



CASCADE

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Developing a Supporting Separating Families Alliance: a scoping study

**Final report
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1.0 Summary

1.1 Introduction

The number of private law applications has been rising, with parents demonstrating unrealistic expectations as to what the court can and should do. This report was commissioned by the Welsh Government in March 2020 to identify what services are currently supporting separating families and to consider the options available for the creation of child-focused local family alliances.

1.2 Method

The scoping study consists of three main elements of data collection. These are:

1. Desktop research was undertaken to identify and map existing provision. This was supplemented with an online survey completed by eight stakeholders and informal discussions with six stakeholders.
2. Interviews were conducted with 22 stakeholders, comprising representatives from voluntary funded, social enterprises, limited companies, and statutory services. One focus group with two young people was undertaken.
3. Consultation with thirteen stakeholders.

1.3 Main findings

1.3.1 Separating families

- Children live in a range of family structures where parents may not have been in a relationship or have ever lived together and which can include extended family members such as grandparents, as well as reconstituted families involving stepparents and additional siblings.
- Young people feel confused and/or frustrated when decisions are made about their lives by people who do not know them. Young people should be included in mediation and more information regarding parent separation should be made available to them.
- Disagreements surrounding child arrangements (residence and contact) are the greatest source of conflict. Where disagreements occur, private law applications appear to be the default option for parents as they have unrealistic expectations of court.

- Covid-19 is having a negative impact on some families, leading to increased rates of parent separation and disagreements over contact. While greater use of communications technology has proven beneficial during lockdown, service provision should include both video calls and in-person support.
- Currently, parents access support with separation through court or self-referral. However, referrals are dependent upon knowledge and availability of service provision. Moreover, some groups of parents are service resistant, invisible, or underrepresented. Consideration is needed as to how to engage these groups and provide equitable access to help and support.

1.3.2 What services are available to support separating families?

- There is a postcode lottery in the provision of services. While some areas have access to a wide range of services other areas have more limited access with some parents having to travel long distances for support.
- Broadly speaking, separating parents can access family support, parenting programmes, and mediation. Contact centres also provide additional help with some centres offering signposting and a base for receiving help and support.
- Findings revealed that trauma-informed approaches, family group conferences, and restorative practice offer parents whole family support with relationship breakdown and the prioritisation of the child's wellbeing.

1.3.3 Developing a Supporting Separating Families Alliance

- There is a clear need for a Supporting Separating Families Alliance. In order to foster engagement, strategic direction should be set nationally by the Welsh Government with implementation determined locally based on need.
- The effectiveness of the alliance is dependent upon widespread awareness and acceptance of accessing and accepting help and support for relationship breakdown.
- A public health approach should be adopted that focuses and extends provision around forming positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect in schools under the new curriculum.
- The alliance should promote the inclusion of a range of multi-disciplinary services in the provision of a one stop shop for all family members and where they are empowered to identify the most suitable forms of support for their unique circumstances before, during and after separation.
- Three scenarios are presented:

1. Inclusion of the alliance within the Single Advice Fund delivered by Citizen's Advice and partners.
2. Situate the alliance within a sister arm of Cafcass Cymru.
3. Establishment of Relationship Wales, a digital platform with telephone and helpline.

1.4 Discussion

- Enhancing relationships between parents is the primary tool for resolving conflict before, during and after separation.
- The success of the Supporting Separating Families Alliance will be dependent upon public acceptance of receiving relationship support and the visibility of support.
- In order to promote equitable access, the Supporting Separating Families Alliance should include a balance of both digital presence and in-person support, whether physically or via a telephone helpline.
- Consideration must be given to the right of the child to have their views heard regarding judiciary and administrative matters. Hence the alliance must ensure that the child's voice is heard through improving their inclusion within services and the judicial process.
- Finally, the success of an alliance will be based on whether families have the financial means to access private services, where appropriate, and the extent to which organisations are able to continue offering these services post-Covid-19.

2.0 Introduction

In 2018, there were 3,390 private family law applications in Wales involving 4,530 children. Establishing how many of these applications involve separating parents is difficult as there is currently no way of differentiating which cases involve families who are in the process of separating from parents who no longer or have never lived together (Cusworth et al. forthcoming). There appears to be an increasing overreliance on family courts, with parents demonstrating unrealistic expectations as to what the court can and should do (Private Law Working Group, 2019, 2020). The Private Law Working Group has highlighted that the process may escalate conflict as family courts are an inappropriate vehicle for conflict resolution between separating parents. Despite successive attempts by governments (largely supported by research) since the early 1990s to divert more families away from litigation into alternative dispute resolution, recourse to court remains the apparent default option for many.

One of the aims of the Child Arrangements Programme (CAP), introduced following the Family Justice Review (Family Justice Review Panel, 2011) and the Children and Families Act 2014, was to remove more low-risk cases from courts, but after an initial drop in applications, the court workload has increased. In Wales, the number of applications per year rose by 27% between 2014 and 2019. In light of the withdrawal of legal aid from most cases and the cuts in the courts' budgets, this increase is now seen as unsustainable. The President of the Family Division, therefore, asked his Private Law Working Group to review the CAP; one of its recommendations was the creation of local family alliances of services that offer integrated child-focused support to separating families (termed 'Supporting Separating Families Alliances'). The CAP was originally aimed at retaining focus on the possibilities of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) at every stage of proceedings, so that cases might be taken out of the system at a later stage, where appropriate. Although this concept appears to have fallen away because of concerns it can cause delay, services that can assist parties during proceedings were also consulted by the Group and should be considered as potential partners in such an alliance. Subsequent to the publication of the second Private Law Working Group report in March 2020, the Ministry of Justice published a report, 'Assessing risk of harm to children and parents in private law children cases' (Ministry of Justice, 2020). This report warns against reducing dependence on the court where there are allegations or concerns about domestic abuse or safeguarding children. Although estimates vary, it is generally accepted that 60% of private law cases feature such issues. Therefore, only a certain proportion of cases are suitable for non-court dispute resolution. Development of a Supporting Separating Families Alliance would need to include effective systems of identifying which cases do need to go to court.

The legislative framework in England and Wales has a unifying principle of the welfare of the child being paramount, but there is a different emphasis between public and private

law. Under the latter, the ‘no order’ principle under section 1(5) is also applied. This was intended to discourage parents from routinely seeking section 8 contact and residence orders (now child arrangements orders) However, this has not resulted in a reduction of private law applications for parents in the low risk category. There appears to be a tension between some parents’ perceptions that their disputes are appropriate for litigation, and some services’ views that only cases where there are blurred lines with public law child protection concerns are serious enough for court. The Private Law Working Group found evidence that there was a high level of unmet need, because existing free or affordable resources and services to tackle family conflict were both embryonic and fragmented and provision of support for families was patchy. This is particularly pertinent as research consistently shows that following parental separation, the best outcomes for children are associated with the quality of parenting they receive, practical factors such as housing and income levels, and the quality of the parents’ relationship (Fehlberg *et al.*, 2011; Pruett and DiFonzo, 2014). Where children are caught in the middle of conflicts between parents, there are heightened risks of poorer outcomes, including poor mental health, educational attainment, self-esteem, and well-being (Amato, 2006; Murch, 2018).

Another complicating factor is that responsibility for children and family services (including Cafcass Cymru) is devolved to Welsh Government but the Court Service and judicial training remain the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice. For example, under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, a child in a separated family may be eligible for more services under a Child Assessment Support Plan than a similar child in England would be able to access. This may not, however, be known to the courts.

In Wales, there are a range of existing specialist and community services available to meet the diverse needs of families yet there is a lack of coherence and awareness regarding existing provision. Such fragmentation is not unique to Wales. A review for the Department of Work and Pensions found gaps between mediation, relationship counselling, parenting programmes, contact centres and an overall lack of inter-agency working and communication. What is needed is the development of wraparound services that provide support to families before, during, and after separation away from the court arena, where it is appropriate to do so (Marjoribanks, 2015).

In the context of the support needs of families where relationship problems between separated parents are adversely affecting children, alongside the support that will help them find a - non-court based solution, this scoping study was commissioned to:

1. Identify what services are currently available in Wales to support families who are separating, and
2. Consider the options available for the creation of child-focused local family alliances which can meet the diverse needs of separating families.

To meet these objectives, data was collected from three sources (1) a mapping exercise of existing services, (2) findings from interviews with key stakeholders, and (3) consultation with key stakeholders. Based on these findings three scenarios are presented for a Supporting Separated Family Alliance (SSFA) which reduces the number of parents entering into private law applications in Wales.

3.0 Method

The study drew upon action research principles by engaging stakeholders in a dynamic cycle of 'problem-focused, context-specific and future-orientated' (Waterman et al., 2001:4) inquiry in order to effect change. Within this cycle, findings from the three workstreams were used to develop and inform each other in an iterative manner:

1. A mapping exercise
2. Stakeholder engagement
3. Consultation meetings

The study was undertaken from March to August 2020. This timeframe coincided with the Covid-19 lockdown measures, which began on 23 March and began to be eased from 1 June. Within this context, the original research plan had to be amended, with stakeholder engagement and roundtable discussions moved to online communication, using either audio or audio-visual technologies. The effects of the lockdown measures also impacted the study in two main ways. First, the stakeholder engagement was delayed while organisations acclimatised to new ways of working. Second, there was a poor response rate to the online survey for the mapping exercise. It was not possible to determine whether this was due to staff furlough, limited capacity or where stakeholders decided not to participate. This section provides an overview of each workstream.

