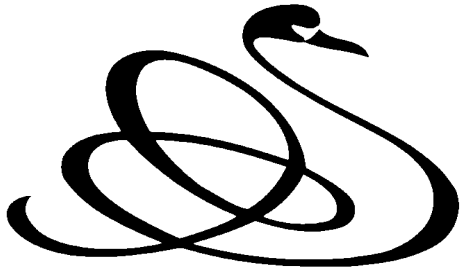


York Consulting

Welsh Assembly Government

**Main Report:
First Stage Evaluation of Children and Young People's
Frameworks,
Early Entitlement and Cymorth**

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents a **synthesis of the findings** from the first stage evaluation of Children and Young People's Frameworks, Early Entitlement and Cymorth. The more detailed findings of the evaluation are set out in the detailed findings report¹. Therefore, **the evidence presented here should be situated within the context of the wider report**. Caution should be exercised in interpreting the findings presented in summary form in isolation from the wider context.

Background and Context

- 1.2 Children and Young People's Framework Partnerships (FPs) have been established in all 22 local authority areas of Wales and are made up of representatives from the local authority, health services and the voluntary sector. The Framework Partnerships are charged with producing a strategic framework for all services for children and young people aged 0-25.
- 1.3 Children's Partnerships and Young People's Partnerships form the key subgroups of the Framework Partnership covering the age groups of 0-10 and 11-25 respectively. The Children's Partnership (CP) and Young People's Partnership (YPP) plan in more detail for their relevant age groups.
- 1.4 Framework Partnerships were originally established under advisory guidance, but the Assembly Government proposes to make them statutory under section 25 of the Children Act 2004. Young People's Partnerships are set up by direction of the Assembly Government, under provisions of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

¹ The paragraph numbers referred to in this document refer to the detailed findings report where further evidence is provided to explain/ exemplify the points being made.

1.5 The Cymorth (Children and Young People Support) Fund was established as a unified fund to subsume and build upon five predecessor programmes (Sure Start, the Children and Youth Partnership Fund, National Childcare Strategy, Youth Access Initiative and the Play Grant). Cymorth aims to provide a network of targeted support for children and young people within a framework of universal provision, in order that the life chances of children and young people from disadvantaged families are improved.

Methodology

1.6 The methodology for the evaluation comprised:

- **preliminary investigation** involving a review of all 22 Local Authority Framework Plans, Children's Plans and Cymorth Plans together with a sample of progress reports; and telephone consultations with the Framework co-ordinators from all 22 areas and a sample of national stakeholders;
- six in-depth **partnership case studies**;
- **an email survey** of Framework and Children's Partnership representatives and a small number of Cymorth project deliverers. One hundred and sixty responses were received representing a 21% response rate.

1.7 The research was predominantly qualitative and perception-based in nature. The in-depth nature of this mode of enquiry best afforded the means to explore partnership issues relating to delivery and implementation and to ground/situate the emerging issues within the local context. The benefit of a qualitative research design is that it enables the researcher to probe into hard-to-define areas and thereby explore the underlying reasons for attitudes and opinions. Qualitative research provides the opportunity to develop a descriptive and rich understanding into individuals' attitudes, beliefs, concerns, motivations, culture and behaviours.

- 1.8 A limitation of qualitative research is that, by virtue of being interpretive, the findings cannot be directly generalised to the larger population. Thus the qualitative aspect of the research was supplemented by the quantitative survey of partners. The survey was designed to ‘test out’ the emerging themes resulting from case study work and thereby ascertain the extent to which the findings from case study work could be **transferred** to other partners, in other words, to determine if the results of the qualitative work could be considered valid for the larger population. Whilst the survey was distributed to the population of partners (i.e. census survey), the responses received were from a sample of partners (21% response rate). As such the survey findings presented cannot be considered as wholly representative of all partnership representatives but, in terms of statistical confidence, at the 90% confidence level, responses are valid within at most +/- six percentage points.

Report Structure

- 1.9 The findings are summarised under the key headings of:
- Stage of Development;
 - Effectiveness Issues: Drivers and Constraints;
 - Cymorth;
 - Participation;
 - Monitoring and Evaluation;
 - Key Messages for the Assembly Government;
 - Conclusions and Recommendations.
- 1.10 Throughout this report the term ‘*partnership*’ is used to refer to the partnership as a whole i.e. the Framework Partnership and its two sub-groups, the Young People’s Partnership and Children’s Partnership. This is because stakeholders consulted refer to **the partnership** in this way rather than as three discrete or separate entities.

1.11 Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that this research was commissioned to focus on the Framework Partnership and Children's Sub-Partnership only and not the Young People's Partnership (YPP). Therefore, although some representatives of the YPP were consulted as part of case study work, much of the case study work centred upon representatives of the Framework Partnership and Children's Partnership only. In addition, representatives of the Framework and Children's Partnerships were surveyed specifically whilst partner representatives of the YPP were not.

1.12 Factors specific to the Children's Partnership (separate from the partnership per se) are highlighted in the report where they emerge.

