

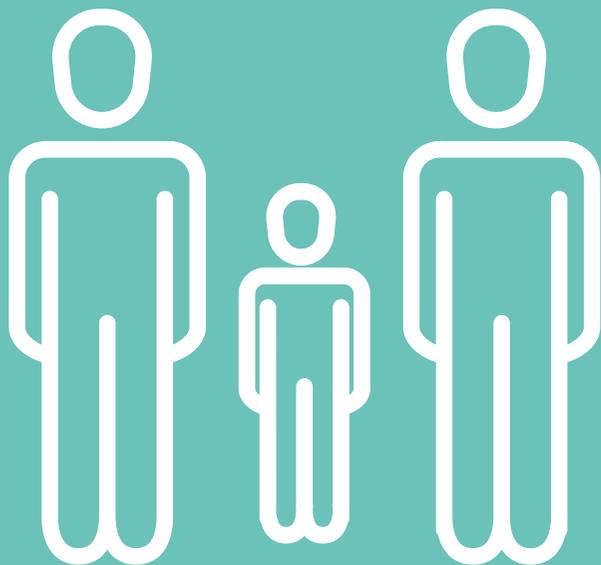
THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE

YOUNG PARENTS



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

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This report has been prepared
for presentation to the National
Assembly under the Government
of Wales Act 1998.

The Wales Audit Office study
team comprised Mark Jeffs, Rachel
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ABOUT THIS REPORT

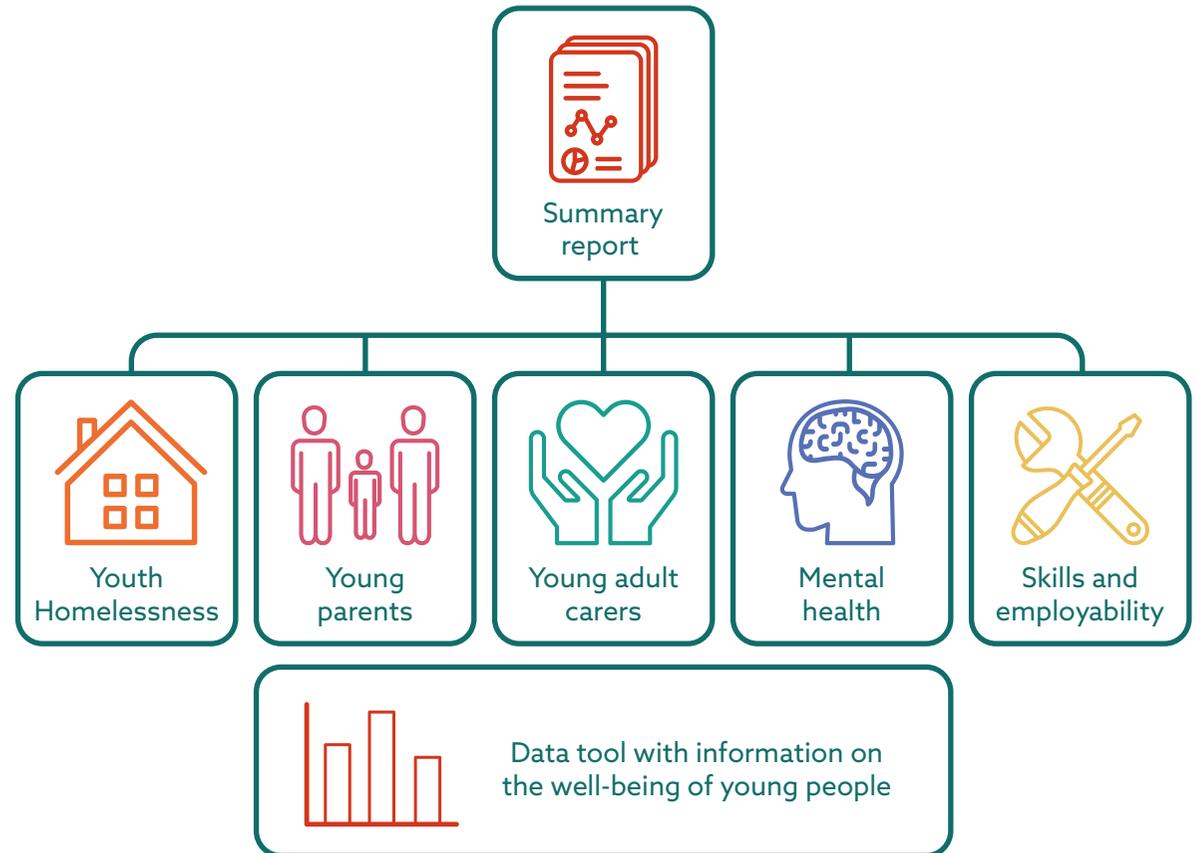
About our wider work on the well-being of young people

Joint-working

We have been working with other organisations to examine a common theme of 'Youth'. The education inspectorate Estyn published its report on **youth support services** in July 2018. Healthcare Inspectorate Wales published its **review of healthcare services for young people** in March 2019. Care Inspectorate Wales published its **report on care experienced by children and young people** in June 2019.