3.1 Mapping exercise

Desktop research was undertaken to identify and map existing provision including specialist services, e.g. mediation, relationship, parenting, and services designed to meet the diverse needs of families, including BAME, LBGTQ+, and disabilities from across Wales. In order to scope existing service provision and identify existing formal or informal networking of services for separating families, this workstream was informed by findings from an online survey. Thirty-five organisations were sent an invitation to complete the online survey. The survey consisted of a range of open and closed questions regarding service provision, signposting to other organisations and views surrounding the SSFA. Of the 35 invitations, eight participated, representing a 23% response rate. These included Heads of Services, Directors and Managers from private organisations, charitable organisations, and statutory services. It is unclear why the response rate was so low. It is possible that some organisations lacked capacity due to Covid-19, either due to staff furlough or where they were preoccupied with increased demand for their services. Alternatively, some organisations may not have participated as they did not explicitly offer services to separated parents. Non-response was recorded for organisations who provide support specifically directed towards women. Requests for discussions with the Court Service were unsuccessful, although there was some input from magistrates.

The mapping exercise also included liaison with a range of stakeholders who did not have a direct role in supporting separating families but whose role entailed signposting families to existing provision. Fourteen stakeholders were invited to participate. Of these, six stakeholders participated in an informal discussion regarding their role with separating families and their signposting activities.

3.2 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders were invited to participate in a semi-structured telephone interview. The interview (Appendix A) began by asking respondents about their organisation, its services and how it supported the diverse needs of children and families including BAME, LGBTQ+, and those with disabilities. Respondents were also invited to comment on SSFAs, including the benefits and challenges as well as any particular issues arising from the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Thirty-one stakeholders were invited to participate in an interview representing a range of statutory, voluntary and third sector organisations. Of these, 22 interviews were conducted (a 71% response rate) with a range of stakeholders. These included Chief Executives from voluntary funded, social enterprises and limited companies, managers from statutory services, such as the Team Around the Child and Early Help, and charitable organisations, such as contact centres. Representatives participated from Cafcass Cymru and the office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Following a request from the Family Justice Young People's Board, one focus group comprising two young people was undertaken. In order to comply with Covid-19 restrictions this group was facilitated by a representative from the Family Justice Young People's Board as opposed to a member of the research team. Young people were invited to comment on the suitability of court to resolve family issues, service provision and their views regarding the SSFA.

All data was digitally recorded and summarised. Data was analysed via a 'code-and-retrieve' thematic analysis (see Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), which was facilitated by NVivo 12 software. A coding frame (a 'node tree' in NVivo's terms) was developed and agreed by a sub-group of the research team, after careful reading of a small number of interview transcripts.

3.3 Consultation

Based on the findings from stakeholder engagement and the mapping exercise, a roundtable discussion with a range of key stakeholders was used to inform and refine the three scenarios. In light of the pandemic, roundtable discussion was amended to a series of consultation meetings using video call. The aim of the consultation meetings were to foster collaborative critical reflection on the suitability and practicality of each of the three

scenarios. Stakeholders were identified from the preceding workstreams in order to include a range of perspectives.

Thirteen respondents participated. In order to encourage engagement, four video meetings were held with each comprising a maximum of seven participants, including up to three members of the research team. Based on feedback from each of the four meetings each scenario was amended.

In presenting findings, it proved simpler to combine interviews, online responses, and consultation feedback.

4.0 Separating families

4.1 Family structures

It is worth noting at the outset that the interview data revealed the diversity of family structures. Such diversity is linked with changing family patterns that have occurred over the last thirty years, including the declining rates of marriage alongside the introduction of civil partnerships, higher rates of cohabitation and increase in divorce (OECD, 2011). Indeed, the term 'separating families' is somewhat of a misnomer. In practice, parents may not have been in a relationship or have ever lived together. For example,

a young couple, she got pregnant on a date, or a weekend fling or something. They were young, 19 and 21 ... they were just two young people who were frustrated, who couldn't get it together, as in, they couldn't listen to each other, to be able to say, actually, we need to park this aside, it's the best interest of the child (*Kelly, charitable organisation*)

Children live in a range of family structures which can include extended family members such as grandparents as well as reconstituted families involving stepparents and additional siblings. Within these structures the relationships between parents and their differing approaches to parenting reflect the varying challenges each family structure encounters (TNS BMRB, 2016).

While children predominantly live with their mother, some may live with their father and some may be divided, with some children living with their mother and some children living with their father. Within these structures children may be,

moved between parents or mum has lots of different partners, or dad has lots of different partners that are moved in, or mum and the child or dad and the child have not got a great bond, and there are a lot of attachment issues, or they're a result of trauma, and the trauma that the child has exhibited tends to be linked to the relationships (*Michelle, local authority team*)

In her interview, Jessica (*charitable organisation*) stated that children are often confused by court decisions but prior to the age of eleven years young people may lack the confidence to ask questions about the process. In adopting the United Nations Conventions for the Rights of the Child (Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2010; Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014), Wales has pledged to place the voice of the child at the centre of all decisions that affect them. Under Article 12 of the Convention, children have a right to express their views about judicial and

administrative decisions made about them, in accordance with their age and understanding, and have these taken into consideration. Findings from the young people's focus group revealed that children and young people often feel frustrated when decisions are made about their lives by people who do not know them.

Generally the group stated that court involvement could serve to overly simplify and/or escalate parental issues. It was also noted that the threat of going to court could be used as a form of power from one parent over the other. While the group acknowledged that court involvement is necessary where there are safeguarding issues, in cases where there are no issues, the group highlighted two sources of support: mediation and schools. Regarding mediation, the group perceived this to be an ideal vehicle for preventing cases from escalating to court. They suggested that existing provision be extended to routinely include children and young people. This reflects the current lack of mediation services who include children and young people (*Lucy, charitable organisation*). In terms of schools, the group felt that more information should be made available in schools. This reflected their uncertainty as to where children and young people can go to access support. The provision of information leaflets in schools was recommended as a way of informing children and young people as to what services were available for them. Finally, when asked about the SSFA, the group highlighted the need for:

1. *Brand awareness* with the alliance advertised on social media, the internet and in schools.
2. *One stop shop* with all forms of support available in one place to make it 'as easy as possible' to access.
3. *Tailored support* that recognises that every family is unique.
4. *Ongoing support* so that families are supported before, during, and after arrangements have been agreed.
5. *Advocacy* for children and young people to ensure that their voices are heard.

4.2 Why do parents go to court?

Disagreement surrounding child arrangements (residence and contact) emerged as the greatest source of conflict. A complex picture was presented where issues with arrangements could serve to prolong relationship difficulties or as a vehicle to obtain housing or financial gains. Respondents spoke of parents disagreeing about the level of contact and whether they perceived the division to be sufficient and fair,

They didn't have 50:50 contact and that's what dad wanted, and he just could not get his head round why he didn't, and so would constantly push and push and push and push and push. And things became – it was almost like it was his right, and I think the needs of

the children kind of got pushed aside (*Christopher, charitable organisation*)

Notions of fairness extended to the costs incurred in maintaining contact. This was especially apparent where parents did not live in the same locality. In these cases parents may disagree about who should travel or pay the travel expenses incurred in maintaining contact agreements (*Jennifer, statutory service*). Hence, a parent may seek a court judgement in order to force a more equitable division where both parents share the costs or divide the travel. Where parents use contact centres, only one parent is asked to pay so this can also serve to escalate conflict.

Difficulties around shared parenting also emerged with both resident and non-resident parents seeking to either deter children from maintaining a relationship with the other parent or actively preventing the child from seeing the other,

It could be then that dad's supposed to have contact, and it could be then the mum says, 'Oh, no, well I didn't send the children because they weren't well.' And, you think, now, were they really not well, or did you not want them to go? And then it's, 'Oh, well, when they've been somewhere, they're always naughty when they come back.' So, there's always – or 'they came back with a bruise.' They're always looking for reasons why they don't have to have contact (*Jessica, charitable organisation*)

Difficulties around shared parenting were not particular to the resident parent. It was noted that non-resident parents may not return children after contact visits. Where the non-resident shares parental responsibility the resident parent may feel powerless to retrieve the child because the police say are unable to intervene. Hence the resident parent may feel they have no alternative but to take the case to court.

In other cases issues around contact can be used as a vehicle to retain housing or for financial recompense,

often those cases while they appear, once they've got into court, to be about the child, they're about the house. Because there's this idea that if you've got the child you're going to be able to keep the house. So, they're just really messy and difficult, and again unrealistic expectations of what the court can do (*Jennifer, statutory service*).

This notion of 'unrealistic expectations' was a constant theme throughout the interviews. Respondents noted that parents often mistakenly believe that by going to court they will 'win', implicitly suggesting that their ex-partner will lose. Respondents challenged this notion,

I've worked with couples where they tell me, "my solicitor said we're going to win this case" or "my barrister says we're ..." It's not about winning. You don't win in that situation, there's only losers, and the losers generally are the children (*Christopher, charitable organisation*)

This is compounded where parents lack the skills to resolve issues and where court involvement can lead to a dependency with some parents returning to court each time they encounter a difficulty,

people are just coming to court for, 'Well she said I could have this and then she did that, and then we had this agreement, but then she changed it back from the Saturday to a Sunday, so I want an order to tell her exactly when it is,' and they just clog up the system (*Jennifer, statutory service*).