2 STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 **The stage of development reached by partnerships varies across Wales.**

Partnership Focus

- 2.2 In the main, the **focus** of partnership activity to date has been on **Cymorth spend** (paras 2.3 – 2.5).
- 2.3 Whilst the majority of partnerships have predominantly **focused on allocating Cymorth funds**, there is evidence that many partnerships are taking this a stage further to **review/appraise** the activities funded and affect **critical decision-making as a result** (paras 2.6 – 2.8).
- 2.4 Partnerships are delivering a range of activities across Cymorth's six themes in line with the predominant focus on this area. There is evidence that some partnerships have moved from a reactive process to delivery (by responding to bids received) to a proactive commissioning process (by authorising activity on the basis of a need identified) (paras 2.47 – 2.52).
- 2.5 Whilst moves to a commissioning approach are most noticeable in relation to the delivery of Cymorth, in several areas partners are working jointly to lever in funds for other sources (e.g. Big Lottery). There are examples of wider projects and programmes being commissioned to meet needs and of new cross sector roles being developed (e.g. parenting co-ordinator) in some areas (paras 2.47 – 2.55).
- 2.6 The focus on addressing more strategic planning and decision-making on **mainstream services has been limited to date**. Nevertheless, a step change is beginning to emerge in some case study areas. **A small number of partnerships feel they are on the threshold of strategic change** to mainstream services. However, changes to the mainstream tend to focus on a single service area or pertinent issue rather than a comprehensive strategic approach being achieved through the operation of the partnership (paras 2.6 – 2.16).

- 2.7 The evidence suggests that the **process of distributing Cymorth funds has acted as the catalyst to joint working**, but the extent to which this has functioned as the seed to foster wider strategic planning, is limited in scope overall. Notwithstanding this, the signs are positive that a shift from Cymorth to wider programmes and mainstream services, as a result of the process of Cymorth fund allocation, is emerging (paras 2.15 – 2.18).
- 2.8 The focus of the Children’s Partnerships has been **greater on the 0-3 age-range than the 4-10 group**. This is for a range of reasons including the fact that Partnerships have inherited previous Sure Start activities, focused on preventative work, been limited by uncertainties of year on year funding and that the gaps for 4-10 are considered as limited in some areas (paras 2.17 – 2.19).

Planning and Decision-Making

- 2.9 There are a number of key activities required to support effective planning and decision-making including (para 2.22):
- Developing the evidence base and understanding need (Factor 1);
 - Looking at existing practice of what works and building on that (Factor 2);
 - Engaging children and young people’s participation (Factor 3);
 - Monitoring and evaluation activities (Factor 4); and
 - Producing a plan (Factor Five).
- 2.10 The evidence suggests that **partnerships are undertaking activities to contribute to Factors 1 and 5 (developing the evidence base and producing a plan)**. However, there is potential for **significant progress to be made on Factors 2, 3 and 4 (existing practice of what works, children and young people’s participation and monitoring and evaluation)** to better inform strategic planning and decision-making (paras 2.22 – 2.42).

2.11 Whilst the stage of development in relation to planning and decision-making is variable across Wales, the signs are positive that partnerships are **beginning to make better use** of the existing evidence base and their monitoring and evaluation activities. This **should lead to better planning and decision-making in the future**. Planning and decision-making must be acknowledged as **an iterative process** that should improve as partnerships develop/increase their capacity for joint working (para 2.43).

Delivery and Implementation

2.12 Due to the fact that the focus to date has largely been on Cymorth, and that partnerships are at varying stages of development in acquiring the critical success factors identified to effectively plan and affect decisions, the **achievements of the partnerships in terms of delivery and implementation tend to focus on those directly associated with Cymorth**. For example:

- the majority of deliverers (70%) feel that the introduction of the partnerships has been a positive step to jointly co-ordinate Cymorth activities for children and young people;
- almost all partners (83%) feel that Cymorth projects add value to mainstream services;
- over one-half of deliverers (53%) feel that the Cymorth projects delivered are new and innovative;
- over half of deliverers (56%) feel that Cymorth-funded projects involve a greater degree of multi-agency working to meet the needs of children and young people than before Cymorth was introduced (paras 2.44 – 2.45).

2.13 There are indications that **further improvements in partnership delivery is required to maximise the value of Cymorth-funded activity**:

- around one-half of deliverers (46%) consider that the Cymorth approach to unified funds (i.e. the merging of five previously distinct funding streams) adds value to how projects and services were delivered previously. However, two-fifths (41%) felt it did not. This suggests that whilst almost half are positive about this achievement, others feel further improvements could be made;

- only a third of deliverers (34%) consider that the process of monitoring and evaluating Cymorth projects has led to improved quality of Cymorth-funded programmes delivered (para 2.46).

2.14 Stakeholders are also **generally positive about the outcomes of Cymorth project activities** (paras 2.66 – 2.68):

- many partners feel that through partnership working there are improved outcomes for children and young people (81% and 87% respectively);
- the majority of deliverers (74%) feel that Cymorth-funded projects have led to improved outcomes for children and young people;
- the majority of deliverers (79%) feel that Cymorth-funded activities have led to improved access to services for children and young people in disadvantaged areas.

