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GRANDPARENTING IN WALES

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GRANDPARENTING
WORKING GROUP**

Presented to the Welsh Assembly Government, August 2006

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The issue of support for grandparents in Wales was first highlighted in the Welsh Assembly Government's Strategy for Older People (2003). To prepare the ground for future work, the Beth Johnson Foundation was funded to undertake a baseline study of current knowledge about grandparents and their role in society. "Grandparents in Wales: a Baseline Document" was delivered in March 2004. Following discussion by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Older People, Assembly Government Ministers decided that future work on grandparenting should be taken forward as part of the Assembly Government's Parenting Action Plan.
- 1.2. The Parenting Action Plan (December 2005) contained a commitment to setting up a small Working Group to consider the Beth Johnson Foundation report and propose a programme of action for the Assembly Government, statutory authorities and the voluntary sector. It was envisaged that subsequent actions could be built into the second and third years of the Parenting Action Plan, and/ or Phase Two of the Strategy for Older People.
- 1.3. The Working Group met four times between December 2005 and July 2006. It was chaired by Alan Hatton-Yeo, Director of the Beth Johnson Foundation. Membership included representatives from national (Wales) organisations involved with policy on older people, children and young people, parenting and intergenerational practice; from the UK grandparent organisations and the Family Rights Group; and from relevant Assembly Government divisions. The full membership is attached Annex A.
- 1.4. The Working Group's remit was to:

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- Review and advise on the implications set out in the Beth Johnson Foundation report, 'Grandparents in Wales: A Baseline Document';
 - Advise on the development of a policy framework for grandparenting in Wales, in the context of the Parenting Action Plan and the Strategy for Older People in Wales;
 - Propose an outline Programme of Action for the Assembly Government, statutory authorities and the voluntary sector including the sharing of good practice and approaches; and
 - Produce a short report with recommendations by end May 2006.
- 1.5. The Beth Johnson Foundation report was also sent for comment to Children and Young People's Partnership Co-ordinators, Older People's Strategy Co-ordinators, and key voluntary organisations working with children and young people, older people and parents in Wales. The responses received were considered by the Working Group and have helped inform the content of this report.

2. DEFINITIONS: GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDPARENTING

- 2.1. On the face of it, grandparents and grandparenting are easy to define. From a policy perspective, however, the picture can be more complicated. Just as a variety of people can exercise a "parenting" role – including mothers and fathers (natural and adoptive parents, and stepmothers and stepfathers), foster carers, local authorities (as corporate parents), and, in many families, older brothers or sisters, grandparents and other older family members – so "grandparenting" too can be seen as an activity undertaken by more than one distinct group of people (for example, by step-grandparents and other older family members, including an increasing number of great-grandparents).

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- 2.2. That there is a recognisable “grandparenting” role is shown by the fact that those grandparents who become the primary carers for their grandchildren often say that in taking on a parent-carer role they feel they lose out on their special grandparenting role. However, while it is easy to define parenting as “an activity undertaken by those who bring up children” (Parenting Action Plan 1.7), it is less easy to find a workable definition of grandparenting. It can be difficult to separate grandparenting from wider concepts of kinship care and the role of the extended family (especially of older family members) and friends in nurturing children. Often, when developing policies and services, it will be neither desirable nor necessary to rigidly separate out grandparents from the wider network of relationships centred upon a child.
- 2.3. There are many different dimensions to “grandparenting”. Some of the key ones identified by the Working Group are:
- Grandparents who become the primary carers for their grandchildren;
 - Grandparents and other older family members as providers of informal childcare;
 - The wider assistance given to parents and carers by grandparents and other extended family members, supporting them in their parenting role;
 - The grandparent-grandchild relationship as an example of intergenerational relationships within families;
 - The support that grandchildren can give to their grandparent/s.
- 2.4. It is important to note that grandparents are not necessarily older people. Some people become grandparents in their thirties or in their forties. There are, however, specific issues relating to older people and grandparenting, as was recognised in the Assembly Government’s Strategy for Older People (which was focused on people over the age of fifty). These include the benefits brought to older people as a result

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of their relationships with their grandchildren; and, conversely, the consequences of a lessening or changing of this role when, for example, older people go into residential care homes or supported housing.