Our work

We looked at the Welsh Government's work to support the well-being of young people in Wales. Well-being is a broad concept, so we have focussed our work on five topics: youth homelessness; young adult carers; young parents; mental health; and skills and employability. We are publishing seven products based on our work, including this report. The diagram provides a link to each product.



About our work on young parents

We looked at young parents¹ because the Welsh Government has promised to help parents² of all ages make the 'early years' of their children's lives as positive as possible. Young parents can have different needs and can need more help than older parents.

This report is not a comprehensive audit of services for young parents. Our focus is what the Welsh Government does to support organisations helping young parents. We give our observations based on interviews with Welsh Government officials, organisations working with young people. We also reviewed Welsh Government strategies, plans, research evidence and statistics. The diagram provides an overview of this report and you can use it to move to the different sections that explain what we found.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 There are different definitions of young parents, but we have looked broadly at 16-24 year olds to be consistent with our other summary reports.
- 2 By parents we mean parents who are raising children.



A picture of young parents

Fewer young people are having children than in 2008. Young parents are likely to need help in different parts of their lives.



How much is being spent?

It is not entirely clear how much is being spent on parenting support for all ages including young parents.



What is the Welsh Government trying to achieve

The general aim is to extend and improve support for parents. This is underpinned by the Welsh Government's parenting guidance.



Opportunities for improvement in the Welsh Government's approach

The Welsh Government has helped organisations work together but it could be better at sharing information across its own departments. It needs to do more to understand what difference its plans are making.



Who else is involved

Lots of different organisations can support young parents.

A PICTURE OF YOUNG PARENTS

The diagram below summarises research on young parents from the Welsh Government's [Parenting Guidance](#):



They are more likely to struggle in school, college or university.



Some people are worried about being criticised for being a young parent. Young parents might not want to ask for help because they want to prove they are a good parent.



They are more likely to:

- have low self-esteem – but some young parents find that having a baby makes them feel more confident.
- have depression including post-natal depression.



Young fathers sometimes find it difficult to be involved in their children's lives. They might have problems with poor housing or low income, or the mother's family might make it difficult for them to get involved. Some young fathers feel ignored by services supporting parents and children.



They are more likely to have been in or still be in care.

Young parents who have been in care are less likely to have help from an adult they trust and rely on. They may also find it difficult to trust professionals because they have been let down in the past. Some people who have been in care find that having a baby gives them a sense of purpose in their lives.

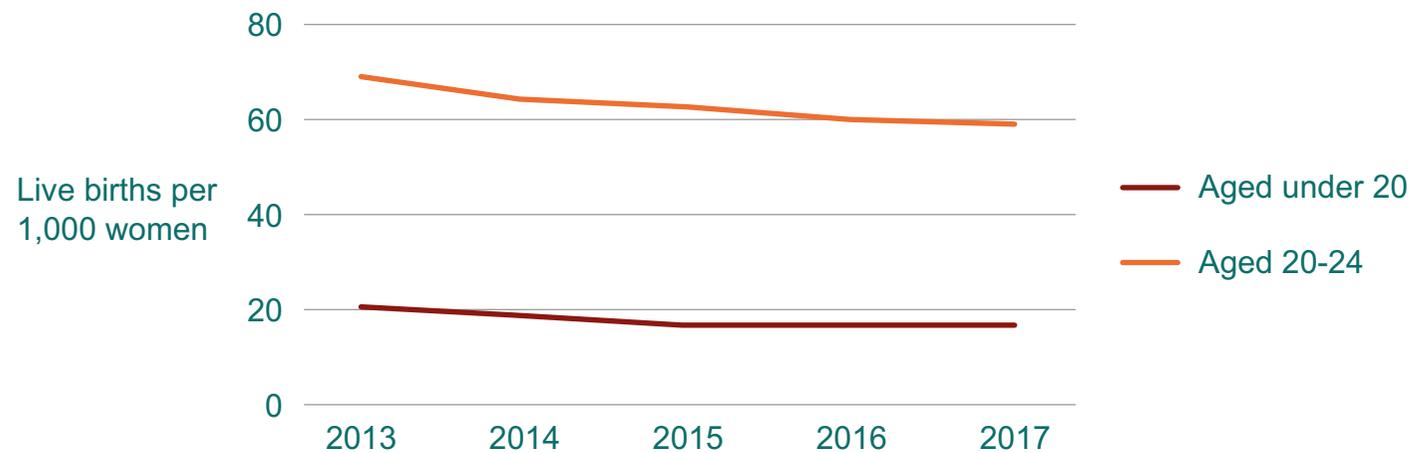


The children of young parents are more likely to:

- Be born early (prematurely).
- Go to hospital in an emergency as a child.
- Die as a child.
- Struggle in school.
- Become young parents themselves.

Age specific fertility rates for women under 25 in Wales have fallen in the last four years³: [Click here for an interactive version of the data](#). There is more information about young people in [our data tool](#).

Fertility rates



Source: Health Board submissions to the Welsh Government

FOOTNOTES

- 3 Age specific fertility rates are calculated by dividing the number of live births to mothers in each age group by the number of women of that age in the population. Rates are expressed per 1,000 women in the age group. Data in this report may differ slightly from our data tool which includes live data updates.

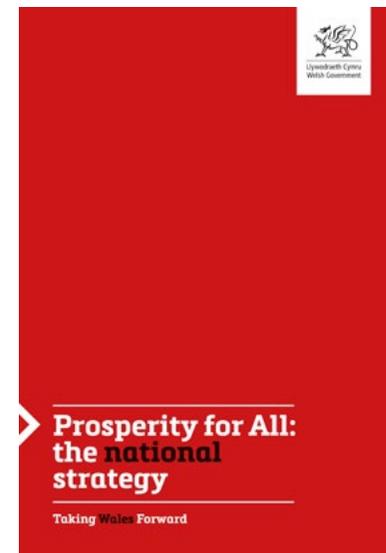
WHAT IS THE WELSH GOVERNMENT TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

The **national strategy** says what the Welsh Government will do to help parents of all ages throughout the Assembly term, including:

- Parenting support in community learning centres;
- An extended, coherent network of parenting support, drawing together family support programmes; and
- 30 hours of free education and childcare for working parents of three and four-year olds.

The Welsh Government works with public services to support parents in many ways. All families can access universal services provided by midwives, Health Visitors, GPs and **Family Information Services**. Other professionals support parents at different stages in each child's life depending on the needs of each family.

The Welsh Government also supports parents through its **Flying Start** and **Families First** programmes. Flying Start supports families with children under 4 years of age living in some of the most deprived areas in Wales. The programme provides parenting support, intensive health visiting, part time childcare for 2-3-year olds, and support for speech, language and communication. Councils use Families First funding to commission projects to support families based on local need. Some projects support young parents.



The Welsh Government's **parenting guidance** gives advice to organisations and professionals supporting parents. The guidance says that some parents, including young parents may need extra and different kinds of help. It encourages organisations to tailor their services to meet parents' needs and suggests ways they can do this.

The Welsh Government's **Parenting Give it Time** campaign gives advice and information to parents. The campaign promotes positive parenting messages through social and print media and digital advertising, with a dedicated website and Facebook page.

The Welsh Government's **Extending Entitlement Guidance 2002** sets out what support all young people are entitled to under the Learning and Skills Act 2000. The Welsh Government commissioned a **review of its guidance** in 2018 but has not decided whether to update it.

The Welsh Government has written other documents relevant to young parents including:

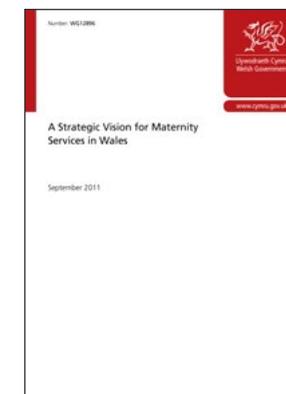
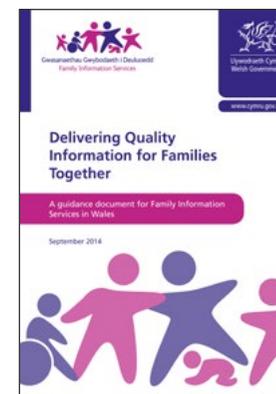
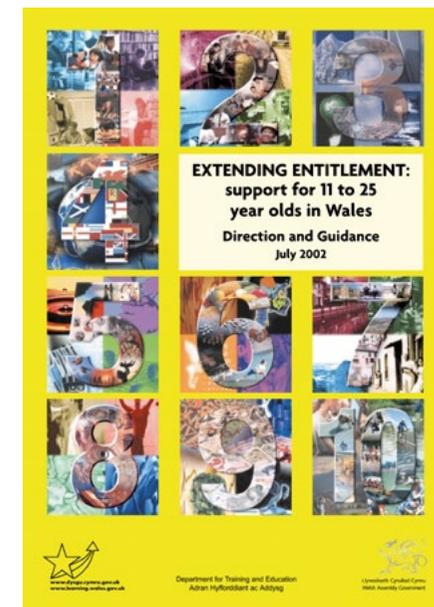
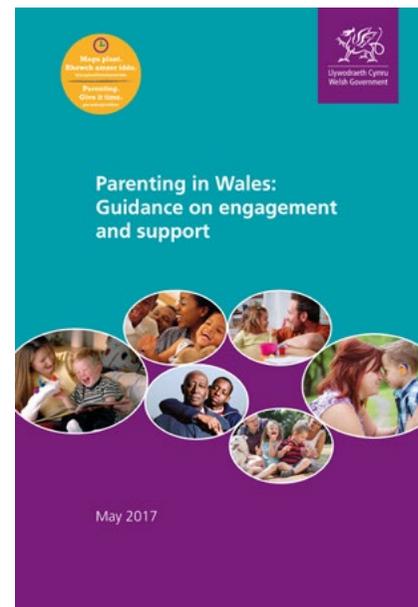
[A Vision for Health Visiting in Wales](#)

[A Strategic Vision for Maternity Services in Wales](#)

[Delivering Quality Information for Families Together](#)

[An overview of the Healthy Child Wales Programme](#)

[Written Statement on Children First 2017](#)



WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED?

Who else is involved in supporting young parents?



NHS Wales and councils provide information and advice for young parents. Some professionals give face to face advice. This includes GPs, health visitors, midwives, teachers, childcare professionals, and Family Information Services.

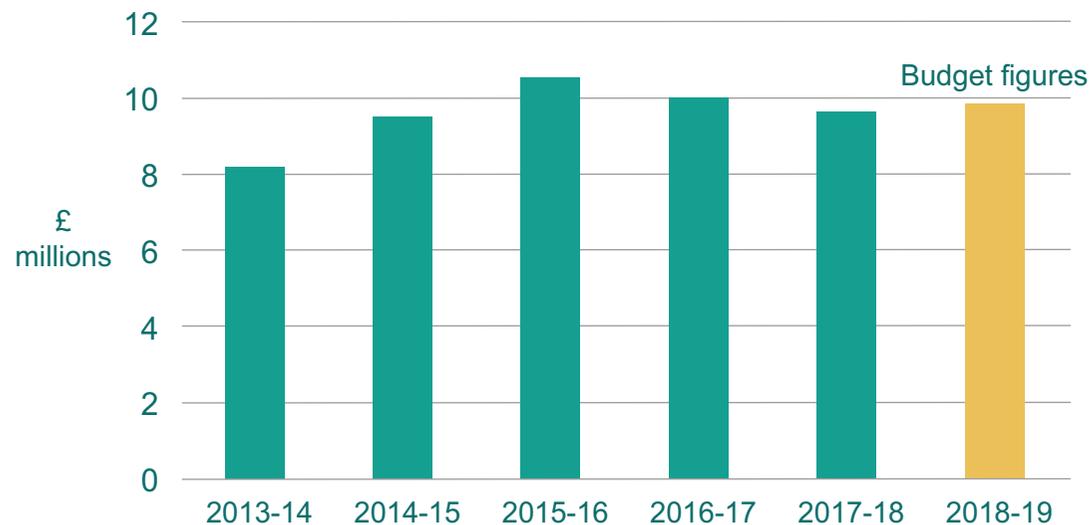


Flying Start, Families First, schools, health visitors, midwives, youth workers and third sector organisations give direct support to young parents. Some families will also get support from social services and justice services depending on their circumstances.

HOW MUCH IS BEING SPENT?

Public services in Wales are investing considerable resources supporting parents. Flying Start alone funded just under £10 million of parenting support each year since 2013-14.

Flying Start Parenting Support Spending



Source: Welsh Government

The Welsh Government has also paid for parenting support through its Families First programme. The Welsh Government collects information on Families First spending but does not routinely analyse Families First spending on parenting support.

The Welsh Government's budget for its Parenting Give it Time campaign for 2018-19 was £340,000.