2.15 However, **more tangible substantiated outcomes are limited** given the constraints associated with current monitoring and evaluation arrangements (discussed further in **Section Six**). In addition, stakeholders are less positive when asked about more specific, long-term tangible outcomes (para 2.69):

- only a fifth (21%) of deliverers consider that Cymorth-funded projects have led to a reduction in the call on crisis interventions or involvement with crime by children and young people. However, this could well be because the projects being delivered were not intended to focus on such issues.

2.16 In the main, **partners are also generally positive about the achievements of the partnership in terms of the joint working and co-ordination of outcomes** (paras 2.62 – 2.65):

- the majority of partners (62%) feel that by working in partnership there are efficiency gains;
- the majority of partners (68%) feel that by working in partnership there is improved communication;
- the majority of partners (65%) feel that joint working across partners has improved;
- over half (54%) feel that partnership has enabled joint bids to access alternative funding sources.

2.17 However, **evidence of significant concrete outcomes for mainstream services and more specifically for children and young people is limited** (para 2.64):

- around a quarter of partners (28%) feel that the partnership influences mainstream delivery. However, almost one-half of partners (49%) do not and almost a further quarter (23%) were unsure whether the partnership influences mainstream delivery or not.

2.18 Whilst partners are positive that improved outcomes for children and young people can be achieved through partnership working, there is **little evidence** resulting from qualitative research to exemplify such **outcomes are being achieved through strategic change implemented by the partnerships** (para 2.70).

2.19 As a consequence, **outcomes for the mainstream and for children and young people are limited.**

2.20 Overall, therefore, most partnerships are **still at the stage of developing effective partnership working**. One half of partnership representatives (49%) highlight that they are clear about the way forward. This suggests that there is **still some way to go for the benefits to children and young people from the introduction of Framework Partnerships and Children's Partnerships to be realised**. Nevertheless, there are **signs of a positive step change towards mainstream strategic change** being evident amongst some partnerships in some areas (paras 2.72 – 2.75).

3 EFFECTIVENESS ISSUES: DRIVERS AND CONSTRAINTS

3.1 The research identified a wide range of factors that influence the stage of development reached both positively and negatively.

3.2 The extent of **partner engagement** is evidenced to have a bearing on the stage of development reached (paras 3.2 – 2.24). This is in terms of:

- the extent to which there is a general **clarity of purpose** across partners;
- the extent to which partners recognise the **need to work in partnership**, are **committed to think and work for the partnership rather than for vested organisational interests** and the **level of commitment from senior representatives** of respective organisations; and
- the extent to which **membership is considered inclusive, representative and equal** whilst being of a manageable size to reach consensus in decision-making.

3.3 Lack of clarity of purpose still prevails as an issue in many areas. Whilst partners are considered to be committed to partnership working in the main, there is evidence from a number of areas that representatives are still engaging for vested interests and that obtaining the buy-in of senior level staff remains difficult (paras 3.2 – 3.14).

3.4 Although progress is clearly evident in terms of securing effective representation within and across sectors, there is evidence that partnerships are still seen as Local Authority dominated in some areas. Balancing the need to be representative with the need to have a partnership of manageable size has caused problems in some areas (paras 3.18 – 3.24).

3.5 The evidence also shows that the **structures** in place to support partnership can be allied to the stage of development reached (paras 3.25 – 3.36). These include:

- the extent to which partnerships have **implemented protocols and systems** such as the use of small, focused thematic groups and systems for communication;
 - the extent to which **effective links have been developed between the FP, CP and YPP**; and
 - the extent of the **fit of the FP within the wider/hierarchical planning structure**.
- 3.6 Whilst many areas have developed clear protocols and systems to support the partnership, a small number are still struggling to effect robust operational and management procedures (paras 3.26 – 3.30).
- 3.7 The links between the FP, CP and YPP are well-developed in some areas (para 3.31).
- 3.8 However, there are tensions in other areas concerning (para 3.31):
- the **effective transfer of communication** across the triangular partnership structure;
 - the **location of the team** - for example, the three partnerships may be located in different departments that differentially influence the direction of the partnership, its activities and focus;
 - the **level of influence and autonomy** of each of the three partnerships and how this promotes or distracts from joint working across the triangular structure; and
 - **disparities in planning** between the three partnerships.
- 3.9 The precise fit of the FP within the wider community planning structure is unclear in most areas. Whilst several areas have been able to establish a sense of fit to date, there is uncertainty in terms of how this will work out in the future as the Children Act is implemented (paras 3.32 – 3.36).
- 3.10 **Partnership Support and Working** also emerges as a key influence on the extent of partnership development (paras 3.37 – 3.65). This relates to:
- the extent to which there is an **effective team** (FP Co-ordinator, CP Co-ordinator, YPP Co-ordinator) in place to support partnership activities;

- the extent to which the **roles of the Framework Co-ordinator and Chair are effective**;
- the extent to which co-ordinators are acting as **‘facilitators’ as opposed to the ‘doers’** of activity; and
- the extent to which **strategies such as self-assessment** (Nuffield tool), development days, consensus building tactics are **employed to aid progression**.