It was suggested that parents may feel that they will be vindicated by the family court with the judge ensuring that their views must be supported. For respondents there was a sense that these unrealistic expectations should be challenged. In their view, if parents knew the reality of embarking upon court action they would be less inclined to follow this path. As one mediator describes,

So many people say 'I just want the form, I just want the form', but then, when they have the hour to talk through, 'OK, what do you want the form for, what do you want the court to do?' or 'What's your expectations of the judge; why do you think a judge knows your child better than you?' You know, 'What do you think is going to happen if you don't like what the judge tells you?', and that's the turning point for a lot of people; when I say that (*Nicola, private organisation*)

There was a sense that parents are more willing to make an application to court than access relationship support services. According to respondents, awareness of service provision and acceptability of receiving support emerged as barriers to accessing support. This follows Pote et al. (2019) who found that parental engagement was associated with both the visibility of services and the parent having favourable perceptions about receiving help and support. This is interesting as visibility of existing provision appeared to be a particular challenge for both professionals and parents. Michael (*charitable organisation*) described the need for staff training and awareness raising as to existing provision so that they are able to signpost parents. Several references were made to Dewis Cymru, an information portal created under the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act, 2014. However, respondents were uncertain as to

the process in which services are included and the extent to which Dewis Cymru includes quality assurance measures.

Even where service provision was visible, some parents may fear being stigmatised if they try to seek help. Some parents experience feelings of shame or guilt regarding their relationship breakdown or may fear negative perceptions of others if they require support. Such feelings can be compounded for some ethnic minority groups as they face cultural pressure against separation (Connors and Thomas, 2014). To counter such fears one respondent spoke of the need to offer provision within universal services,

a lot of people experience family breakdown, parental separation so we felt that it's really important to make sure that the support was available openly, open access and as universal as possible, because we didn't want the stigma that would be attached to something that's only available to a certain type of family because we know it affects everyone really (*Kelly, local authority team*)

Such a view proposes the adoption of a universal approach that encompasses all members of the Welsh population and promotes acceptability in accessing relationship support.

4.2.1 Impact of Covid-19

While the study was not aimed to explore the impact of COVID-19 on developing the SSFA, respondents were asked what they perceived the effects to be on families. Generally, respondents felt that the impact of Covid-19 was two-fold; it was exacerbating existing disagreements and increasing the numbers of parents separating. At the time of interview this was primarily due to a lengthy period of lockdown where families had been confined to their homes. In this context, relationship separation is slower as the process of separation is constrained by the ability to physically leave and the availability of services (Lebrow, 2020). For those who have separated prior to lockdown, Heather (*charitable organisation*) described how Covid-19 and the social distancing measures were being used as an excuse to prevent the child from seeing the other parent. Over the longer-term respondents anticipated the increased prevalence of financial difficulties on families due to loss of employment,

if they're already struggling with that [relationship] and you pile on the anxiety of Covid, people losing their jobs, I think what you're going to get is people who might not normally access services requiring support, and then those people who haven't been accessing services as soon as they get that connection, that face to face connection it's going to come out. There is going to be demand definitely (*David, charitable organisation*)

This anticipated increase in demand was also associated with uncertainty around how services were going to operate as the lockdown measures were lifted but social distancing measures continued,

What kind of support's [going to be] available? You've got things like social distancing, so how can you support a family two metres apart? What barriers does that bring? If you've got to have a face mask, gloves, what is that going to do, as well? There's loads of things to look at (*Christopher, charitable organisation*)

Possibly reflecting the shift to remote working, most respondents indicated that they would continue to use video calls for service delivery in the future. This was seen to have particular advantages in sustaining contact with parents who are reluctant to engage with services in person. It also enabled more efficient delivery of services in large geographical areas,

We had a trickle of families using this facility at the start saying 'oh no we're fine we don't want anything' but now we're just as busy as we were before Covid. We have realised that we can have a lot of Zoom meetings because it means we don't have to travel so it's saved a lot of time... so going forward if we can continue to provide some of our services through Zoom then that's great (*Karen, charitable organisation*)

However, there was widespread agreement that video calls are not suitable for all families. This included families deemed vulnerable, those with limited space or opportunity to have a private call and those with no access to technology.

4.3 How do parents access services?

When asked how parents access services, three main themes emerged. First, the family court may refer parents to particular support, although it was noted that judges and magistrates may not have up to date knowledge regarding service provision and it is only relatively recently that the HM Courts and Tribunals Service adopted a signposting policy. Nevertheless, knowledge of service provision can be complicated,

because services change so fluidly, depending on funding, so funding might be for 12 months, and so the service is there, and then it's not there. It's all over Wales and the UK there's these services are popping up and then disappearing and popping up and disappearing. So, I think we'd benefit from improving relationships with the courts (*David, charitable organisation*)

Consequently, service provision differs across Wales. Respondents spoke of a postcode lottery with service provision dependent on where families are located. Several respondents spoke of 'different money pots to do different things in different local authorities' (*Laura, charitable organisation*). Even where parents were referred to services, they had to be ready and willing to engage with services. Moreover, parents had to be able to prioritise their children's wellbeing over their own feelings in order to consider what was best for their child,

this is the challenge with how do you get people to that point where they realise how much their behaviour is impacting upon their children (*Lisa, charitable organisation*)

Second, some parents will self-refer indirectly through contacting organisations such as the Citizen's Advice or the local authority Information Advice and Assistance Service. In these instances, parents would be signposted or referred to other services. Parents may also self-refer directly to specific services. In support of findings from the Department for Work and Pensions (2019), it was noted that parents quite often Google information for help and to see what services are available. Findings from parent interviews from low income households and family support workers, demonstrated that rather than accessing established websites for parental conflict advice, parents were more likely to use Google but struggled to clearly define search terms (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019). This meant that parents did not always locate relevant information. According to Jennifer (*Statutory service*), difficulties in defining search parameters is resulting in parents being presented with biased or poor quality information,

the horrible passported cheat MIAMs [Mediation, Information and Assessment Meetings] that can be done online just to bypass and get through that hoop, and you're going to be overwhelmed with conflicting advice from different advocacy groups and pressure groups and everything from the CAFCASS are corrupt Facebook page which is there.

Finally, parents can become known to services indirectly through their participation in other forms of support or where the child's behaviour may alert education or social care staff to parental conflict. For example,

Health visitors go in and do a lot of what we call 'listening visits' and talking to people when they have the children, and they can pick up an awful lot of what's going on within the family even when it's not been said through the body language and things like that, so they may identify there's a bit of conflict (*Joe, statutory support*)

In these cases, parents may then be signposted or referred to other additional help and support.

4.3.1 Meeting the diverse needs of families

Findings from Barrett (2008) revealed that there are three main groups who are less likely to access relationship support: the service resistant, underrepresented, and the invisible. First, some parents are 'service resistant' either because they are unwilling to engage or because they are blind to the problem (Barrett, 2008). This group includes families with long-term difficulties, those with domestic abuse or substance misuse. This group have a wide range of needs including those that require specialist service provision. Second, underrepresented groups can be described as parents who are marginalised, economically disadvantaged or socially excluded including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) parents, parents with learning disabilities and Traveller parents. The Private Law Working Group (2020:20) have expressed concern that court documents, advice for litigants and the child arrangements programme are all 'insufficiently accessible' for some groups of parents. Such documents have been produced on the assumption that litigants possess a certain level of education and literacy. For example, Sarah (*charitable* organisation) described the multiple challenges posited by private law courts for parents with a learning disability,

Often in a situation of tension, people with a learning disability will say yes, they've understood, because they think that's what they should be doing, and the stigma attached to not understanding is quite great ... it would be important to have easy-read information ... that allows a support worker, who may be not trained in the legal system, or not trained in whatever service is being offered, to be able to support the person with key points as well. Often we find that the people supporting people with a learning disability; it's a lower-paid job, and [their] literacy levels are significantly low as well.

However, Sarah noted that in those 'pre-court stages' there is far better provision for this group with mediation and counselling services more able to tailor their support at a suitable level and pace.

Third, parents deemed 'invisible' have been found to be less likely to access relationship support (Barrett, 2008). These include fathers, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered parents, parents with mental health problems, and families with needs that fall below service thresholds. Such invisibility can be based on gendered approaches to provision. For example, fathers are often reluctant to access support as they perceive services to be directed towards the mother (Maxwell et al., 2012). When asked the extent to which

organisations adapted their services for the diverse needs of families, Gemma (*local authority*) summarises the prevailing view across respondents,

I think traditionally, no matter what service we offer, there's a huge underrepresentation of any of those communities ... so it might be that people make a choice to go to the specialist provisions as opposed to be referred into maybe something more mainstream, if you like, but I'm not aware of any adaptations, for want of a better word, that we have made to the delivery of anything because somebody is black or somebody is gay or lives with the same sex ... we haven't adapted that material in any way.

As the quote above shows, some respondents assumed that parents may prefer to access support from specialist groups. Evidence in support of this notion was limited, although with such a small number of respondents from specialist groups this may not be representative at a wider level. Other respondents did not perceive the need to tailor support purporting that their provision was non-discriminatory and aimed at all parents. There was some evidence that mainstream organisations supported parents with protected characteristics, although as noted, there was an underrepresentation from some groups. A minority of respondents described a range of methods they adopted to support families with their diverse needs. These included preliminary needs assessment meetings so that the service could ensure their needs could be accommodated,

[we have] support facilities for parents who have certain disabilities not just physical and need to address them and cope with them and provide. [we] do a pre-visit assessment, no ... session will be listed until each parent has been assessed (*Michael, charitable organisation*)

Where respondents identified specific adjustments these were primarily around making buildings accessible. A few respondents referred to British Sign Language or lip-reading provision.

