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SUPPLEMENTARY PAPERS

Committee	CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date and Time of Meeting	TUESDAY, 8 MAY 2018, 4.30 PM
Venue	COMMITTEE ROOM 4 - COUNTY HALL
Membership	Councillor Bridgeman (Chair) Councillors De'Ath, Philippa Hill-John, Joyce, Morgan, Murphy, Phillips, Taylor and Singh

The following papers were marked 'to follow' on the agenda circulated previously

Item 4 - Draft Out of County Placement Inquiry Report (Report and Appendices) (Pages 3 - 108)

Davina Fiore

Director Governance & Legal Services

Date: Wednesday, 2 May 2018

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This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

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**CYNGOR CAERDYDD
CARDIFF COUNCIL**

CHILDREN and YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 May 2018

Out of County Placements - Report of Committee's Task & Finish Group

Reason for the Report

1. . This report enables the Committee to approve the draft report of this Committee's Task & Finish Group, copy attached at **Appendix A**.

Background

2. At its meeting in September 2017 the Committee agreed to undertake a Task & Finish group to investigate 'out of county placements. The Committee agreed the Terms of Reference for the task group:
 - To review the provision of out of county placements, the types of provision, cost and impact on resources
 - To identify gaps in local provision, social services, and education that result in the need to place children out of county.
 - To identify the barriers to providing additional support in Cardiff and the impact on looked after children in being placed outside Cardiff.
 - To consider plans and proposals to provide improved provision and determine the effectiveness of these improvement in addressing Cardiff high levels of out of county provision.
 - To report the findings of the Committee to the Cabinet.
3. Members of the Task & Finish group were:
 - Councillor Lee Bridgeman (Chair)
 - Councillor Dan De'Ath
 - Councillor Heather Joyce

- Councillor Joel Williams (Backbench Councillor)
 - Ms Carol Cobert, Church in Wales Co-optee member.
- 4 The Task Group reviewed the evidence gathered from discussions with Children's Services senior staff, Social Workers, Voices from Care, the Chairman of the Welsh Government Advisory Committee, advice to the Welsh Government from the ADSS, Fostering Network, the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru, and Pembrokeshire County Council. The Members also reviewed a number of publications and reports. As a result of the analysis and assessment of the evidence gathered throughout the Inquiry a number of key findings were identified from which a number of recommendations were agreed, as set out in the attached report at **Appendix A**.

Way Forward

- 5 The draft report of the Task & Finish Group, is attached at **Appendix A**. Members' attention is particularly drawn to the recommendations section.
- 6 Members may wish to consider the report, make any amendments and agree whether to approve the report to be considered by the Cabinet.

Legal Implications

- 7 The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not making policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the

Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

Financial Implications

- 8 The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not making policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to:

- Consider the draft report of the Task and Finish Group, copy attached at **Appendix A.**
- Endorse the report, subject to any comments the Committee may wish to make, for submission to the Cabinet.

Davina Fiore

Director of Governance and Legal Services and Monitoring Officer

1 May 2018

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**An Inquiry Report of the:
Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee**

Out of County Placements

May 2018



Cardiff Council

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Appendix 1 - ADSS Cymru, WLGA and National Adoption Service evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Public Accounts Committee inquiry into Care experienced Children and Young People.

Appendix 2 - 4C's 360 degree feedback on staying close to home from Children & Young People.

Appendix 3 – Placement Finding Process via the all Wales Frameworks

Appendix 4 - the Local authority Regional/National Commissioning Arrangements via Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCRS).

Appendix 5 – Blaenau Gwent's Strategy to safely reduce the number of children being looked after

CHAIR'S FOREWORD

DRAFT

INTRODUCTION

1. The Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee during its consideration of items for the 2017/18 work programme agreed to undertake a Task & Finish inquiry into “Out of County Placements” later in the year, to be chaired by Councillor Lee Bridgeman.
2. The inquiry was requested by three Cabinet Members, the Committee Chairman and supported by all Committee Members at the work programme forum meeting.
3. This area of activity and expenditure is a very challenging and often volatile one in all local authorities. It is difficult to anticipate a number of key factors including:
 - how many and which children will enter the looked after system each year;
 - what type of placements they will need; and
 - how many children will cease to be looked after;
 - the impact of case law and changes in government regulations.
4. In common with other local authorities, Cardiff has experienced an increase in the number of children with especially complex needs and the rising costs associated with meeting these needs within appropriate placements continues to place pressure on budgets. This cohort of children relates both to those with challenging and complex behaviour and to those with disabilities.
5. Children and young people with challenging and complex behaviours often cannot be maintained within foster placements and require admission to residential care. In certain circumstances these placements will be specialist (for example, where a child is displaying sexually abusive behaviour) and/or require the provision of additional staffing to manage risks associated with the child’s behaviour. Placements of this type can cost over £200k a year.
6. There is evidence of increasing demand for support for older disabled children and young people. Families often manage to cope when children are younger but some of them find it increasingly difficult to do so as the children grow and may become more

