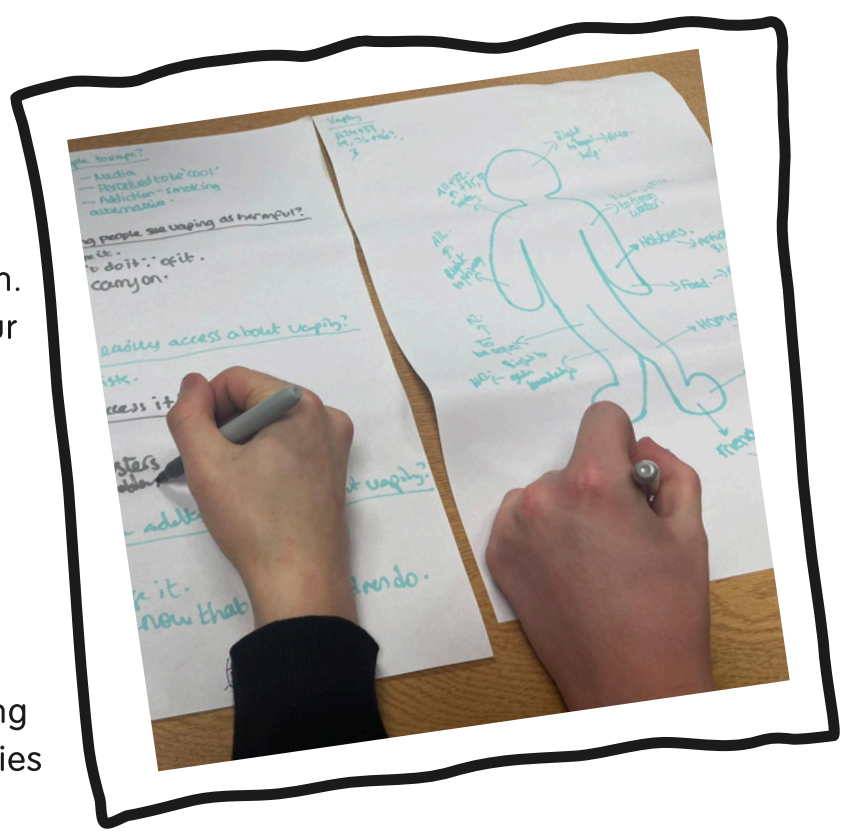


## Vaping



- 'Young people are walking out of mock exams because they're not able to cope for that length of time' (without vaping)
- 'Children are coming from primary schools addicted to vaping'
- 'Children are horrified when they know the cigarette equivalent of what they're smoking'
- 'All education videos etc are American, there's nothing we can use from a UK perspective.'

These are all quotes from a listening session our team held with a group of young people aged between 12 and 18 years old, and the adults supporting them. Information from this session reflected our ongoing concerns regarding the attractiveness and accessibility of vapes, the lack of availability of nicotine replacement therapy for vapers, and the lack of available educational information to help combat use.



We have shared the results of this listening session directly with the Cabinet Secretaries for Health and Education in Welsh Government.

Earlier this month, Public Health Wales (PHW) published a new report calling for support to be prioritised over punishment when helping young people who want to quit vaping, this includes recommending that children are able to access Nicotine Replacement Therapies for vaping addiction. We fully support this approach, and urge Welsh Government to do all they can to ensure that PHW's recommendations are taken forward. The UK Government is making changes which will bring harsher penalties for those selling vaping products to under 18s, and those giving free samples of vaping products. They are planning changes in the law to make sure flavours and contents of vaping products are restricted. They also want to make vaping products less appealing by restricting what the packaging can look like, and by restricting where in shops vaping products can be displayed.

Welsh Government support these changes too. Welsh Government is also seeking to change the law here to ban disposable vapes because of the health and environmental impact.

## 4 A rights realiser

**Our Advice team helps children and young people in Wales to access their human rights.**

**From now on, what was previously our Investigation and Advice service will be renamed the 'Children's Rights Advice and Assistance Team'.**

**The commissioner shares her vision behind the name change:**



“

For me, ever since coming into the role of Children’s Commissioner, the most important thing about the job has been what it does for children and young people and how they can directly benefit from it. Whilst all the functions of my office including listening to and engaging with children and young people, and influencing and challenging government, are important, there is something fundamentally direct and unique about our casework service which offers children and young people a formal voice and a direct way of arguing for and getting their rights if these are being denied.

With its skilled and dedicated team of officers, this service already helps over 600 individual children each year, and is free, bilingual and impartial. We advise and assist on a range of topics, including lots around Educational issues and around involvement with Social Services. But I am convinced that more children and young people could benefit from it, and across a wider range of issues, if they knew more about the service and what it offers. This is what prompted me to explore how the service could be adapted and we have done this through conversations over the last few months with children and young people as well as with stakeholders.



Consequently, our new Children’s Rights Advice and Assistance Team will offer the same professional casework service, but, we hope, with a more approachable name and feel. We will still be able to carry out further investigations when we see fit, but the emphasis is on assisting or simply helping children and young people - ‘we are here to help’ is the strapline that we want you to remember! Please help us to spread the word!

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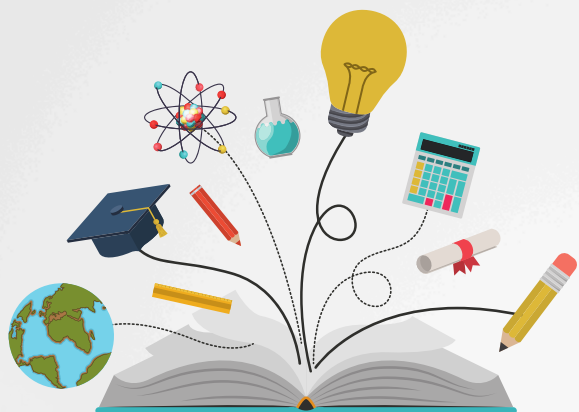
**You can contact the Advice team by phoning 0808 801 1000 (Monday to Friday 9-5pm) or emailing [advice@childcomwales.org.uk](mailto:advice@childcomwales.org.uk)**

# Over the past quarter, our Advice team has:



Supported children in 21 out of the 22 local authorities in Wales

Supported 233 children and young people, including 135 new cases.



Dealt with education-related cases relating to exclusion, bullying, transport, and placements, and Additional Learning Needs

Dealt with social services-related cases relating to safeguarding and child-protection; advocacy, complaints and whistle-blowing





**Diolch/thanks  
for reading!  
We'll publish our next  
quarterly impact  
paper in the summer.**

**In the meantime, sign up to our monthly newsletter.**



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