4.3.1 Language needs

Under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 public sector organisations must offer services in the Welsh language; charities and businesses may do so voluntarily. The majority of respondents provided written information in the Welsh language. Most organisations were also able to access Welsh speaking staff if requested. Respondents reported that parents are more able and more comfortable accessing support in their first language. Despite this, for some specialist programmes such as family group conferences and restorative practice there appeared to be a lack of Welsh provision across Wales,

even in the north, and in some communities that are very Welsh first language driven, we know that there are specialists, professionals who are not Welsh language speakers, and that's difficult then for families in those communities (*Sarah, charitable organisation*)

The significance of the first contact was raised where, having met one non-Welsh speaking practitioner, parents were reluctant to see someone new, even if it meant the new practitioner was Welsh speaking. In terms of other languages, several respondents indicated that they had accessed interpreters in a range of languages including Chinese, Polish, and Urdu. The extent to which organisations had the resources to access interpreters varied. Unsurprisingly, smaller charitable organisations often lacked the resources to pay for this provision, relying instead upon the language skills of staff and volunteers. While seemingly the exception rather than the rule, some organisations actively recruited volunteers from local communities in order to ensure that local cultures and languages were included in their provision. The suitability of using such informal interpretation was unclear, especially as Craig explained that,

there's a new requirement from the 1st of April that the Statement of Truth needs to be in the language of the applicant and we didn't actually get round to doing it, we were about to say that we can't do that because we can't promise that we've accurately told the applicant in their own language what the Statement of Truth means (*Craig, charitable organisation*)

This highlights the potential problems with use of specialist language and legal terminology within the court arena.

5.0 What services are available to support separating parents?

5.1 Provision of support

What became apparent from the findings was that parents experiencing relationship breakdown difficulties were often those who encountered other difficulties such as mental health problems, substance misuse and parenting issues. This rendered it difficult to disentangle services directed towards addressing wider issues, which may require local authority involvement and public law proceedings from those purely aimed at resolving relationship difficulties and diverting parents away from private law proceedings. In practice, services work with myriad issues, with relationship conflict a predominant feature of parental difficulties,

So, in regard to the services I have now, I would say nearly all of them would pick up on relationship issues and relationship problems (*Lisa, charitable organisation*).

Findings revealed a range of disparate services. Families with wider issues tend to be directed towards family support, while support specifically aimed at directing parents away from the court arena consists of two main pathways: parenting programmes and/or mediation. Against this backdrop, the introduction of an alliance for supporting separating parents was perceived as a way of bringing together disparate services into a partnership or 'one stop shop' where parents could be signposted to different services,

I think the alliance could be really powerful and have a real position of strength, which I think sometimes individual services don't necessarily have that, and sometimes even individual local authorities might not even have that. So, I think forming an alliance whereby different organisations could work in partnership to generate a single message, a cohesive response ... I think there's a massive need (*David, charitable organisation*)

The need for a consistent message across services was emphasised. This was particularly pertinent where services are adept at promoting the views of one parent as opposed to offering whole family approaches.

5.1.1 Family support

Several respondents highlighted that local authorities have two existing services that support families: Integrated Family Support Service and Team Around the Child. The

Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) was established under the Children and Family (Wales) Measure 2010 and was aimed at working with parents with drug or alcohol issues. However, more recently IFSSs have extended their multi-disciplinary multi-agency service to include interpersonal conflict and abuse (IPCA), a term Rees, Casserly and Maxwell (2020) use to cover the full spectrum of relational conflict. The Team Around the Family (TAF) was established under the Families First (2017) programme aimed at supporting children and families through whole family strengths-based multi-agency early intervention support. Under this support, Families First seeks to minimise the adverse effects of separation upon children. Hence, IFSS and TAF were perceived as ideally placed to offer separating parents support tailored to their needs for three main reasons. First, TAF is a universal service that does not stigmatise parents who experience relationship breakdown,

parents won't feel like they're any different, they're just being offered their support and care package amongst the whole family support package, if that makes sense? So, it's not like 'Oh you've separated, this is happening, you need to go there', it's part of what's already there, and it's a pathway of support (*Melissa, charitable organisation*)

Second, while TAF provides support for all the family needs rather than focusing on the issues relating to separation, IFSS teams have expertise in working with families experiencing conflict. Third, in working with whole families, practitioners can be alerted to difficulties surrounding separation even where parents may be unaware of the detrimental effects of their conflict upon the child or where they lack the internal resources to seek help (*David, charitable organisation*). In fact some TAFs are already delivering dispute resolution with some having adopted aspects of Working Together for Children (described below). With such provision already available, respondents raised the issue of duplication. As Michelle (*TAF*) highlighted, duplication of existing services could be both helpful, if the alliance provides free access to services that local authorities currently pay for, or detrimental if they simply replicate existing provision.

5.1.2 Parenting programmes

Where family courts refer parents to a parenting programme this may be Working Together for Children (WT4C). Despite their powers to make contact activity directions under section 11 of the Children Act 1989, not all family courts were aware of this programme. Nonetheless, WT4C is a four-hour programme aimed at resolving issues around contact, finance, and parenting styles. There was a sense that rather than being a solution in itself, it was an introduction to more in-depth programmes. For example, Relate divert some parents towards additional support via their more generic services while Parenting Apart in England was created based on acknowledgement that conflict

can be deep-seated and require more in-depth trauma informed approaches. In this regard, parent separation may be the result of a long period of difficulties,

some of these difficult family situations have been going on for months and years, we're not talking weeks. We're talking a long, long time, and there's a lot of impact and trauma that is a result of that, then, on the child who's often in the middle (*David, charitable organisation*).

In terms of timing, there was a sense from respondents that the provision of help prior to separation could serve to prevent difficulties from becoming entrenched. Although even where parents are able to reach an initial agreement, difficulties can arise as family structures change over time. For example, the introduction of new partners may fuel new difficulties. This highlights the need for timely intervention and was associated with frustrations as to the long waiting lists for programmes and/or support.

Where parents self-refer for support, there appeared to be a tendency to direct them towards parenting programmes. Respondents provided a range of parenting programmes delivered by local authorities, charities, and private providers. The exact programme accessed appeared to be related to local authority commissioning arrangements and, as such, findings supported the notion of a postcode lottery. While interviews did not seek to determine the quality of such courses, it was noted that separating parents primarily required programmes that fostered communication amidst the adversity and focused on prioritising the needs of the child,

we are completely impartial, we're not here to take sides, absolutely not, but what we do throughout is to be the voice and the absolute stance for the emotional needs to be prioritised at all times for their children (*Rebecca, parenting programme*)

Hence, variability was noted in terms of the relevance and utility of some parenting programmes for separating parents. It has also been shown that where such programmes have been evaluated, there has been a lack of attention regarding their impact on fathers (Philip and O'Brien, 2017).

Parental readiness to change and willingness to resolve difficulties emerged as key requirements for change to occur. Jessica (*charitable organisation*) extended the notion of readiness to change to include children noting that,

where the parent is going on a parenting programme, they are having all these interventions, their parenting of their child changes overnight, and the child's not ready for it because they're not on the same journey.

This highlights the importance of including the whole family in programmes.

Without engagement in the programme and willingness to make the necessary changes, for some families court appeared to be only remaining option,

particularly when we're getting cases that are coming in and coming in and coming in for the same contact issues, some support has been offered by Early Help, they've done the Parents as Partners programme, they've had support from us, and yet they're continuing to get every sort of week an issue where they're ringing up. The weekend comes, there's an issue with contact ... in those cases we're saying, 'I think you need to seek some legal advice' (*Clare, statutory services*)

While some respondents highlighted the role of mediation when parents become 'stuck' others tended to refer parents for more general legal advice. It was unclear as to whether this was due to a lack of knowledge regarding mediation or availability of services.

5.1.3 Mediation

Respondents suggested that even when parents access a Mediation, Information and Assessment Meeting (MIAM) this can be perceived as a tick box exercise. Introduced in April 2014 under the Children and Families Act 2014, MIAMs require that all applicants to private law family proceedings attend a meeting with a mediator in order to discuss the case, learn about mediation and assess whether the issues can be resolved through other non-court based dispute resolution options and the benefits of doing so. The Private Law Working Group (2020) have found mixed views in relation to the utility of MIAMs. While some consultees supported more rigorous enforcement others asserted that they come too late as, by that point, parents are fixed on going to court. Nevertheless, under the Child Arrangements Programme both parents are expected to have attended a MIAM before they can complete the C100 form in order to proceed to court.

While mediation has been the primary tool for diverting families away from court, the take up rates are relatively low (Cusworth et al, forthcoming). This has been further reduced following introduction of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012 where signposting to mediation was largely removed. It is also important to note that unlike family support or some parenting programmes most parents must pay for mediation. Several respondents deemed this to be a disincentive for participation especially as parents are able to attend court at much lower cost.

Where one parent has displayed interest in mediation, non-engagement of the other parent appeared to be relatively common, with little the mediator could do to foster engagement. Where parents did engage, mediation was perceived as a beneficial

service that could successfully divert parents away from the court arena. As one mediator noted,

one of my tools in my mediation tool bag that I remind people of regularly is, there was a time that you loved each other, and sometimes that just becomes lost in acrimonious solicitors letters

Respondents reported a range of mediation practices, from practitioners who believed they were finding themselves taking a mediation role to mediation organisations staffed by qualified mediators. In addition, some contact centres serve as a base for professional mediators. It should be noted that only a small number of mediators in Wales are accredited to conduct MIAMs and even fewer work for an organisation that holds a legal aid contract to allow public funding.