challenging or aggressive. Some disabled young people require 24 hour care and support which can be met only in a residential school setting, usually until they reach the age of 19.

7. Cardiff Council, over the past 6 years, has implemented a number of strategies, plans and initiatives to help address the challenges that Children's Services has been facing, these included the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee, the Enhanced Fostering Scheme, Signs of Safety, early intervention and prevention initiatives, Social Worker recruitment and retention initiative and the Cardiff Fostering campaign "Count Yourself in".
8. The Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru's (ADSS Cymru) evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Public Accounts Committee, published on the 29 January 2018 stated that "The majority of children who are looked after are cared for by foster carers where children receive positive and nurturing care in stable placements. Residential care also provides many children with positive care and across local authority and agency providers for both foster care and residential care there are committed, enthusiastic and positive carers."
9. However, the evidence also stated that "the increasing complexity of cases and the growing numbers of children are negatively impacting on both the availability of appropriate placements and the cost of placements. An ageing foster carer population and the increasing costs of providing residential care are draining the sector. Despite the initiatives of the National Fostering Framework, the work of the Welsh Government Residential Task and Finish group, the commitment of local authority placement teams and the work of the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) the lack of appropriate placements for looked after children is approaching a crisis position. Despite local authorities' strong commitment to ensuring placement choice and stability most have struggled to recruit foster carers in sufficient numbers to provide the range and choice of placements needed, particularly for those young people with challenging behaviour and with additional needs. Local authorities report similar shortages in the independent sector. This apparent deficit in the foster carer market raises complex challenges across Wales. A similar deficit is increasingly apparent in residential provision and particularly in the availability of placements for children presenting with the most complex needs".

KEY FINDINGS

10. The Inquiry Members reviewed the evidence gathered from discussions with Children's Services Senior Staff, Social Workers, Voices from Care, the Chairman of the Welsh Government Advisory Committee, advice to the Welsh Government from the ADSS Cymru, Fostering Network, the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru, and Pembrokeshire County Council. The Members also reviewed a number of publications and reports. As a result of the analysis and assessment of the evidence gathered throughout the Inquiry the following key findings have been identified:

Impact on Children being looked after

- KF1** The lack of placement provision in Cardiff needs to be addressed;
- KF2** Former Looked After Children often have told us that they value consistency in their relationships with professionals and relatives;

Strategic operations

- KF3** As Corporate Parent, the Cardiff Council has a responsibility to ensure that all looked after children are safeguarded and that their outcomes are improved.;
- KF4** The overwhelming increase in cases coming forward are concerned with neglect with significant increases in domestic violence, issues which are increasingly highlighted as a result of the support that is provided as part of early intervention services;
- KF5** The Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) is focusing on improving outcomes for children by working to three key work-streams 1. Improving Practice, 2. Edge of Care and Risk Assessments, 3. Promoting Permanence. Cardiff Council should continue to work closely with the MAG whilst accelerating its own development agenda.

- KF6** Particularly as Cardiff is the fast growing City and is promoting itself as the a great place to grow up;
- KF7** To review the Corporate Parenting Strategy to reduce the number of Looked After Children is key to help safely reduce the number of looked after children, it should be supported by a clear strategic approach to commissioning and an updated placement strategy, and include more residential specialist provision in Cardiff, , in particular settings for over 14 year olds.
- KF8** There needs to be more collaborative working across Children's Services, and the wider Council;
- KF9** That effective prevention and intervention strategies and improved outcomes are key to reducing numbers of children being looked after. Prevention and intervention work is considered more effective under the full control of children's services;
- KF10** Parents of children who have complex needs children, require specific support services to build their resilience and enable them to look after their children at home.
- KF11** Placement commissioning arrangements should to be reviewed to ensure that the Councils has a fit for purpose system.;
- KF12** In September 2017 the Council had approximately 796 looked after children this has increased from 557 cases in 2012-13; and Members projected that this could reach 920 by March 2019.
- KF13** There is an overspend year on year and is likely to continue for some time, we need to build this into the budget;
- KF14** Savings accrued from invest to save schemes such as moving residential children back to Cardiff can be reinvested into preventative and early help initiatives;

Social Worker Workforce

- KF15** A stable and fully established social worker workforce is key for the well-being of children being looked after as well as the well-being of social workers themselves;
- KF16** The Council must do everything possible, to help recruit and retain children's services social workers;
- KF17** The "signs of safety" model provides the Council with the ideal opportunity to both improve the outcomes for children, well-being of social workers and reduce the number of looked after children and placements.