3.11 The presence of a team to support the partnership is positively associated with the state of progress. A minority of areas have struggled to engage a stable team of co-ordinators because of resource constraints or because staff were appointed on short-term contracts which provided little in the way of job security (paras 3.37 – 3.41).

3.12 The skills, seniority, impartiality and personality of the co-ordinator and Chair have positively influenced development in most areas (paras 3.42 – 3.50).

3.13 It emerges as important that the co-ordinator facilitates the activities to be undertaken rather than doing them on behalf of the partnership. Most partners consider that the co-ordinator does the bulk of the work, which has negative implications for the sustainability of the partnership since activities become over-reliant upon one person (paras 3.51 – 3.55).

3.14 The extent to which partnerships have created strategies to develop the partnership has varied. In some areas, the process of self-assessment using tools such as Nuffield has acted as a key driver to enable change. However, in others, the self-assessment process has been of more limited value because partners did not completely engage with the process. Gaining consensus is still proving difficult in some areas, which is often a function of the (limited) extent of impartiality (paras 3.56 – 3.65).

3.15 Additionally, the research shows that a range of **contextual factors** have an effect on the stage reached by partnerships (paras 3.66 – 3.76). This includes:

- **geographical factors**, such as: the extent to which partnerships are operating out of coterminous areas (i.e. the extent to which organisations represented on the local area partnership such as Health and the Local Authority, have the same or coincident boundaries); the rurality and distance of the area; and the size of the area (paras 3.66 – 3.68);
- **political factors**, such as: the changing political environment (new policies being introduced); the fact that some partnerships were initially a statutory obligation and others not; until early 2005, differing ministers were driving the children and young people’s agendas and the resulting messages were considered conflicting; and tensions between local and national priorities. There still remains a perception that policies relating to children and young people emanating from the Assembly Government are not joined up resulting in mixed messages to partners in terms of what political imperative they need to respond to and how (paras 3.69 – 3.72);
- **historical factors**, such as: the extent to which there is an historical level of trust established between partners; and the extent to which partnerships’ progress has been driven or constrained by partnerships that were already in existence prior to the introduction of the FP and CP (paras 3.73 – 3.76).

3.16 Lack of coterminous/coincident boundaries of organisations, extremes in size (very large or very small), and rurality have and continue to present obstacles to the pace of partnership development in areas where such issues are pertinent.

3.17 The changing political climate within which partnerships are operating has hindered the extent of evolution, although some areas have progressed well in spite the external political constraints they face.

3.18 Prior history, such as established levels of trust and well-functioning pre-existing partnerships (such as the Early Years Development Childcare Partnership), have been capitalised upon in some areas to positively aid progression. Nevertheless, prior history has impeded partnership development in some areas. This was often the case where the FP and CP was evolved from an existing partnership without sufficient changes to its purpose and membership being affected.

4 CYMORTH

4.1 Cymorth funding is being used to **deliver a wide range of services for children and young people** across each of its six key themes. This includes:

- **Family support activities** such as family centres, parenting programmes and behaviour support projects;
- **Health promotion** for example improving sexual health projects, language development activities to reduce the call on speech therapy services and breast feeding initiatives;
- **Play, leisure and enrichment opportunities** such as outdoor play sessions, dads and lads activities, holiday play schemes;
- **Empowerment, participation and active citizenship activities** for example youth fora, parent and children focus groups, conferences and presentations;
- **Training, mentoring and the provision of information** for example through developing drop in centres, outreach work, support workers, counselling services and programmes that aim to reduce disaffection;
- **Building childcare provision** by supporting and training childminders and childcare providers, and establishing Children's Information Services for instance (paras 4.4 – 4.12).

4.2 As outlined in **Section Two**, partners are generally positive about Cymorth project delivery achievements in terms of adding value to the mainstream and achieving greater co-ordination, innovation and multi-agency working.

4.3 The projects are also viewed as beneficial for children, young people and their families.

4.4 A key positive of **Cymorth is considered to be its use as a vehicle to engage partners and foster collaboration**. The Cymorth money has acted as a catalyst to kick-start the process of partnership working in most areas with this translating to joint decision-making and action in some (paras 4.13 – 4.14).

- 4.5 Nevertheless, some stakeholders are beginning to positively recognise that a focus on allocating **Cymorth funds may be a distraction from the central aim** of the partnership to direct *mainstream* and *non-mainstream* services such that the outcomes for children and young people are improved.
- 4.6 There are a number of issues regarding Cymorth which need to be considered/addressed going forward (para 4.15):
- there is anxiety that the positive activities funded through Cymorth will be lost once the fund becomes included in the RSG settlement in 2008;
 - there is a danger that Cymorth is being used as a catch-all to fund both innovative and core services;
 - whilst partnerships have reviewed the activities they sponsor through Cymorth, there is clearly a large legacy of inherited projects being funded. This makes the added value of the fund, in terms of additional outcomes to children and young people, difficult to isolate;
 - the scope, rigor and validity of evidence, in relation to the outputs and outcomes that result from projects, is hugely variable. This makes it difficult for some partnerships to use the evidence collected to inform planning and decision-making and for the Government to reach any meaningful conclusions regarding the effects of the programme at the National level.