Further, there appeared to be few mediators qualified to work with children. Yet one mediator noted that 'my experience of child inclusive mediation is massively positive' as it serves to present parents with the wishes and feelings of the child.

Echoing later findings regarding the change in role definition that separation brings, Jackie (*private organisation*) emphasised that mediation is aimed at,

encouraging families to enter into direct discussions about their future with a view to helping them to understand how they can manage as a separated family.

Parents may engage in mediation continually for six to twelve months while others may access three sessions and then there can be a long period before they return. Moreover, parents are able to return to mediation should the need arise in future.

5.1.5 Contact Centres

Regarding the role of contact centres, findings from the Help and Support for Separated Families Innovation Fund Evaluation (TNS BMRB, 2016) have shown that parents particularly welcome the opportunity to maintain regular contact with their children without the need to go to court. While contact centres must be registered with the National Association of Child Contact Centres in England, the suitability of this accreditation for the Welsh environment was queried.

Contact centres provide a neutral venue for either supervised contact, where a trained member of staff or volunteer remain in the room with the child, or supported contact, where staff or volunteers are present while families share facilities. The service is carefully designed with staggered times and different entrances and exits for any parent who,

doesn't feel safe being there at the same time as the other parent because they don't get on or they don't want to be anywhere near them
(*Michael, charitable organisation*)

Contact centres can also serve as the first port of call for help and support for some parents. Hence, staff and volunteers are trained so that they are able to signpost parents to other services such as mediation (*Michael, charitable organisation*). Although, as noted, contact centres may also facilitate access to a mediator as well as providing a safe meeting place for mediation to take place.

Where parents self-refer, both parents must agree for contact to be undertaken in the centre and they must pay for the safeguarding assessment and each subsequent contact session. Where family courts make the referral, the first six sessions are paid for by Cafcass Cymru. One respondent commented that parents often continue to pay for another six sessions although this depends on the particular case.

5.1.6 Other non-court based approaches

The main theme emerging from the interviews was the emotional nature of relationship breakdown. In these circumstances, respondents noted the difficulties inherent in putting these feelings to one side in order to amicably resolve issues concerning the child,

And I think a relationship breaking down, there's so much emotion there, isn't there? And to move away from that, or to put that, I think sometimes you just don't realise what you're doing, or you can't help it, to be honest (*Jessica, charitable organisation*)

Thus, most respondents stated that the needs of the child became lost as parent needs became prioritised. Nonetheless, parent relationship breakdown does not mean that parent-child relationships have broken down,

children look at both parents with the same eyes, it's the relationship between the parents that has broken down. Its emotional harm to the child not to have both parents and the connection with the child
(*Michael, charitable organisation*)

Respondents described parental low mood or high anxiety highlighted the prevalence of mental health issues either before or as a result of the breakdown. It was also noted that separation impacts the sense of self. For those parents who had lived together, separation was linked to the redefinition of the parental role. For resident parents, this meant re-establishing themselves as a single parent while for the non-resident parent this meant coming to terms with having reduced contact with their child,

you've got a whole load of stuff to get your head round, being a single parent again, or back to being an absent parent when suddenly, your influence on the family has diminished. So, yeah, we have quite a lot of that work to do as well and helping families re-establish themselves, really (*Angela, local authority team*).

Most respondents were clear that they would not be drawn into taking sides. This was especially apparent in services that offered whole family support and who strived to engage both parents. Where organisations do not adopt such whole family approaches, it was suggested that they inevitably represent only one perspective. Nevertheless, respondents spoke of providing parents with a safe space to talk about the relationship breakdown. This was apparent across all services from those that are aimed at whole family strengths-based approaches to mediators and those that support parents through the court process,

For quite a lot of the clients that we work with we are the first organisation they've told their story to, so emotional support is actually quite important to us (*Rosemary, charitable organisation*)

Hence, several respondents spoke of the need to adopt trauma-informed approaches with separating parents. In addition, family group conferences and restorative practice are also used as forms of non-court based dispute resolution. Family group conferences are intended to create an environment in which families lead decision-making and planning (Edwards and Parkinson, 2018). Their inclusion of the extended family acknowledges the importance of relationships beyond the parent. As one respondent stated, when relationships break down, the child can lose access to grandparents, aunties, uncles, and other members of their wider family network. Family group conferences provide a safe space for the family to discuss the conflict and seek amicable resolution. Findings revealed that being able to talk about the relationship breakdown could have a large impact on parents,

mum, she was screaming and shouting, and she stormed out of the room. She came back, but she had her piece, and she told dad what she thought of him. When it came to dad, he was sat there in floods of tears just saying, "I'm sorry. I was 19 when we had our son. I just couldn't cope. I had to go." And mum just said, at some point in that meeting, "I needed to hear that." They'd been fighting for, like, three years, and she just needed him to say I'm sorry (*Christopher, charitable organisation*)

The above quote demonstrates the emotive nature of relationship breakdown and the significance of resolving relationship issues. Without this, there is a risk that conflict

becomes entrenched rendering amicable solutions seemingly impossible (Doughty et al, 2018).

Restorative practice was also highlighted as an effective mechanism for resolving relationship conflict. Restorative practice is a strength-based approach which brings parents and children together to explore how they have been affected by the relationship breakdown and how this can be resolved. In doing so, restorative practice supports parents through separation,

it's hard, it's a loss, it's a grief, so you're helping people through the grieving process proactively, so that anger bit of the loss and the grief which is natural ... at some point they loved each other, I assume, so it's just remember the other restorative values, humour, respect, and the quality. Try to keep your own respect, and respect the other. You might hate each other but you can still be respectful (*Amanda, social enterprise*).

Within restorative practice, parents are supported to explore their feelings so that they can determine what help and support they need. Moreover, the notion of establishing respectful relationships emerged as of primary importance for non-court based resolution.

6.0 Developing a Supporting Separating Families Alliance

So where I think the group that you're hoping to set up would be brilliant, there are so many couples that do end up in the family court that really should be able to sort out their situations either through mediation or counselling (*Nicola, independent organisation*).

As the quote above demonstrates, respondents saw a clear need for a mechanism that can divert parents away from the court and provide them with appropriate support to resolve issues around the child. Hence, all participants supported the creation of the SSFA. Where respondents differed was how best to develop the alliance.

6.1 Strategic direction

All respondents stated that the SSFA required a clear sense of purpose from Welsh Government. Without this, respondents were uncertain as to whether the SSFA would get the necessary buy-in from appropriate services. Whilst Welsh Government was perceived as the most effective lead, it was also suggested that regional safeguarding boards were ideally placed to offer the nuanced provision required for the different geographical regions of Wales,

bearing in mind the variation in availability of services, and probably the difference in the demographics around different areas of Wales as well, that actually, it may be worthwhile for each individual region having its own board, if you like, that could pull together the different services, and consider the most appropriate strategies to deal with what's happening in that area (*David, charitable organisation*)

Therefore, it was suggested that the strategic direction of the SSFA should be determined nationally in order to foster engagement and ensure consistency across Wales. Operation and implementation should then be undertaken at a local level to harness services to meet local need. This is particularly pertinent given the differential rates of private law applications across Wales. In their analysis of total private law applications per 10,000 family households in 2018, Cusworth et al. (forthcoming) found 71 applications per 10,000 in North Wales and 91 applications per 10,000 in Cardiff and South East Wales. However, Swansea and South West Wales had the highest rate at 110 applications per 10,000 family households.

Respondents emphasised the need for appropriate, long-term funding in order to establish, maintain and sustain the service over time. In this respect, respondents

expressed frustration that some initiatives are subject to fixed term funding and as such they may end just when the service has become embedded. Concerns as to funding were also exhibited if charities were competing against each for funding,

but being absolutely honest and upfront is, we would be competing for the same funding, potentially, unless the tenders are done, are grant funded rather than sent to tender because little old organisations like us don't stand a chance against big charities (*Amanda, charity*)

Amanda went on to caution against organisations using the SSFA as a promotional opportunity as opposed to a genuine partnership of agencies working together to improve the wellbeing and outcomes for children and families. As described earlier, the need for a clear consistent message across the SSFA was perceived as an important factor in reducing parental confusion,

You've got various different organisations telling people completely different things, which just adds to the confusion for a couple that don't know what the hell to do (*Lucy, private organisation*)

The need for an inclusive, neutral approach was deemed necessary not just for funding but also in order to ensure that parents can access the best support for their needs.

6.2 Visibility and accessibility

Visibility was a common theme throughout respondent interviews. Whilst general signposting to the SSFA from organisations such as the Citizens Advice was deemed necessary, it was also noted that information raising is needed amongst practitioners including family court advisers with Cafcass Cymru and practitioners who work with children and families. As noted, parents often rely on Google searches to locate advice and information. Hence it was recommended that the SSFA should have a prominent digital presence. In order to address findings that parents may not adopt clearly defined search terms, it was suggested that appropriate use of meta data should be used to ensure the SSFA is captured by a wide range of search terms (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019). This includes the use of siloed searching such as housing, finance, and custody.