Placements

- KF18** Cardiff needs to have considerably more placements than it currently has, and where possible should utilise its own housing stock;
- KF19** Monthly reviews of out of county residential placements is undertaken to assess whether the needs and well-being of each Child could be fully met in Cardiff;
- KF20** As Greenhill is the only special school and only takes Boys, Girls have to be placed out of county.
- KF21** To encourage more people to become Foster carers, it has been suggested that the Council should invest in its Foster Carers and identify ways of making working for Cardiff in-house Fostering Service more attractive such as seasonal allowances, pay additional fees and retainers;
- KF22** That where safe to do so, Cardiff should maximise the use of all in house foster carers whenever possible;
- KF23** The key issue that children have to be safeguarded in the setting which best meets their needs and well-being.

- KF24** The increasing complexity of cases and the growing numbers of children are impacting on both the availability of appropriate placements as a result the pre-matching and planning of placements is becoming crucial to the effective placement of Children particularly in emergency situations;
- KF25** There is a high volume of inappropriate referrals to the Council's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub from stakeholders, stakeholders need to be supported to understand when to make a referral to the MASH and when to provide effective early help services;
- KF26** Cardiff is the one of only a few authorities in Wales to place 0 – 5 year olds out of county and in independent placements;
- KF27** If you want to reduce out of county placements then you have to change the approach as well as changing provision through an invest to save initiatives;

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Members of the Inquiry Group were tasked to consider plans and proposals to provide improved provision and determine the effectiveness of these improvement in addressing Cardiff high levels of out of county placements. The Task and Finish Group reviewed the evidence gathered from Children's Services, team managers, staff, Children who are looked after, Welsh Government's advisory Panel and other stakeholder groups. Members have identified from the evidence received and key findings, and agreed 20 recommendations for the Cabinet to consider:

The Committee recommends to Cabinet that:

- R1** All Placements must be made in the interests of the Child, minimising the impact on them, their education and well-being. **(KF1 & 2)**
- R2** As Cardiff is the fast growing city and is promoting itself as a great place to grow up, placements should be made, wherever possible in Cardiff. **(KF6)**
- R3** Social Service Directorate should undertake a well-being assessment of all it's Children's Services social workers over the next 12 months. **(KF 15)**
- R4** Social Services Directorate must develop and fully implement a social worker recruitment and retention strategy to encourage new applicants and support to retain staff by 31 March 2019. **(KF 16)**
- R5** As corporate parents, all staff and Councillors, must work in collaboration with all partners to ensure that the safeguarding of all children. **(KF4, 8 & 10)**
- R6** The new management team for People and Communities, to work with the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee to, review the structure and operation of the service to ensure that it is works with all parts of the Council in undertaking their corporate parenting duties, by 31 March 2019. **(KF 3, 10 & 23)**

- R7** It must task officers to review the early help service and reorganise the management and control of all early intervention and prevention initiatives to enable them to be under the control of children's services, within the next 12 months. **(KF 9)**
- R8** A strategic approach to commission placements, to improve outcomes and safely reduce the number of children being looked after, must be developed and implemented as soon as possible. **(KF 7 & 27)**
- R9** It tasks officers in the Social Service Directorate to review the Placement Commissioning arrangements by 31 March 2019. **(KF 11)**
- R10** It continues to implement the Signs of Safety framework, within the next 12 months and provide evidence of its impact.. **(KF 17)**
- R11** It tasks Officers to review, current demand, in to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub to ensure the consistent use of criteria by partners. **(KF 25)**
- R12** Officers must ensure that the placement of 0 – 5 year old, out of county, is only undertaken when it is in the best interests of the Child. **(KF 26)**
- R13** To develop and implement a Placement strategy which should include, to recruit and retain Foster Carers, including, continuous advertisement programme, additional support, allowances, and retainers, to be in place within the next 12 months. **(KF 21)**
- R14** It ensures that a review of all vacant fostering placements, Agency, Council and kingship options, is undertaken to verify that there is appropriate matching and stable placements for all Children being Looked After. **(KF 24)**
- R15** Officers are to develop and implement a building programme of homes for children in Cardiff, utilising every possible agency, as an Invest to save project, within the next 12 months. **(KF18)**