5 PARTICIPATION

- 5.1 Partnership representatives are **clearly committed to the principle of engaging the participation of children, young people and their families**. However, **the extent** to which **partnerships** are actively engaging the participation of children and young people **varies across Wales** (paras 5.1 – 5.8).
- 5.2 The evidence revealed that **strategies to ensure the participation of young people tend to be more advanced** than those for children (paras 5.3 – 5.8).
- 5.3 There is a **lack of a systematic approach** to seeking the active participation of children, young people and their families in planning and decision-making with involvement largely being ad hoc (paras 5.9 – 5.13).
- 5.4 Case study feedback suggests that the ways in which children and young people are involved varies. Whilst most partnerships are **consulting** with young people and in some cases children, examples of attempts to involve children and young people at the **strategic level** are limited (paras 5.9 – 5.12).
- 5.5 Several challenges to children, young people and families' participation emerged. These included the **need to be representative, concerns of how to effectively engage children and resource constraints**. There is evidence of a lack of clarity and uncertainty of intent for the participation of children and young people for example, how much weight should be attributed to users' views. (para 5.11).

- 5.6 The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard and taken into account on decisions that affect them. As a result, the Assembly Government has employed a wide range of strategies to support the participation agenda such as the Funky Dragon Guide to Participation, impact measurement work and standards for participation that are currently being developed by the participation consortium. Although these policies/activities were beyond the scope of this evaluation since participation was not a central focus, it is important to point out that a range of activities are currently being undertaken at the national level to support the development of local participation strategies (paras 5.13).

6 MONITORING AND EVALUATION²

- 6.1 All Partnerships are **committed to the principle of monitoring and evaluation** (M&E), and all are undertaking activities albeit it in different forms (paras 6.3 – 6.26).
- 6.2 Partnerships are completing the Cymorth National targets template (PIs) and working with service deliverers to complete the Cymorth funded projects template on outputs and outcomes. In addition, a wide range of other M&E activities are taking place including audits of need, independent evaluations, primary research, self assessment exercises and longitudinal research with service users (paras 6.4 – 6.26).
- 6.3 The **Cymorth National targets template is not considered valuable or meaningful** by partnerships because of concerns regarding attribution, relevance, data availability, reliability and consistency of measurement in the areas they are required to report information. As such, the value of the template is limited and needs to be urgently reviewed (paras 6.7 – 6.11).
- 6.4 **Views regarding the Cymorth funded projects template are mixed.** Some partnerships consider this imposes unnecessary burdens on service deliverers. There is a lack of awareness among some partners as to how the information collected is used by WAG and concern that the findings are not disseminated. However, others value the process highly as a means to engage and work with providers to assess the effectiveness of delivery and outputs achieved, and, thereby, effect crucial decisions. Nevertheless, it is clear that approaches to capturing outputs and outcomes are inconsistent across partnerships and projects which means, regardless of their value at the local level, the current Cymorth reports are of limited meaning at the national level (paras 6.12 – 6.17).³

² Further detail and issues regarding the suitability of Cymorth National Performance Indicators, use of the Cymorth funded projects template and local Monitoring and Evaluation arrangements are outlined in a separate document to the Welsh Assembly Government.

³ WAG uses the information provided via the templates as a source for briefing Ministers and to test compliance with the guidance. It is also intended that the template be used to facilitate the process of target output negotiation between the Cymorth project deliverer and the partnership.

- 6.5 **The definition of what constitutes M&E is being variously interpreted on the ground.** At one end of the spectrum, it is seen as a means to provide evidence of whether an innovative activity is working or otherwise, whilst at the other end it is being used for wider purposes to monitor contract delivery and scrutinise delivery. Whilst the latter has positive implications for partnership development (for example, to encourage joint review of services), it has negative implications for comparison at the national level. This is because the resulting data tends to be localised, project-specific and process rather than impact focused (paras 6.19 – 6.26).
- 6.6 Whilst M&E information is being used in a range of different ways, there is **limited evidence in some areas that the information collected from Cymorth-funded projects is being used in a structured way to inform partnership planning and decision-making** (paras 6.22 – 6.24).
- 6.7 **The extent to which partnerships are investing the suggested 4% spend on monitoring and evaluation varies** depending on the size of the area and funding allocation received, the stage of development of the partnership and the definition of what is covered under M&E. If the 4% is reduced, there is a risk that some areas will struggle to fund a monitoring and evaluation officer and, thereby, obtain the (basic) information required to inform partnership planning and decision-making (paras 6.25 – 6.32).
- 6.8 Some partnerships are collaborating by pooling monies to fund joint monitoring and evaluation activities. This is in order to achieve value for money from external evaluation exercises (para 6.26).