The extent to which current staff are aware of mediation, WT4C and resources such as the Cafcass Cymru Parenting Plan was questioned. It was also questioned whether 'the legal worlds want this' (*Christopher, charitable organisation*) as diverting families away from court could result in a loss of income. Although it is clear from the Private Law Working Group (2020) reports that, generally, legal professionals do want more non-court dispute resolution than at present, this comment indicates a need to sensitively work with

solicitors and family court practitioners to prevent drift occurring between the SSFA and family courts. For parents, various suggestions were made including the use of paper leaflets in GP surgeries, paediatric departments, nurseries, schools and leisure centres and electronic leaflets easily located via internet search engines. In addition, it was noted that the SSFA must be easily accessible,

I don't think you should make access difficult; you don't want a family to go through hoops. You want it that a professional can access it on behalf of a family, or a family can just phone or ask for it themselves. Because what you want to do is to get that right help at the right time (Amy, TAF)

The right help could then be accessed by agreed upon support pathways and where all organisations within the SSFA work towards the same outcomes. The phrase 'the right support at the right time' was often repeated by respondents. This reflects the view that early help is vital in order to prevent issues from becoming entrenched (Doughty, Maxwell and Slater, 2018).

6.3 Quality assurance

Respondents emphasised the need for a quality assurance process for services joining the SSFA. For parents this would provide reassurance that they received credible advice and information from knowledgeable sources. Several respondents described the ease with which parents unknowingly locate so-called professionals who lack the qualifications and skills necessary,

What you find is a lot of the private mediators are not registered with the FMC [Family Mediation Council], thus cannot undertake Legal Aid work, which is pretty naughty in the sense that, you know, these big money cases, they tend to go with solicitor mediators, who are charging £450 an hour as opposed to my £120. And they're not an affiliated mediator and they're not an authorised mediator, they've just done a three-day course (*Lucy, private organisation*).

One respondent referred to the Help and Support for Separated Families Mark (HSSF) which is given to organisations that meet the required standards relating to working in the best interests of parents and children, where it is appropriate and safe to do so (YNS BMRB, 2016). In Wales, the Information and Advice Quality Framework (IAQF Wales) Quality Mark signifies that the information and advice is of a high standard and that the organisation is committed to continual improvement of their service (Welsh Government, 2018).

6.4 No additional cost option

In order to develop a SSFA within existing resources at no additional cost, it was suggested that the SSFA would take the form of a directory available through an electronic front door and consisting of a 'one stop shop' (*Gemma, statutory service*) for parents and practitioners. While such a suggestion is by no means new, as Kimberly notes within the current directories and online resource such as Dewis Cymru, there is a lack of services aimed at reducing parent conflict,

I'd love to see something that really harnesses all of that, the good work that's going on out there and that is in one pot, so to speak, so we can actually see what is going on out there and we can tap into it for the benefit of the many, many families that we work with (*Kimberly, statutory service*).

There were mixed views as to who would 'tap into' such a directory. In the above quote Kimberly described practitioners accessing the directory for the benefit of families. Feedback from the consultation groups corroborated this assertion as respondents expressed caution as to whether vulnerable families would be sufficiently empowered to access a directory. Acknowledging that interviews were conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, and as such lockdown measures were in place which have necessitated a shift to online working, it is perhaps unsurprising that many respondents mentioned the efficiency and potential reach of digital technology. Some respondents recommended that the SSFA could be reached through an electronic front door either through a central website or app. Alternatively, other respondents were divided between physically locating the SSFA within existing statutory provision and situating it independently from local authorities. However, the extent to which each option enables equitable access for all families regardless of socio-economic status, diversity or needs is unclear. There was some suggestion that middle class families may be more adept at using digital technology to access information whereas older parents, those with long term health problems and disabled parents may be more comfortable with face to face contact.

Conversely, in creating a directory for practitioners it was suggested that a portal similar to the Population Wellbeing Portal (Making Every Contact Count Link, 2020) could be created. This portal was developed as part of the health behaviour change initiative, Making Every Contact Count (MECC) where health practitioners are trained to provide information and signposting in their everyday contacts with the general public (Nelson et al., 2013). The portal is provided on a regional basis and supports practitioners in raising awareness to motivate members of the general public to improve their health and wellbeing by signposting information relating to health improvement such as self-care, national and local support.

The suggestion that existing provision could be harnessed within Dewis Cymru, or as a specialised branch accessed from Dewis Cymru was dismissed by respondents. Dewis Cymru is an online directory of well-being services across Wales that can be searched by location and service type. Dewis Cymru also comprises bespoke pages for specific audiences. For example, the Family Information Services pages comprise links to services aimed at parents, such as playgroups and child minders with individuals/organisations responsible for creating and updating their information (although this is reviewed and approved by editors prior to publication). Many respondents reported that they were unaware of Dewis Cymru and of those who had accessed it, the information was outdated. It was also noted that there is no information for separating parents currently available. Therefore, members of the consultation groups were sceptical as to how much resource would be needed to enhance brand awareness of Dewis Cymru, undertake quality assurance and to ensure that appropriate information was included and updated regularly. The Single Advice Fund was used to demonstrate the scale of this task.

The Single Advice Fund is funded by the Welsh Government and delivered by Citizen's Advice and partners. This initiative was offered in 2019 under procurement as twelve separate regional and one remote award for the provision of information and generalist and specialist advice and which brokered local and national partnerships to provide integrated support. Under each notice, each region specified particular vulnerable target groups where the Single Advice Fund should increase engagement. In doing so, Citizen's Advice has brokered relationships with funded and non-funded partnerships with organisations, termed 'Advice or Access Partners', in each region and remotely via an electronic referral system, 'ReferNet'. The aim is for ReferNet to connect members of the public to the most appropriate sources of support from organisations in a timely manner. It is anticipated that access and advice partners will engage in reciprocal referrals based on information and understanding of what services each organisation can offer. Moreover, the ReferNet system provides management information regarding referral take-up rates and outcomes so that Citizen's Advice and partners can follow this up in order to improve the system and service uptake. However, as noted, some groups are less inclined to access digital support and so the Single Advice Fund includes face to face provision delivered through Citizen's Advice offices (although this has been limited during Covid-19 lockdown). While this initiative looks promising there are two main limitations for using it as a vehicle for the SSFA in its present format. First, demand for information and advice in Wales far exceeds the Single Advice Fund provision. For example, it is currently estimated to be meeting 60% of demand for the remote telephone service. In light of Covid-19 it is anticipated that demand for help and support will significantly increase around employment, debt, and welfare benefits. Second, currently the initiative is only funded until December 2020. Yet, consistency of funding is required to develop the resource so that it includes services directed at relationship breakdown and to promote the directory so that it becomes embedded across services.

6.4.1 Scenario one

With no additional funding, scenario one must sit within existing provision. Two options emerged from data collection: Dewis Cymru and the Single Advice Fund. Of these two options, the Single Advice Fund posits the additional benefits of offering information and advice locally with the Citizen's Advice signposting parents into existing services. This service is available in both electronic and face-to-face provision thus widening the potential for capturing vulnerable and service resistant families. The existing ReferNet could be extended so that it directs parents to the most appropriate support. In order to become an advice or access partner, organisations must obtain IAQF Wales Quality Mark (Welsh Government, 2018).

As noted, a key benefit of an electronic offer is that parents are able to access help and support at a time and pace that they choose. Where parents access online information for relationship support this is often reactive and emotionally fuelled in order to access information on an issue by issue basis (Connors and Thomas, 2014). Hence, the provision of an electronic directory offers a timely response. Scenario one was also perceived as having the potential to reduce service duplication and associated expenditure,

Actually, if we all really had a really strong, kind of robust idea of what we're all doing across the county or our smaller pocket then we wouldn't need to be trying to raise the funds or shell out for this, that and the other, because again then we'd just be duplicating. But I think a lot of us are so – and I'm sure there will be a number of people that would echo this, we're all working so hard with our heads down we haven't necessarily got the time I guess, which is where this alliance will come in (*Kimberly, statutory service*).

The inclusion of SSFA within the Single Advice Fund would benefit from the Citizen's Advice brand and work completed to date. However, this scenario is dependent on continuation of funding for the Single Advice Fund post December 2020. Should this occur, scenario two could be piloted in one region by extending the existing resource to include resources for parental separation. While Citizen's Advice currently offer practical support with housing and financial issues, further training would be required around relationship breakdown and separation. Such training would need to include other non-court based resources as well as family support and parenting programmes. Further, mediation organisations and contact centres should be invited to become advice or access partners. ReferNet will need to be adapted to highlight relevant resources for separating parents.

6.5 Limited additional resource

What became apparent across the mapping exercise and stakeholder interviews was the range of existing service provision. Three main themes emerged within the limited additional resources (max £100k per annum) cost option. First, some respondents recommended strengthening the MIAM. As discussed earlier, the MIAM can serve as a tick box exercise rather than an opportunity to consider mediation or other non-court based options for resolution. It was also suggested that some mediators lack the necessary formal qualifications or accreditation. Consequently, parents are subjected to inconsistent and potentially misleading practice. For example, some mediators may be reluctant to present parents with the full range of options for fear of losing work (Connors and Thomas, 2014). Although respondents also considered that mediators are reliant upon their knowledge of local services and organisations. Aligned with this is the discrepancy between paid and unpaid advice and support. As a paid service, the prospect of embarking upon mediation may be less attractive than attending court. Hence, development of the MIAM has the potential to encourage parents to consider options other than court. Findings from the second PLWG (2020) report have suggested that such development must include training for court staff regarding MIAMs and the potential benefits of mediation.