It would be difficult for the Welsh Government to work out how much is spent on parenting support in totality because support is delivered by many organisations in different ways.

From 2019-20, money for Flying Start and Families First will be combined with money for other things including childcare and play in a new Children and Communities Grant.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Opportunities for improvement in the Welsh Government's approach

Identifying young parents and understanding their needs



The Welsh Government's parenting guidance describes some of these challenges different groups of parents face but the information is not specific to parents in Wales. Some young parents have similar needs to parents over 25 years old. Some face different challenges they need help to overcome.

The Welsh Government and wider public sector could do more to understand what help young parents in Wales need, and the best way to give that help. The Welsh Government could work with councils and health boards to improve the information they have on parents with specific needs. Evaluations of **Families First** and **Parenting Supporting for Flying Start** found that the local needs assessments that organisations submit with their funding applications vary in quality and the extent to which they inform local plans. The Welsh Government could make better use of data it already has, including analysing data on parental attitudes in its National Survey by age.

Some organisations struggle to identify young parents. Professionals are sharing information where organisations supporting parents share a building or agree local referral processes. But parenting practitioners told us it is particularly hard to identify young parents in areas without referral processes.

Understanding what services exist and gaps



For Flying Start and Families First, local organisations must plan services so they meet local need and don't overlap. The Welsh Government has information about some parenting projects in Wales but does not understand the totality of parenting support across Wales or what is being done to help young parents. It does not know whether services are in areas of greatest need. It does not know where and why gaps exist, or what impact this has on other services or young people themselves.

Joining up policy making



Other parts of the Welsh Government could learn from the way its officials encouraged joint local working through Families First. The Evaluation of Families First said the programme helped redesign local systems and encourage a culture of joint working. The Welsh Government's changes to its Families First and Flying Start funding are designed to give councils more flexibility to work with partners on local projects.

Organisations raised concerns about joint working across Welsh Government departments. Some were confused about how relevant laws and policy fit together.

Key messages from the Parenting Guidance are not reflected in other parts of the Welsh Government's approach. For instance, it says young parents are a vulnerable group but has not reflected this in its Parenting Give it Time campaign or the information it collects to monitor its programmes.

As part of its work on the Children (Abolition of the Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Bill, the Welsh Government has carried out an exercise to map current parenting support across Wales including gaps in provision. The Welsh Government will publish its findings by the end of September 2019. Findings will include the number of parents using existing support and investment in parenting support in the last 12 months.

Learning from and improving delivery on the ground



The Welsh Government has a clear national priority on supporting parents but no way of measuring or reporting its own progress. It paid for research to review Flying Start and Families First and holds a national annual conference that brings staff from both programmes together to share learning. It also monitors the impact of some parenting projects. But it has not looked beyond these programmes to look at everything else it does to support parents.

Some organisations told us the Welsh Government has not done anything to understand the problems they have helping young parents or how it can support them. It has not done anything to see whether organisations are using its parenting guidance or whether organisations understand what it wants them to do.

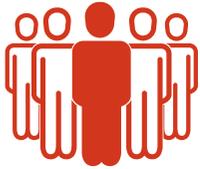
Working out who does what



The Welsh Government set out specific requirements for organisations providing Flying Start and its **Healthy Child Wales programme**. It also recognises that councils, health boards and their partners need the flexibility to work out who does what locally and therefore does not specify who is responsible for delivering other elements of parenting support.

Organisations working with parents told us that everyone knows what they are doing in areas where local partnerships and relationships are strong. Where strong partnerships do not exist, staff are confused about who is doing what, and do not know where to send young parents if they need certain kinds of help. Councils, health boards and other organisations could do more to make local roles and responsibilities clear, but the Welsh Government can also help. The Welsh Government works with organisations to share learning from local approaches to supporting parents. In having conversations with local organisations about what works, we think the Welsh Government could encourage them to make local roles and responsibilities clearer to improve the way they work together.

Providing leadership



Evaluations of Flying Start and Families First show that the Welsh Government has worked hard to get the right balance between national guidelines and letting local organisations decide how to deliver services. It wants parents of all ages to experience a joined-up system of public services that meets their needs. But joining up each part of the system is difficult and needs co-ordination to help organisations work towards common goals.

The Welsh Government has made parenting support a priority in its national strategy. But professionals working directly with parents told us they had never heard of the parenting guidance and did not know what the Welsh Government's national priorities are. We think the Welsh Government could reflect more on its own role in joining up the system. It could do more to find out whether public services and partners understand what it expects them to do and how they should work together to support parents.

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