- 2.5. What is clear is that, however one defines grandparenting, the primary focus, in the context of the Parenting Strategy, has to be on outcomes for children and on raising children confidently, in line with the Assembly Government's Seven Core Aims for Children and Young People. Parents, grandparents, and all those involved in raising children, have a crucial role to play in ensuring that all children and young people have a flying start in life, the best possible base for their future growth and development, and safe homes and communities that support their physical and emotional wellbeing (Core Aims 1 and 6, taken from Rights to Action (January 2004) p. 1). They are also entitled to the information, services and support they need in fulfilling this role.
- 2.6. **The Working Group recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government adopts an approach to grandparenting that is as inclusive as possible, that is genuinely child- and family-centred, that enhances the experience of grandparenting for both children and their grandparents and acknowledges the valuable contribution grandparents can make to their children and grandchildren.**

3. RESEARCH/ EVIDENCE

- 3.1. The Beth Johnson Foundation report, "Grandparenting in Wales: a Baseline Document" gave an overview of recent research into grandparenting. It particularly noted the lack of up-to-date research and evidence relating specifically to Wales. Possible sources of data

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to build upon are Bangor University's 1980's research on relationships in families, and the University of Kent's work on intergenerational contact. There are also relevant foreign studies.

3.2. The Working Group recommends that a literature review be carried to find out what research data is available around grandparenting in general and Wales in particular. Decisions should then be taken on what further research might be needed.

3.3. In drawing up proposals for this research, the following should be considered:

- **The need for further data on relationships within families and intergenerational contact, including Wales-specific demographic data;**
- **The experiences of grandparents themselves and what they say their support needs are (this needs to include both older and younger grandparents);**
- **The experience and needs of the so-called "pivot generation" of people between age 50 and retirement who are combining work and care roles;**
- **The perceptions and experience that children and young people have of their grandparents.**

4. EQUALITY ISSUES

4.1. There are various equality issues relating to grandparenting, some of which are highlighted below. It is particularly important to acknowledge the gender and age biases in much work on parenting and

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grandparenting. Account also needs to be taken of the needs of disabled grandparents, and grandparents of disabled children.

- 4.2. Projects are being taken forward under the Older People's Strategy for Wales on the experiences and role of older people ("elders") in black and minority ethnic communities in Wales; and also on older people from within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Although these focus on wider issues and not on grandparents or older kin as such, they may nonetheless throw up relevant issues that could influence future work on grandparenting.
- 4.3. There are particular issues around the status and needs of paternal grandparents. To some extent these mirror issues relating to fathers and fatherhood in general. Available evidence suggests that a high proportion of fathers lose contact with their children when relationships break down; and the extended paternal family also gets lost in these circumstances. Similar issues can occur when grandparents themselves get divorced.
- 4.4. **The Working Group recommends that consideration be given to equality issues in all proposed research and actions relating to grandparenting in Wales. We particularly recommend that research be undertaken on grandparenting and the role of the extended family within black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in Wales, to fill a clear gap in current knowledge.**

5. SPECIFIC ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1. The Group's underlying issues in relation to grandparents are **choice** and **rights**. It is important to recognise that some grandparents feel under a great deal of pressure to make more of a contribution to the lives of their grandchildren than they feel able to do. They should be able to exercise choice about the contribution that they make to the

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care and upbringing of grandchildren. Grandparents should also have the right to be heard and to have their views considered by public authorities who make decisions which will affect them, particularly where human rights issues are involved (such as the right to respect for private and family rights). Such rights should not compromise the principle of the paramount rights to the child established by the 1989 Children Act.

