

New programme to improve the lives of people with a learning disability in Wales

The way services are delivered for people with a learning disability in Wales is to be transformed to ensure they have what they need to lead successful lives, Social Care Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies has announced today.

Around 1.5 million people have a learning disability in the UK; some have a mild, moderate or severe learning disability which remains throughout their lives. There are approximately 15,000 adults with a learning disability are known to social services in Wales, with potentially at least a further 60,000 people not known to social services.

In 2017, the Welsh Government established the Learning Disability – Improving Lives Programme to better understand whether people with a learning disability have what they need to lead successful lives. It considered what a person and their families and carers may require across their life course and how these needs are currently being met.

Last week, the Welsh Government published A Healthier Wales, its long term plan for health and social care. This provides a blueprint to build and strengthen services for people with a learning disability and their families and carers, ensuring the seamless delivery of services focused around the needs of the individual and encouraging good practice to be shared consistently across Wales.

The Improving Lives Programme will focus on improving services in five key areas:

- early Years – reducing adverse childhood experiences and improving the ability of parents with a learning disability to bring up their children
- housing – new models of supported housing will be developed, helping people to live closer to their friends and families
- social care – making sure everyone who needs it has a access to good quality care and support which is focused on their needs
- health – through reasonable adjustments to mainstream services and access to specialist services when needed. To address health inequalities, making sure people with a learning disability receive the annual health checks they are entitled to and health boards ensure they meet the needs of people with a learning disability when in hospital
- education, skills and employment – supporting young people to make the most of their potential, and when they become adults ensuring they have the right support to allow them to live successful lives, through providing targeted careers advice and making sure more people with a learning disability have paid jobs.

Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“In the Welsh Government’s Strategy, Prosperity for All, we’ve challenged ourselves to look at the services we provide to ensure they support everyone to live a healthy, prosperous and rewarding life.

“Over the last year, we’ve met more than 2,000 people with learning disabilities, their families and carers to better understand whether they have what they need to lead successful lives. The response from parents and carers shows we have some work to do before we can be that sure all services are person-centred and flexible enough to meet people’s needs.

“The Improving Lives Programme I’m announcing today will put people and their families at the centre of our services, and give them a say in the services they receive. We will ensure services are seamless and work together, which will hopefully benefit everyone, whilst ensuring those who need additional support experience a level of equality when accessing services.”

To support the implementation of the programme, the Minister has established a Learning Disability Ministerial Advisory Group, whose membership includes people with a learning disability and families and carers key and key professionals from local authorities, the health sector and charities.

The group will be chaired by Mrs Gwenda Thomas, the former Assembly Member for Neath and Deputy Minister for Social Services in the Welsh Government between 2007 and 2014. Ms Sophie Hinksman, a representative of All Wales People First will continue in her role as to Co-Chair.