7 KEY MESSAGES FOR THE ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

- 7.1 WAG's **requirement for an assessment of the plans produced has not aided partnership development**. This is because the **enforced timescale and criteria for assessment** has meant partnerships **focused on completing the task** by the deadline rather than developing the capacity for partnership working such that the resulting plans were realistic, supported, joined up and grounded in evidence. The evidence suggests that there is scope to improve the planning process in some areas so that it can be better grounded in/ take account of existing practice of what works, children and young people's participation and monitoring and evaluation evidence collected at the local level (paras 7.3 – 7.4).
- 7.2 The changing political context and lack of joined up government has led to **inconsistent messages** being received that have led to confusion and incoherent approaches being developed across Wales (paras 7.4 – 7.5).
- 7.3 There is a **perception that the Assembly Government is constantly changing direction** which has impeded the rate of progress and the extent to which senior staff are buying into the Children and Young People's Framework agenda (paras 7.4 – 7.6).
- 7.4 There is **concern that Cymorth is being used as a catch all for both generic issues such as childcare and targeted/preventative services**. There is some anxiety that this dilutes the extent to which all areas can be effectively addressed (para 7.7).
- 7.5 It is felt that the Assembly Government has been **overly prescriptive on issues of process** (e.g. producing plans, membership composition, Cymorth focus), but **unhelpfully vague on issues of policy and strategy** (e.g. the links between the Communities First and CYPF, and the fit of the partnership within wider community planning structures) (paras 7.8 – 7.11).
- 7.6 There is a **need to review the case for partnership rationalisation**. This is in terms of the **relative** need for the **current triangular structure** (FP, CP, YPP) to address the children and young people agenda and the **mass of other partnerships that are in existence** (paras 7.12 – 7.18).

- 7.7 In terms of the triangular structure (FP, CP, YPP), **several stakeholders highlighted an emerging need for partnership rationalisation during case study work.** This finding is supported by survey evidence which shows that the majority (62%) of partners responding to the survey considered that there should be local discretion as to whether separate age-based partnerships are required (paras 7.13 – 7.16).
- 7.8 Nevertheless, the **need to rationalise the triangular structure or otherwise, will need to be placed within the context of local structures, partnership arrangements and the stage of development reached.** The evidence suggests that some case study areas have developed a means of determining the strategic direction and a means to channel delivery such that the value of three distinct partnerships is being questioned. However, other areas are still struggling with some aspects of partnership development and working and thereby are not at a sufficient stage of maturity to risk rationalisation (para 7.17).
- 7.9 There is also a need to consider the need for **wider rationalisation in terms of the multitude of other (strategic) partnerships that exist across Wales.** Several partners highlighted that they sit on a large number of partnerships which makes the extent and sustainability of their engagement difficult (para 7.18).

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

- 8.1 Overall, the emerging picture is that it has taken considerable time to implement and establish the partnerships. The cultural climate is changing slowly, but it must be acknowledged that translating joint decision-making to joint implementation in the mainstream from improved partnership working will take time to achieve.

Establishing Partnerships: Development and Effectiveness

- 8.2 The stage of development reached and extent of effectiveness in establishing partnerships is variable across Wales.
- 8.3 All areas have established the triangular structures, though specific arrangements in terms of for example, charring arrangements, membership and representation, varies. Much of this is appropriate and associated with local circumstances.
- 8.4 However, the quality and effectiveness of arrangements does differ across partnership areas in terms of the extent to which there is clarity of focus, commitment, adequate representation, local authority dominance, and adequacy in the structures and support mechanisms employed. The most significant factors influencing effectiveness across partnerships relate to clarity of roles and responsibilities of the three triangular partnerships (with some stakeholders questioning whether all three are necessary) and links with wider community structures. However, there are some constraints that pose significant localised obstacles in some areas such as size, rurality and level of commitment.

Planning

- 8.5 All areas are producing the required plans and annual/progress reports. However, the evidence suggests that:

- the plans are not always driven by effective use of needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation of services and evidence of what works;
- plans are sometimes driven by co-ordinators/partnership staff and are not sufficiently owned by or engaging of partners in their development;
- the plans are not always driving implementation, particularly in relation to wider projects/programmes and mainstream services.

8.6 As a result, developments are required in some areas to reach the point where partners and agencies own, produce and action/implement plans through joint working. This is in order that delivery/implementation is based on sound planning and decision-making processes, which build on clear evidence, existing practice, and children and young peoples' views and perceptions. It must be acknowledged that planning and decision-making is an iterative process that takes time to develop.

Delivery/Implementation

8.7 The focus of delivery has been primarily on the allocation, delivery and review/critical assessment of Cymorth activities. Less significant progress has been made in most areas in relation to wider projects/programmes and mainstream services.

8.8 However, there are some areas that are "on the brink" of taking a more strategic and joint working approach to wider projects/programmes and mainstream services. There are also examples where delivery actions have been achieved for wider projects/programmes and mainstream services, though these tend to be focused on single service areas or issues rather than a wholesale strategic approach being achieved through the operations of the partnership.

Achievements

8.9 Most achievements to date relate to the delivery of Cymorth and effecting partnership working. This is not surprising given the stage reached and the fact that partnership development takes time.