Kinship/ family and friends care

- 5.2. Many grandparents assume responsibility for care of their grandchildren as a result of family tragedy or crisis, on a long-term or short-term basis, without any kind of intervention or additional support. Very many more provide informal childcare. However, there are circumstances when social services need to intervene formally within the family to safeguard the interests of the child. In these circumstances, they have a responsibility under the Children Act 1989 to seek to place children first within their extended family – such placements are known as “kinship care” (sometimes the broader term “family and friends care” is preferred). This may not involve formal care proceedings, but is a means of supporting parents. Some or short-term or periodic (e.g. when supporting a disabled child), and the local authority can offer short-term support such as one-off Section 17 payments, respite care, or day care.
- 5.3. There are various legal arrangements which can formalise kinship/ family or friends care, to promote or safeguard the interests of the child. The child might have been placed with a relative or friend by the local authority, either with parental agreement or under a care order made in the courts (in these cases the child is a “looked after child”, and following an assessment the carer can become a local authority foster carer). Alternatively, the carer may have applied to the courts for a Residence Order, to designate the home of the family or friend as the

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child's permanent home; or, from 30 December 2005, a carer may apply for a Special Guardianship Order, introduced under the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Special guardianship orders provide an alternative legal status for children that offers greater security than long term fostering but falls short of full adoption.

- 5.4. There have been a number of research studies in the UK and in other countries into the effect of kinship/ family and friends care on children and their life chances, although there is nothing specific to Wales. A study by the National Children's Bureau and Joseph Rowntree Foundation into young people's and carers' views on kinship care (2001¹) found that many of the young people expressed a sense of "emotional permanence" from being cared for within the extended family.
- 5.5. There appears to be much confusion and ambiguity over the level of allowances and other support that kinship/ family and friends carers are entitled to. Statistics submitted by local authorities to the Assembly Government indicate that they are making more use of kinship care – at the year ending 31 March 2005, there were 621 children in kinship care placements, representing 19.4% of total foster care placements in Wales. Case law has established that local authorities should be paying kinship carers the same amount as other approved foster carers. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that financial support arrangements are being applied in an inconsistent manner dependent on geographical location. The Working Party is particularly concerned that grandparents and other relatives who look after children in any of the ways outlined above should receive equitable treatment whichever local authority area they live in. Grandparents and other relative carers also need to be made aware of their entitlements.

¹ *Kith and Kin – Kinship care for vulnerable young people*, Bob Broad, Ruth Hayes and Christine Rushworth, National Children's Bureau and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2001

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- 5.6. There is often a lack of recognition on the impact on grandparents economic circumstances of, for instance, having to reduce work hours or give up work all together to meet caring commitments. This can be particularly difficult for grandparents who are looking after children in an informal manner, without the intervention of social services, and who are therefore not receiving any external financial support.
- 5.7. **The Working Group makes the following recommendations about kinship/ family and friends care:**
- **The Assembly Government should issue guidance to local authorities clarifying the use of kinship/ family and friends care, to ensure compliance with the statutory requirements, and to ensure parity of treatment. They should also gather and disseminate examples of good practice.**
 - **Consideration should be given to encouraging employers to operate more flexible dependence leave arrangements, to assist grandparents and other family and friends carers.**
- 5.8. The Family Rights Group has recently published an updated version of “Second Time Round”, a guide for grandparents who look after their grandchildren. The new edition broadens this out to embrace the wider concept of family and friends care. Following discussions with the Assembly Government, it was decided to make the new edition an England-only document, on the grounds that the policy context in Wales is sufficiently different to warrant a separate guide. **The Working Group recommends that the Assembly Government fund preparation of a Wales version of this guide, if possible during the 2007-08 financial year.**