The second theme was the need for an umbrella organisation. This was based on the observation that existing provision is fragmented (*Lucy, private organisation*). This highlights the prevailing view that the SSFA should bring together existing provision to avoid duplication. In terms of locating the SSFA within existing provision respondents were unsure as to whether it would best fit within Flying Start, which is an established programme that provides intensive support for families with 0-3 year olds, or Families First TAF provision. In doing so, the SSFA would benefit from already established multi-agency, multi-disciplinary alliances who work with the whole family. Moreover, some Families First initiatives have already incorporated conflict reduction within their provision. Conversely, it was noted that statutory involvement may deter some parents from accessing the service. Nevertheless, one example that emerged from the data was the role of the Team Around the Family (TAF) in establishing effective partnerships in the pursuit of a common goal (Welsh Government, 2017). While situating the SSFA within existing TAF provision appeared to reap the benefits from existing collaborations, including work already adopted from the WT4C programme respondents were sceptical about this notion. Such scepticism was based on the diversity of TAFs across Wales. While some provide families with a dedicated keyworker, others have opted to adopt a co-ordination role aimed at bringing services together. Further, TAFs have been largely dependent upon the local offer which can lead to discrepancies in the range of services offered in different locations.

The third theme was to situate the SSFA within a sister arm of Cafcass Cymru. Such an approach acknowledges the devolution of Cafcass functions section 35 of the Children Act 2004 which set out the Welsh Assembly's Cafcass functions as being 'In respect of family proceedings in which the welfare of children ... is or may be in question'. The section goes on to describe the 'support' function as to 'provide information, advice and other support for the children and their families'. It was suggested that 'the' children has been interpreted by both Cafcass and Cafcass Cymru as referring only to children who are already in court proceedings. Such a view negates the offer of services to families where there is no current court application. Similarly, the provisions for contact activity directions added to section 11 of the Children Act 1989 in 2008 refer only to court proceedings. However, given that contact activities include access to local support services, the potential link between Cafcass/Cafcass Cymru functions and non-court dispute resolution was posited. Indeed this follows findings from the second Private Law Working Group report (2020),

It was proposed by some that Cafcass' statutory powers could or should be extended to have this responsibility (among other consultees, this was the view articulated by the Association of District Judges... (para 46)

However, the Private Law Working Group report concludes (without any discussion) that,

There is a balance to be struck between a commissioning model which is tailored to local need, and the need for a nationally consistent blueprint which avoids a postcode lottery. Given the range of services proposed, the PrLWG [Private Law Working Group report] does not consider that Cafcass itself (which is, as defined by statute¹⁶, a 'court advisory' body) could or should be adapted for this role. (para 47)

Reference was made in the research literature to the Cafcass Supporting Separated Parents in Dispute' (SSPID) pilot project undertaken between 2014 and 2017. The SSPID pilot was undertaken in five areas in England and comprised a free helpline operated by Cafcass. Callers to the helpline received impartial information and guidance provided by an experienced Cafcass worker. As the single point of contact, the Cafcass worker adopted the role of case worker, identifying caller needs, putting them in touch with appropriate local services and following up progress. According to the Cafcass website, the evaluation was generally positive. However there is no link provided to the evaluation report.

6.5.1 Scenario two

With limited additional resource, scenario two must provide an umbrella organisation to harness existing provision. Situating SSFA within Cafcass is aligned with the Child Arrangements Programme as this emphasises that the court and those working in the family justice system must continually bear non court dispute resolution (NCDR) in mind – Practice Direction 12B: The judge is obliged to consider, at every stage of court proceedings, whether non-court dispute resolution is appropriate. (para 6.1). At the First Hearing and Dispute Resolution Appointment (FHDR), the court and Cafcass are specifically encouraged to signpost parties to NCDR (para 14.13).

An argument can therefore be made that as Cafcass Cymru is an established child-centred organisation that has an existing overview of what mediation and family services are available, during court proceedings, it would save unnecessary duplication to site the SSFA there. In this regard, the Cafcass based SSFA could be directed towards the underlying parent conflict as opposed to purely diverting parents away from entering the court arena in the short-term,

even where cases are going to court and this hub and the Support of Separated Families Alliances, is to either be alongside them through the court and support them afterwards so that they don't just keep coming back to court with a more entrenched argument (*Jennifer, statutory service*)

Hence, the SSFA would be directed towards giving parents the skills necessary to prioritise the needs of the child, communicate with each other and resolve their differences so that,

if it [case] came in the door, there would be various different places it could go, so it might need to go to a counselling service, it might need to go to a mediation service. It might need to go to a play service. There's all sorts of different places that you can put that help together (*Michelle, Statutory Service*)

Resolving the underlying issues would reduce the likelihood of parents resorting to court each time they encounter difficulties. A separate branch of Cafcass with a different name would clarify to families when they are being signposted to services, rather than being investigated. It is recommended that a pilot similar to the Cafcass SSPID pilot is undertaken in Wales. It would be helpful to have sight of the evaluation referred to above, although a clearer distinction between Cafcass Cymru court work and the SSFA role is envisaged than appears to have existed in the English pilot. This pilot in Wales would involve establishing a small team in one region who are responsible for offering online and telephone support to parents regarding non-court based options. As in the previous

study, key workers will be assigned to each caller so that engagement with services and outcomes can be tracked. However, the pilot will extend previous work offering training to court staff regarding the Welsh context and the additional service provision under the Child Assessment Support Plan.

6.6 Significant and ongoing resource

Drawing on and extending scenario one with significant and ongoing resources, a platform could be developed focused on relationships in Wales. Indeed, such a resource has been established in Scotland, 'Relationships Scotland' delivered by a sister organisation of Relate. Relationships Scotland brings together 21 members in the provision of counselling, mediation, and the delivery of contact centres. In doing so it receives an annual grant from Scottish Government of £1.5m which is primarily used to employ staff who oversee training and practice standards of member organisations. The adoption of such an approach in Wales, 'Relationships Wales' could encompass whole family approaches in order to divert families away from family courts. Hence member organisations would extend beyond counselling, mediation, and contact centres to include local authority provision such as the Team Around the Family, large charitable organisations such as Barnardo's and Gingerbread alongside smaller local charitable organisations. Another difference to the Scottish organisation would be that regulation functions would not be required if already applicable across England and Wales, for example for family mediation. Following survey findings and uncertainty surrounding access to digital support, the Relationships Wales platform would require a dedicated helpline where parents could be signposted to advice and information contained on the platform and/or directed to specific service provision. Drawing on the limitations revealed for the Sorting Out Separation app which was developed in England (Connors and Thomas, 2014), the platform should include an online assessment tool that will direct them to the most appropriate support,

they'd have some information there, but then it would, they'd be signposted to the right organisation for support. And again, it's the same driver of trying to let families find support before they get to court, before things escalate (*Stephanie, charitable organisation*)

This option was the preferred approach within the consultation meetings. Respondents believed that families would access the platform provided that five criteria were met. First, that the platform be marketed to professionals and families as the primary platform for relationship advice and support. Second, that the platform had equitable access to organisations across Wales including statutory and non-statutory, large and small. Third, that the platform offer a wide range of support rather than a prescriptive or pre-determined pathway to specific support. Fourth, the information be updated regularly. Fifth, the issue of quality assurance was emphasised in order to ensure that practitioners

and parents were accessing credible information and advice. Regarding uncertainty as to whether vulnerable families would access the platform, findings from the evaluation of the web app Sorting Out Separation (Connors and Thomas, 2014) suggest that underrepresented groups such as BAME parents and invisible parents such as fathers reported that they would access online information. Evaluation findings (ibid) showed that participants perceived the Sorting Out Separation app positively as it collated a wide range of information on one site in an accessible manner. In practice, the app enabled parents to access impartial information anonymously at their convenience parents however its utility was limited by the provision of scant information on key topics (Connors and Thomas, 2014).

6.6.1 Scenario three

With significant and ongoing resource scenario three consists of the creation of Relationship Wales, an online platform with telephone helpline. Based on interview findings, Relationships Wales, would need to align with the Families First programme and the commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such alignment would require the inclusion of family support, parenting programmes, mediation and contact centres as well as ensuring that other non-court based approaches are included in the bank of resources offered. In response to consultation feedback, it is imperative that the platform caters for grandparents and the extended family. Relationship Wales will outline the different levels of support to families with clear delineation between the range of support and advice available. Such signposting will empower parents to access appropriate support either through the provision of information digitally, through the online assessment tool or via the helpline.

Creation of Relationship Wales must meet the five criteria outlined. Hence, the platform should be marketed to the general public in order to establish it as the primary resource for relationship information and support. It is suggested that the platform be hosted by the Welsh Government in order to promote credibility and to establish it as a trusted brand (cf. Connors and Thomas, 2014). It is anticipated that existing provision such as Families First, TAF and IFSTs will promote the platform. In order to meet the needs of children and families and preclude them from resorting to court to resolve their difference Relationship Wales must extend beyond statutory services. This means that consideration must be given regarding how to foster the continued engagement of charitable and private organisations within the current economic uncertainty.

While scenario three was the preferred option across all consultation meetings, it posits the most challenges for a pilot. With no existing resource, a pilot study would need to establish a team who are able to create the platform and broker partnerships with existing services in the region. However, it is envisaged that should this option be

selected, the team should arrange a meeting with the management team of Relationships Scotland to determine how they established the resource.

