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**Speech to the OPAN Cymru/ SPARC Conference in Swansea on 23rd July 2008**

**OPAN CYMRU ANNUAL CONFERENCE, SWANSEA**

23 July 2008 (1330 – 1430)

Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi am fy ngwahodd i yma heddiw i'ch cynhadledd flynyddol. Mae'n bleser gennyf fod yma. I ddechrau hoffwn gydnabod y rôl hollbwysig sydd gan ymchwil o ran datblygu polisiau a chynlluniau sy'n seiliedig ar dystiolaeth. Mae OPAN Cymru, mae'n dda gen i ddweud, yn cael ei ariannu gan Lywodraeth y Cynulliad, ac mae wedi chwarae ac yn parhau i chwarae rhan fawr mewn cyfrannu at gynyddu ansawdd a swm ymchwil ym maes pobl hŷn a heneiddio.

Rwyf hefyd yn falch iawn o rannu'r un llwyfan â Vivienne Walters unwaith eto. Y tro diwethaf y bu hynny roedden ni yn achlysur lansio Ail Ran ein Strategaeth ar gyfer Pobl Hŷn ym mis Mawrth. Ers hynny mae Vivienne wedi gwella o salwch difrifol ac mae'n glod i'w chymeriad cryf a'i dyfalbarhad ei bod hi yma heddiw i gadeirio'r gynhadledd.

Hoffwn siarad â chi am yr agenda fwy cyffredinol yr ydym yn ei rhoi ar waith ym maes heneiddio, a hefyd yn fwy penodol am rai agweddau allweddol o'r polisi ar wasanaethau cymdeithasol, sydd mor bwysig i nifer o bobl hŷn.

Mae OPAN Cymru, drwy Vivienne yn enwedig, wedi chwarae rhan allweddol yn y gwerthusiad o'n Strategaeth gyfredol ar gyfer Pobl Hŷn ac yn yr adolygiad o gyfeiriad y strategaeth yn y dyfodol. Mae eraill yn OPAN Cymru wedi chwarae rhan allweddol yn y broses honno hefyd gan gynnwys Gill Windle, Vanessa Burholt, Sue Lambert ac Alison Porter.

Thank you so much for asking me join you today for your annual conference. I am delighted to do so as at the outset I would like to acknowledge the vital role research has in helping to develop evidenced based policies and plans. OPAN Cymru, which I am pleased to say is funded by the Assembly Government, has played and continues to play a significant role to play in contributing to the increase of the quality and quantity of research in the area of older people and ageing.

I am also delighted that I am sharing a stage with Vivienne Walters once again. The last time I did so was at the launch of Phase two of our Strategy for Older People in March. Since then Vivienne has bounced back from a serious illness and it is a tribute to her strength of character and resolve that she here to chair today's proceedings.

I would like to talk to you about both the broader agenda on ageing we are taking forward as well as more specifically about some key aspects of policy on social services that are so important for many older people.

OPAN Cymru, through Vivienne in particular, played a key role in the evaluation of our current Strategy for Older People and in the review of its future direction. Others from OPAN Cymru who also played key parts in that process include Gill Windle, Vanessa Burholt, Sue Lambert and Alison Porter

The evaluation found that that the implementation of Phase 1 of the Strategy by the Assembly Government, Councils and the voluntary sector had been broadly successful, and that there had been strong support for it from older people and age organisations. The strong consensus was that the general approach taken should be continued but strengthened and refocussed.

This feedback was taken on board and as a result the next phase of the Strategy is concentrating on four key strategic and cross-cutting themes: Engagement with Older People, Economic Status of Older People, Health, Well Being and Independence and Implementation. These strategic themes are under written by 24 priority issues.

Indeed, as part of the refocused Strategy I am going to strengthen the National Partnership Forum for Older People by increasing its membership to include a researcher. I shall shortly be inviting nominations.

As many of you will know the Office of the Chief Social Research Officer, which is a central research division within the Welsh Assembly Government responsible for developing and delivering a cross-cutting programme of social research. I am pleased to say that as part of that programme, they are currently undertaking a number of pieces of work relating to Health and Social Care. These include an Older People's Wellbeing Monitor for Wales. This will be a 'state of the nation' style report with key published data and research evidence on older people's wellbeing indicators. The monitor will reflect the aims and values of the Welsh Assembly Government's Older People's Strategy and the UN Principles for Older Persons. Publication of the monitor is planned for November 2009.

Another key development is, of course, the appointment of Ruth Marks as Commissioner for Older People. I know Ruth has already spoken to you this morning about her role . Among the statutory powers that has been provided to the Commissioner is to undertake or commission research in relation to her functions. This underlines the importance of an evidence base in the scrutiny role as well as in policy development. I wish Ruth every success in her new role as champion for older people in Wales.

Turning now to wider issues, I want to briefly set our distinctive approach in Wales as it impacts on my role as Deputy Minister for Social Services.

We have set out our approach to public services in *Making the Connections*. This presents an inclusive view of public service that recognises the contribution of the public, the private and the third, or voluntary, sector. Citizen centred services for local communities and strengthening the voice and influence of service users are at the centre of this agenda. These considerations are also at the heart of social care. My colleague, the

Minister for Social Justice and Local Government, will be bringing forward new legislation in the next few months to place these issues at the heart of local service design, commissioning and delivery. Local authorities are already well aware of the need to work collaboratively to understand and meet citizen and community needs, and the new Measure will significantly enhance their ability to do so. This will give added impetus to the work we have been progressing in recent years on engagement of older people .

Our 10 year strategy – *Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities* sets out a vision for social services in Wales. They must of course work with others, like the health service, but they have to be closely tied into the work of all other local government services. They are a key part of local government’s work in supporting communities and promoting the well-being of the most vulnerable. They must also provide services which meet individual need for safeguarding and support and must focus on maximising their independence.

Importantly there must be a continued focus on improving joint working with the NHS. This was evident from the 3 recent reviews of Delayed Transfers of Care that set out a number of clear areas for action. Maximising the use of the Health Act Flexibilities including use of pooled budgets through effective and mature partnerships is essential.

We are using the new opportunities for Legislative Competence Orders to extend the powers of Welsh Assembly Government in relation to charging for non -residential care and carers rights enabling us to bring forward distinct service initiatives of our own here in Wales. I am pleased that the LCO on charging has already received Royal Assent and that good progress is being made on developing the Measure in consultation with a range of stakeholders including users.

With some agendas we need to work within a UK context. You will be aware of the recent announcement of the consultation in England on paying for care. It is important that people in Wales have an equal opportunity to engage in this important debate. I will be announcing arrangements for consultation in the autumn including the creation of an Advisory Group to help plan our approach in Wales.

I cannot allow this occasion to pass without mention that this year is, of course, the sixtieth anniversary of the NHS. 1948 was a significant year for the NHS and indeed for social services as well. The National Assistance Act laid the foundations of the welfare state and provided the basis for the services we have evolved to where it is today. Yet it is still an under-appreciated and misunderstood service. The huge progress over the longer term in the strength of protection services and the massive changes in the scale and balance of services with an increasing emphasis on support in the community must be recognised. We must also use this record of achievement to give us the confidence to modernise social services so that they are accessible, responsive and flexible wherever you live in Wales These vital services must promote independence and prevention and support people through services that protect people from harm and abuse. Whatever their difficulty or impairment social services must support people to have control over the life they wish to live.

Thank you for your time.