Family Group Conferences

- 5.9. Family Group Conferences originated in New Zealand in the 1980s and were introduced to the UK in the early 1990s. They are used in a wide variety of child welfare situations. The aim of the Family Group Conference is to achieve the best possible decisions and outcomes for children through a collaborative approach. They promote the involvement of the wider family in the decision-making process to achieve a resolution of difficulties and permanence for their children. A qualitative study of an NCH Cymru project in South Wales, that provides Family Group Conferences for three local authorities, was undertaken by Cardiff University in 2003 ², with funding from the Assembly Government. Although a small sample, it reported positive outcomes for most of the children experiencing a Family Group Conference intervention. It also found that almost all of those family members who had experienced “traditional” social services meetings preferred the Family Group Conference.
- 5.10. The Family Rights Group has produced a toolkit for Family Group Conference Toolkit and accompanying Reader for use by those setting up or managing Family Group Conference projects. Funded largely by the Department for Education and Skills, the Assembly Government contributed funding to ensure that the toolkit was also fit for Family Group Conference projects in Wales, and for translation and production of a Welsh language version.
- 5.11. The “Review of the Child Care Proceedings System in England and Wales” (May 2006), issued jointly by the Department for Education and Skills, Department for Constitutional Affairs, and the Welsh Assembly Government, recommended that best existing practice should be followed in pre-proceedings advice, support and advocacy, including

² *Outcomes in Family Group Conferences for children on the brink of care: a study of child and family participation*, Sally Holland, Sean O’Neill, Jonathan Scourfield and Andrew Pithouse, Cardiff University School of Social Sciences, 2003

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Family Group Conferences, and that this should be covered in statutory guidance (para.1.10).

- 5.12. **The Working Group endorses the recommendation of the Child Care Proceedings Review, and recommends that Family Group Conferencing should be available in each local authority area in Wales. It also endorses use of the Toolkit produced by the Family Rights Group.**

Older people

- 5.13. Many older grandparents experience a diminishing of their grandparenting role when they themselves need support or move into residential care or supported housing. Residential and nursing homes are often not very child-friendly (it has to be remembered that they are also other people's home environment), and supported housing often only has one bedroom and no facilities for children or young people to stay over. Wider relationships are often forgotten when an older person needs support - the focus shifts to what they cannot do, rather than on what they want to do; and the needs of those in relationship with them (e.g. grandchildren) are often lost.
- 5.14. What is needed is a shift in thinking, among policy makers; those responsible for assessing an older person's needs; and among providers of residential and nursing home care, and of supported housing. All need to consider issues relating to the wider family relationships of their residents, and how these can be sustained. This will include consideration of how to sustain grandparenting roles, to the benefit of both the older person and the grandchildren.
- 5.15. Consideration also needs to be given to grandparents as vulnerable adults. Age Concern and other helplines take many calls from grandchildren concerned about the welfare of their grandparents.

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Grandchildren may also take on a caring role when grandparents become frail or in need of care. Problems may arise when an older person cannot express their preferences for who they would like to represent their wishes, leading to family disputes.

- 5.16. Phase One of the Assembly Government's Strategy for Older People is currently being evaluated, and decisions will be taken shortly about Phase Two. **The Working Party recommends that there is a continued recognition on grandparenting in the Strategy for Older People, so that these issues are not lost.**

Access to parenting services

- 5.17. Many of the services that grandparents need, particularly if they are primary carers for (or play a significant role in raising) their grandchildren, often already exist but are targeted at parents. Where appropriate, information and service providers need to make sure that they are promoting their services so that grandparents and other kinship carers know that they are also welcome. This will be particularly true of universal access services, such as telephone helplines and Children's Information Services. Other services aimed primarily at parents, including Parent Networks or parenting support groups, could also usefully consider the needs of grandparents and other kinship carers. Sometimes it will be appropriate to develop services targeted particularly at grandparents – e.g. support groups, grandparent and toddler groups, or even classes for grandparents who wish to refresh their parenting skills. It should be noted that some grandparents, especially those who have become step-grandparents, have never been parents.
- 5.18. All of this raises the broader question of how we design and promote parenting (and related) services in ways that are as inclusive as

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possible, so that all those involved in raising children receive the advice, information and support they need, when they need it. It also raises the issue of how Children and Young People's Partnerships engage with parents, grandparents and other carers in planning services that are responsive to local needs and priorities.