7.0 Discussion

This scoping study highlighted the need to move away from traditional notions of the nuclear, elementary, or conjugal family towards encompassing a range of different family structures. In today's society children may be brought up by a range of caregivers including extended family members and reconstituted families. When relationships breakdown, positive relationships between separated parents where they are able to share the child's care amicably and engage in flexible child arrangements, is associated with a range of positive outcomes for children (Maxwell, Doughty and Scourfield, 2014). Yet levels of conflict are highest during the period of separation and where contact and separation issues are discussed (Nielsen, 2013). However, it should be noted that conflict can occur at any point before, during or following separation due to lack of adherence to contact agreements and/or notions of fairness in parenting arrangements. Where issues surrounding residence and contact are encountered, family courts appear to be the default option with parents seemingly unaware or reluctant to engage in alternative methods of non-court based resolution. Court action can become embroiled in parental disputes with stakeholders reporting that parents can perceive going to court as their chance for vindication. In practice, parents have unrealistic expectations of court. Enhancing relationships between parents is the primary tool for resolving conflict both at the point of separation and beyond. What is needed is an alliance that fosters communication between parents and that serves to support both parental wellbeing and the best interests of the child.

Findings revealed five main themes. First, for a supporting separating families alliance to be effective, there needs to be widespread acceptance of accessing and accepting help and support for relationship breakdown. The adoption of a public health model that promotes healthy relationships and normalises seeking relationship support would serve to remove the stigma around accessing relationship support at all stages of the relationship (Pote et al., 2019). Such an approach should extend existing Relationships and Sexual Education provision in schools (Welsh Government, 2019) and be aligned with the new curriculum's aim to develop healthy, confident individuals who are able to 'form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect' (Welsh Government, 2020). This may serve to reduce relationship breakdowns or mitigate the effects where relationships do end. A public health approach should also dispel myths surrounding the primacy of private law court applications. For the vast majority of cases court should be the last resort, only considered when a range of non-court based options have been unsuccessful.

Second, in addition to the normalisation of accessing relationship support, there needs to be increased public awareness of what help and support is available. While there are a range of existing services either directly or indirectly providing support to separating parents, this is currently fragmented. Further, it is sometimes unclear what help and

support is available and what particular services organisations offer. Moreover, existing resources may be perceived negatively due to fears of statutory services or suspicion regarding what engagement involves. This means that an alliance must both raise awareness and dispel fears regarding engagement as well as promoting a range of multi-disciplinary services. In doing so, parents are empowered to assume responsibility and identify the most suitable forms of support for their unique circumstances before, during and after separation (Marjoribanks, 2015).

Third, the alliance should offer both a digital and in-person presence. Drawing on findings from the young people's focus group, the alliance should be a one stop shop offering tailored and ongoing support that families. Further, the alliance should offer timely support to all families and all family members. This places the onus on ensuring equitable access to everyone, including those groups who are less likely to engage with services, including the service resistant, underrepresented, and the invisible (Barrett, 2008). Regarding timely support, findings showed that where access to support is delayed, issues can become entrenched. This necessitates an immediate response and access to services with no waiting lists. Further, where parents seek help this tends to be responsive and issue-led and where immediate access to support is sought (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019). While a digital resource facilitates an immediate response, some parents may prefer support to recognise or articulate the issues they are encountering (Pote et al., 2019). This suggests that some form of assessment tool or signposting is necessary to encourage parents to consider other forms of emotional or relationship-based support.

Fourth, consideration should also be given to including children and young people. Findings suggest that there is currently limited signposting to and support available for children and young people seeking more information regarding parental separation. Yet under the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2010 children and young people have a right to have their views heard on judicial and administrative matters that affect their lives. There is a legal presumption that it is in children's welfare for both their parents to be involved in their upbringing but rather than making these decisions on behalf of children, consideration should be given as to how to meaningfully involve them in decision making, such as including them within mediation.

Finally, while the study was not aimed at exploring the impact of Covid-19, it was anticipated that the rate of parent separation will increase in the weeks and months ahead (Prasso, 2020). Families have been under additional stress during the lengthy period of lockdown and as this eases and communities move into social distancing, the impact of rising unemployment will undoubtedly affect families. The direct effects have been observed where social distancing has been used as a tool for preventing children contact with the other parent. Indirectly, Covid-19 will affect families due to the rising levels of unemployment and poverty and sustained uncertainty regarding the course of

the virus and concerns regarding the second wave. Such findings highlight the need for a supporting separating families alliance.

This scoping study identified three scenarios which address each of these five themes to varying degrees. In scenario one, linking the SSFA to the Single Advice Fund posits the additional advantage of Citizen's Advice existing presence in Wales and its reputation as a comprehensive and credible information resource. In doing so, scenario one has the potential to offer locally based support from existing Citizen's Advice offices as well as national coverage of services. Further, the Single Advice Fund has been designed to track and improve engagement with services. This means that scenario one has the potential to be aligned with the Single Advice Fund whilst benefitting from ongoing refinement. However, with fixed term funding there is the risk that this service will not be maintained post December 2020. Sustainability of the SSFA was one of the key factors identified in this study. Scenario two proposes to extend Cafcass Cymru provision by expanding its remit to the many families who will not benefit from a private law application. This notion proved somewhat contentious as there are mixed views regarding the extent to which Cafcass should be involved in the provision of support in cases suitable for diversion away from court. However, the original aims of establishing Cafcass and Cafcass Cymru, along with the aims of the Child Arrangements Programme suggest otherwise and situating the SSFA within Cafcass Cymru fosters numerous benefits such as existing knowledge and expertise, including the WT4C programme, and experience in assessing the support requirements of families. Of the three scenarios this appears to be the option that can most readily be implemented with less uncertainty regarding how the alliance will be sustained over time. Finally, scenario three offers the most ambitious option. This option proposes a new platform designed to link all relationship support and advice. It is this option that presents the opportunity to promote culture change across Wales where seeking help and support with relationships becomes normalised for all life stages and ages. Creating a new platform for the SSFA with a telephone helpline promotes brand awareness, a one stop shop for digital and in-person help and support while empowering parents and caregivers to identify resources tailored to their needs. Of the three scenarios, scenario three offers the most potential for future development as the platform can be expanded as new resources are created. By linking the platform with the Welsh Government it also offers the advantage of visibility, credibility, and quality assurance.

Regardless of which scenario is preferred, there is a clear need for a supporting separating families alliance which fosters relationships between parents and caregivers and which prioritises resolution in the best interests of the child. In doing so, the success of an alliance will be based on whether families have the financial means to access private services, where appropriate, and the extent to which organisations are able to continue offering these services post Covid-19.

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Appendix A: Semi-structured interview

Introduction

1. What is your role?
 - What are your responsibilities?

About the organisation

1. In which local authority do you operate/provide services?
2. How long has your organisation been operating?
3. How many full and part-time staff does your organisation employ?
4. Do you provide any volunteering opportunities? If so, how many volunteers do you employ annually?
5. What is the type of work your organisation does?
 - Statutory/ non-statutory or private?
6. How are you funded?
7. How do families generally pay for your services?

About the service(s)

1. What services does your organisation provide for families that are separating?
 - What is the nature of that service(s)? What does it involve? (if they have any leaflets or information sheets to share that will be useful)
2. Approximately how many parents have received support over the last year regarding family separation from your organisation?
3. Who primarily accesses your services? E.g. both parents together, fathers only, mothers only, grandparents, stepparents.
4. Does your organisation offer tailored services for separating families? E.g. with residence, contact or financial advice.
5. How are services accessed? E.g. online referral, telephone, visit to organisation, social media, court/Cafcass referral, word of mouth.
6. At what point during separation are your service(s) accessed? E.g. prior to separation (no court involvement, after a family court application has been made, post-separation but no court involvement, post separation after court order.
7. What are the main reasons separating families access your services? E.g. Financial problems, disagreement about child arrangements.
8. Are there any differences in the type of support separation mothers and fathers request?
9. How are services delivered? E.g. over the phone, face-to-face, groups etc.
10. Do you provide services for children? If so, what?
 - In what circumstances?
 - How is it accessed?
 - How is it delivered?
11. For how long are your services accessed for by families/service users?
12. Can you estimate how often using your service assists towards a resolution without recourse to court?
13. Do you signpost to other services?

- What type? Who?
- Are you aware of other services that support families during separation?

Diversity

14. Does your organisation offer its services in the Welsh language? E.g. All services and written materials, some services and written materials, written materials only.
15. Does your organisation offer a translation facility to families where Welsh or English is not their first language? E.g. All services and written materials, some services and written materials, written materials only.
16. Approximately how old would you say those accessing your service(s) are?
17. Do you adapt your service(s) to meet different family needs? How? For whom? (e.g. LGBTQI+ persons, disabled persons, BAME communities and people with different religious beliefs)
18. Do you adapt your services for people who are in different types of relationships able to use your service(s)? How? (i.e. marriages, civil partnerships and cohabitation)
19. What are the types of concerns/worries that separating families have at this stage of separation?

Local Family Alliance

20. In your view, do existing services meet the needs of separating families?
21. Do you feel there is enough visible support for families who are separating? And for children who are experiencing family separation?
22. Do you think more services are needed to support separating families?
23. Do you think there is a need for Supporting Separating Families Alliances in Wales?
24. How do you think it could be most accessible? (i.e. online, mobile app etc)
25. Do you think it would be beneficial to families? (i.e. due to the lack of legal aid and increase in self representation)
26. Do you think it would be beneficial to the legal sector? (i.e. in terms of less pressure on courts and less people self-representing and less of the less serious cases going to court)
27. Who do you think should lead each local family alliance?

Covid-19

28. What, if any, impact do you think Covid-19 will/is having on separating families?
29. What, if any, impact do you think Covid-19 will/is having on service provision for separating families?

That's all the questions I have. Is there anything you think we should know about the needs of separating families or the creation of local family alliances that I haven't asked you about?

Thank you for your time.