- 8.10 Whilst the evidence suggests some partners perceive positive achievements have been made to mainstream services, few specific examples are cited, and there is limited evidence in the main that these are attributable to the activities of the partnerships as opposed to natural progression or achievements in services that would have happened anyway.
- 8.11 The same applies to outcomes for children and young people which partners are positive about but for which there are relatively few specific examples supported by evidence to demonstrate that these have been achieved by strategic change imposed by the partnerships.
- 8.12 The research demonstrates that a wide range of factors influence the stage of development reached. Many areas recognise the barriers they face, and some have clearly started to overcome the major constraints faced. However, a significant proportion of partnerships are unclear about what is needed to aid progression.
- 8.13 It must be acknowledged that there is no one size fits all solution to effective partnership working. Organisational cultures are often key to the ways in which the processes of partnership working unfold. What is straightforward to achieve in one area may be difficult or impossible to resolve in another. Some areas would benefit from external advice and support to inform decisions and facilitate progress.
- 8.14 The evidence from this study suggests that:
- without significant funding, smaller areas grappling with additional issues such as diseconomies of scale, restricted team capacity will continue to grapple with issues of size of need versus size of resource;
 - gaining adequate partner engagement takes time to overcome, but in some cases will not be achieved until 'new blood' is introduced into the organisation that is more open to the notion of organisational change;
 - some areas will struggle to make further progress in the short-term without external intervention and support to direct them on the way forward;
 - greater clarity is required regarding the fit of the partnership within wider planning structures.

Cymorth

- 8.15 Cymorth funding is being used to deliver a wide range of innovative services for children and young people across each of its six themes.
- 8.16 To date, the funding has acted as a key catalyst to accelerate joint working.
- 8.17 The evidence base on outputs and outcomes from Cymorth projects is variable within and across partnerships, with some partnerships requiring ongoing advice and support on how to affect evaluation activity such that it can be used to better inform planning and decision-making.

Participation

- 8.18 Whilst most areas are endeavouring to engage the participation of children and young people, a number of challenges emerge. These relate to a bias towards the participation of young people over children and concern as to how much weight should be attributed to the views elicited. In many cases, the participation of children and young people to inform planning and decision-making has been largely to corroborate, rather than direct, decisions made. Nevertheless, these findings should be situated within the wider context of initiatives that are being developed by the Assembly Government to support the participation agenda that were not covered within the remit for this research.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- 8.19 Partnerships are committed to the principle of monitoring and evaluation and have undertaken diverse strategies to assess their activities and action the results with varying degrees of success.
- 8.20 The definition of what constitutes monitoring and evaluation is being variously interpreted with the monies being used for a range of purposes - from contract monitoring, to reviewing Cymorth, to appraising wider projects and programmes, to assessing mainstream services and to developing the partnership. However, there is limited evidence in some areas, that monitoring and evaluation evidence is being used systematically to inform planning and decision-making.

8.21 The generic templates provided by the Assembly Government to collate monitoring and evaluation evidence require review. The PIs template is not considered as meaningful as there are constraints regarding attribution, relevance, data availability and reliability. The Cymorth target template is being used in a diversity of ways which means the resulting information, although critical to some local areas' decision-making processes, is of limited value at the National level.

Concluding Remarks

8.22 It must be acknowledged that partnership working is not easy and partnerships inevitably take time to develop. Partnership working is a continually evolving process. As such, the progress made to date, however variable, should not be underestimated.

8.23 The evidence from the research has demonstrated clearly that the Cymorth fund has acted as an important catalyst to focus partnership activity and foster joint working. However, there is an acknowledgement that the focus on Cymorth can also act as a distraction from the partnerships' main purpose. Thus, there is a need for partnerships to advance from Cymorth allocation to a mainstream strategic focus.

8.24 As a result of having the Cymorth Fund to focus minds, the rate of progress towards joint working is perhaps more rapid than that which has been exhibited in other types of partnership⁴. However, it is still unrealistic to expect significant achievement on mainstream development and change without further political inducement and impetus. Recent political developments, such as the Children Act and National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services, may help to provide this incentive and take things a step further.

8.25 In spite of this, greater clarity is sought on the detail of these political imperatives, and, particularly, greater emphasis is required on the fit of the partnership within the wider Community Planning Structure.

⁴ C.f. - the implementation of Learning Partnerships in England that had a similarly broad and changing political context as the framework and Children's partnership.

8.26 The evidence from this research has elucidated the varying range of constraints partnerships face in developing effective working arrangements. Several of these constraints are clearly more insurmountable than others (i.e. issues such as clarity of purpose and ownership are easier to address than issues of size, resources, extent of senior commitment and a changing political context). The support and guidance offered by WAG needs to improve and shift in focus so that is more developmental and supportive and more understanding of the process of partnership development.