5.19. Implementation of the Assembly Government's Parenting Action Plan will provide opportunities to get these messages across. For example, the new parenting helpline needs to be developed and marketed in ways that show that is a resource for all those involved in raising children, and not just the primary carers. The practice guide on parental participation that will be issued shortly covers the involvement of grandparents and other carers. There is an opportunity to write grandparents into the script of the booklets that the Assembly Government is preparing for parents, on issues such as managing difficult behaviour and alternatives to physical punishment; and in future editions of "Birth to Five". Guidance on integrated centres and community-focussed schools could also acknowledge the importance of grandparents and other family members in children's lives.

5.20. **The Working Group recommends that all Assembly Government initiatives concerning parenting or support for raising children should be branded and marketed in an inclusive way, acknowledging the role of grandparents and other family and friends in raising children, and their need for support and information.**

Information provision

5.21. The need for information provision to be as accessible and inclusive as possible has been touched on above. Making them relevant to grandparents and other kinship carers includes more than just marketing services in an appropriate way. It also includes making sure

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that those who refer on enquirers to sources of advice and support – including Children’s Information Services, Citizens Advice Bureaux, local Age Concern groups, and the new parenting helpline – know where to direct grandparents.

5.22. The Working Group recommends that the Assembly Government and NACIS (National Association of Children’s Information Services) consider adding grandparents and extended family members to the list of standards of service for Children’s Information Services.

5.23. The Group also recommends that further guidance should be issued on what information Children’s Information Services should hold, as part of a general drive to increase the capacity and role of CIS’s across Wales.

Support groups

5.24. The existing grandparents organisations (Grandparents Association and Grandparents Plus) do not have a high profile in Wales at present, although their national information and advice services are available to grandparents in Wales, and they have been involved in supporting social services departments. They, and the Family Rights Group, would welcome Welsh input into the resources they are developing, including the issue of Welsh language written and web materials.

5.25. There is also very little information available about the extent of support groups for grandparents in Wales, about what grandparents want, or what works or does not work in terms of support for grandparents. **The Working Party recommends that pilot projects are set up in different parts of Wales, based on the research recommended in 3.3 above, to establish a portfolio of good practice in support for grandparents.** Grandparent-toddler groups are suggested as one

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area that could be piloted more widely in Wales. The Family Rights Group, Grandparents Association and Grandparents Plus are all willing to offer consultancy support in establishing support groups or Grandparent Networks; and all three could give advice on what works and what does not in relation to grandparents.

Inter-generational Strategy for Wales

5.26. The Inter-generational Strategy for Wales is currently being developed, as part of the Strategy for Older People. To date, most the intergenerational initiatives being funded in Wales are non-kinship related, including the work undertaken by the Wales Centre for Inter-generational Practice. The irony of this is that much inter-generational work is undertaken within families, including the relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren. The Inter-generational Strategy for Wales would provide an ideal opportunity for promoting both kinship and non-kinship models of inter-generational practice. **The Working Party recommends that the Beth Johnson Foundation broadens the remit of the emerging intergenerational strategy to take account of issues around kinship.**

Maintaining the profile

5.27. The Working Group is keen to ensure that the profile of grandparenting (and the role of extended family relationships of which grandparenting is a part) is not lost once its work has concluded. At present, Wales has a Parenting Forum (Fforum Magu Plant) managed by Children in Wales, which gives members an opportunity to exchange information, share good practice and network with others in the field. It also provides a channel through which issues and concerns can be fed to policy makers. Although it covers a broad range of parenting and child-

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rearing issues, it is not specifically resourced to deal with grandparenting issues. **We recommend that an all-Wales forum on grandparenting be set up, with appropriate resources, to help raise awareness and visibility of grandparenting issues.**

- 5.28. **We also recommend that the Working Group be re-convened in a year's time to review progress against this report's recommendations.**

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **The Welsh Assembly Government should adopt an approach to grandparenting that is as inclusive as possible, that is genuinely child- and family-centred, that enhances the experience of grandparenting for both children and their grandparents and acknowledges the valuable contribution grandparents can make to their children and grandchildren.**