Recommendations

Partnership Development and Progress

8.27 In order to facilitate further progress of the partnerships, it is recommended that the Assembly Government:

- review the resource (monies) and support (team) available for smaller areas;
- continue to recommend partnership self-assessment but support this with guidance on how self-assessment can be best effected to maximise the value gained from the exercise;
- provide support for partnership development activities – depending on the resource available, this could be achieved in a range of ways such as:
 - the establishment of a central support unit within the Assembly Government;
 - the establishment of regional support teams using outside agencies to provide and disseminate advice and support within and across regions;
 - the establishment of a dedicated website to access, disseminate and exchange information;
 - employing co-ordinators from well-functioning partnerships as champions to provide consultancy support/advice and guidance to areas struggling;

- provision of additional resource for partnerships to buy-in external support and consultancy. Recently, a proportion of partnerships' 4% evaluation spend for Cymorth has been re-channelled to national level evaluation. It must be acknowledged that this is likely to reduce partnerships' resource to commission external advice for the purpose of **partnership** development. This may imply a greater need for nationally-based support, or a need to provide additional local funding for partnership development (as opposed to Cymorth evaluation). The latter could be achieved for example, by providing opportunities for local areas to request/bid for extra funds to commission localised evaluation activities or through the provision of additional funding to the partnership for the specific purpose of monitoring, evaluating and developing the partnership;
- holding workshops/ development days focussing on key thematic areas for development.
- develop a specification of the roles and responsibilities of partnership co-ordinators;
- provide greater guidance, clarity and consistent messages regarding issues of policy and strategy. This means even further alignment and joining up of the children, young people and Cymorth agendas (intra-political issues) and greater unification of linked policy areas such as Communities First (extra-political issues).

8.28 There is an emerging need to review the case for rationalisation of the triangular partnership structure. Given that partnerships are at varying stages of development, decisions to rationalise the triangular structure, or otherwise, should be considered carefully and grounded within the context of each local area. It is **not recommended that blanket decisions to rationalise are made at this stage** given that the three partnerships are at differing levels of maturity across Wales.

8.29 However, it is suggested that **consideration be given to how the issue of rationalisation can be addressed in the future** going forward. Whilst it is acknowledged that currently there is little room for local discretion on the three partnerships since all three are statutory, there is clearly a need to consider this issue given that the relative value of the three partnerships is already being questioned by stakeholders.

8.30 Decisions regarding rationalisation could be made for example, on a case by case basis whereby:

- the **initial case** for rationalisation is left to local discretion with local areas reviewing the stage of development reached and thereby making the case for the relative value/ need for three distinct partnerships;
- this case/ evidence could then be **externally/independently reviewed/verified** to assess the relative strengths of partnership delivery across the age-range 0-25 to determine whether an agreement to rationalise, or otherwise can be made.

8.31 There is also a need to identify opportunities to streamline the wealth of other strategic partnerships in existence and provide greater clarity in the links between them.

Cymorth

8.32 It must be recognised that the breadth of the agenda to be covered (generic and preventative services) has the potential to dilute the achievements made. It is therefore recommended that the scope of Cymorth is separated out to:

- focus on innovative/preventative work with funding that is ring-fenced and not devolved as part of the RSG settlement;
- generic issues such as Childcare, integrated centres and information services should then be separated out to the mainstream.

8.33 To facilitate better clarity in decision-making regarding the allocation of Cymorth funding, clearer eligibility guidance should be produced.

8.34 The framework for monitoring and evaluating Cymorth activities should be reviewed. This should be such that partnerships can continue to use local monitoring and evaluation (to monitor Cymorth contracts and inform decision-making) and such that progress can be assessed at the National level.⁵

⁵ Strategies as to how this can be achieved are outlined in a separate report to the Assembly Government.

Participation

8.35 Information, advice and guidance should be provided on how partnerships:

- can effectively engage the participation of children;
- can develop strategies to ensure consultation is representative;
- should respond to the views elicited when planning and effecting decisions.

8.36 It is acknowledged that much of this is already being addressed through the Assembly Government's development of standards for participation for example.

Monitoring and Evaluation

8.37 The current templates for monitoring and evaluation should be reviewed and revised into a clear analytical framework. This is so that the information collected can be used more effectively for the dual purposes of local and national evaluation (to inform local level action and provide National level information for Ministers)⁶.

8.38 The Assembly Government should seek to publish/feedback results of monitoring and evaluation evidence in order that it has value and meaning for partnerships.

8.39 Given that partnerships are currently using monitoring and evaluation budgets for a range of differing purposes (to assess Cymorth projects, undertake participation activities and inform partnership decisions by commissioning needs assessments), greater clarification is required regarding the definition of monitoring and evaluation and what this should comprise. It is recommended that monitoring and evaluation activities should focus on both Cymorth AND the partnership with resource for each provided accordingly.

⁶ Ibid.

8.40 The recent re-channelling of a proportion of the 4% spend for monitoring and evaluation to better resource national evaluation, may have negative consequences for funding a monitoring and evaluation officer in smaller local areas. The Assembly Government should therefore consider the options to:

- weight the percentage allocation to smaller partnerships to ensure they have sufficient resource to fund a M&E Officer post with a recommended job description;
- share resource across small areas close in geography and size.

8.41 As the capacity for monitoring and evaluation varies across partnerships, greater support is required in some areas. This can be achieved by putting in place support mechanisms to develop the partnership e.g. the establishment of a central support unit, provision of external consultancy, creation of a website⁷.

⁷ Strategies as to how this can be achieved are outlined in a separate report to the Assembly Government.