2. **A literature review should be carried to find out what research data is available around grandparenting in general and in Wales in particular. Decisions should then be taken on any further research that might be needed.**

3. **In drawing up proposals for this research, the following should be considered:**
 - **The need for further data on relationships within families and intergenerational contact, including Wales-specific demographic data;**
 - **The experiences of grandparents themselves and what they say their support needs are (this needs to include both older and younger grandparents);**
 - **The experience and needs of the so-called “pivot generation” of people between age 50 and retirement who are combining work and care roles;**
 - **The perceptions and experience that children and young people have of their grandparents.**

4. **Consideration should be given to equality issues in all proposed research and actions relating to grandparenting in Wales. It is particularly recommended that research be undertaken on**

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grandparenting and the role of the extended family within black and minority ethnic communities in Wales, to fill a clear gap in current knowledge.

- 5. A survey should be undertaken in Wales of the use made by local authorities of kinship/ family and friends care, and of the arrangements in place to provide financial support. This should include examples of good practice.**
- 6. The Assembly Government should issue guidance to local authorities clarifying the use of kinship/ family and friends care, to ensure compliance with the statutory requirements and to ensure parity of treatment. They should also gather and disseminate examples of good practice.**
- 7. Consideration should be given to encouraging employers to operate more flexible dependence leave arrangements, to assist grandparents and other family and friends carers.**
- 8. The Assembly Government should fund preparation of a Wales version of the Family Rights Group “Second Time Around” guide, if possible during the 2007-08 financial year**
- 9. Family Group Conferencing should be available in each local authority area in Wales, making use of the Toolkit produced by the Family Rights Group.**
- 10. Family Group Conferencing should be available in each local authority area in Wales, making use of the Toolkit produced by the Family Rights Group.**
- 11. There should be a continued recognition on grandparenting in the Assembly Government’s Strategy for Older People, so that these issues are not lost.**

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12. **All Assembly Government initiatives concerning parenting or support for raising children should be branded and marketed in an inclusive way, acknowledging the role of grandparents and other family and friends in raising children, and their need for support and information.**
13. **The Assembly Government and NACIS (National Association of Children's Information Services) should consider adding grandparents and extended family members to the list of standards of service for Children's Information Services.**
14. **Further guidance should be issued on what information Children's Information Services should hold, as part of a general drive to increase the capacity and role of Children's Information Services across Wales.**
15. **Pilot projects should be set up in different parts of Wales, based on any research commissioned as a result of recommendations 2 and 3 above, to establish a portfolio of good practice in support for grandparents.**
16. **The Beth Johnson Foundation should broaden the remit of the emerging intergenerational strategy to take account of issues around kinship.**
17. **An all-Wales forum on grandparenting should be set up, with appropriate resources, to help raise awareness and visibility of grandparenting issues.**
18. **The Working Group should be re-convened in a year's time to review progress against these recommendations.**

GRANDPARENTING WORKING GROUP

MEMBERSHIP

Alan Hatton-Yeo (Chair)	Director, Beth Johnson Foundation
John Sayce	Barnardo's
Tony Ivens	Children in Wales
Lorraine Childs	Gwent NHS Trust
Michelle Matheron	Age Concern Cymru
Sara Reid	Assistant Children's Commissioner
Phyllis Matthews	Children's Information Service/NACIS
Ana Palazon	Help the Aged Cymru
Debra Ennis	NCH Cymru
Diana Whitworth	Grandparents Plus
Lynn Chesterman	Grandparents Association
Cathy Ashley	Family Rights Group
Stephen Vincent	Older People's Strategy Team, Welsh Assembly Government
Graham Carter	Older People's Strategy Team, Welsh Assembly Government
Huw Jones	Pension Service
Huw Gwyn Jones	Children's Framework Team, Welsh Assembly Government
Rhonwyn Dobbing	Social Services Inspectorate Wales