- R16** It ensures that future annual placement budgets must reflect anticipated number of Looked After Children at future year mid-point, to help ensure that Social Services do not overspend. **(KF 12 & 13)**
- R17** Savings accrued from returning children back to Cardiff are reinvested into preventative and early help initiatives. **(KF14, 19)**
- R18** Officer investigate whether Greenhill School could admit Girls to minimise out of county placements. **(KF 20)**
- R20** **Action Plan** - The Cabinet Member ensures that an action plan is developed to ensure the implementation of these recommendations within an agreed timescale as part of the response to this report. **(KF 5)**

The Inquiry team also wishes to commend the work of Children's Service management and staff who have developed and implemented many changes over the recent past, which has in some way started to address some of the issues identified in this report.

EVIDENCE

Scope of Task & Finish Group Inquiry

11. The Committee reviewed a draft scope for the Inquiry at its first meeting and agreed to the terms of reference of the Inquiry to be:
 - To review the provision of out of county placements, the types of provision, cost and impact on resources
 - To identify gaps in local provision, social services, and education that result in the need to place children out of county.
 - To identify the barriers to providing additional support in Cardiff and the impact on looked after children in being placed outside Cardiff.
 - To consider plans and proposals to provide improved provision and determine the effectiveness of these improvement in addressing Cardiff high levels of out of county provision.
 - To report the findings of the Committee to the Cabinet.

12. Members agreed to hold a number of meetings and to receive the following information:
 - Overview and background – to set the context of the Inquiry and gain an understanding of the policies, plans, proposals and challenges around the placement of Children who are looked after by Cardiff Council.
 - The members also received evidence from The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Children's Services Senior and Social Workers. The inquiry also heard from the following external witnesses, Voices from Care, Fostering Network the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's), the Chairman of the Welsh Government "Outcome for Children Ministerial Advisory Group".
 - Members also reviewed a number of documents which had been identified as relevant to the work of this Inquiry.

POLICY AND PROCESS FOR THE OUT OF COUNTY PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER

13. The City of Cardiff Council is committed to providing the highest possible quality service to ensure the safeguarding and protection of children. The Council has a highly professional and dedicated team of social workers and support workers to ensure that all vulnerable children and young people are safeguarded and can grow up in a safe environment,

Legislative Framework

14. The Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014, The Children Act 1989, Adoption and Children Act 2002, Children Act 2004 provides the legislative and regulatory framework. Children (leaving care) Act 2000.

Different types of care

15. Long term and permanent fostering. - Sometimes children will not be able to return to live with their own families. A parent's health may have become worse, or perhaps a child's family has been unable to change in a way that will protect the child from harm. In these situations long-term or permanent fostering will allow a child to grow up in a safe and supported family environment while retaining the important connection with their birth family.
16. Short term fostering. - This can last from an overnight stay to as long as two years. There may be an illness or other problems in the child's family, or a child may have been harmed in some way. The goal is to get the child back to his or her own family care, as soon as possible, or once it is decided they cannot return to their birth family, to help them move on to a permanent substitute family.
17. Parent and Baby - Some parents may need foster carers who can support them and help them care for their babies. They need carers who can teach and encourage them

without taking over their responsibilities as parents. There are also some parent and baby residential care settings (Family Assessment Centres).

18. **Respite Fostering** - Respite fostering aims to relieve pressure on families who have difficulty caring for their children. By planning ahead and giving their children regular short breaks with the same foster carer, the families are more able to care for their own children long term. Some short breaks are just for the day, while other include overnight breaks. Some occur weekly, others monthly, and some just in the school holidays. This form of foster care can suit people who are not in a position to offer full-time but do not want to make a regular commitment to a child (or children).
19. **Residential Care** – Residential care for children are provided to ensure the needs of children are met when they cannot live with their own family or in Foster Care.

Child Protection Process

20. The All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008 sets out the six stages of the child protection process, which are:

- **Referral:** The person taking the referral within social services will record comprehensive details on the appropriate form and seek further information. The police should be notified as soon as possible if it is suspected that a criminal offence has been committed against a child.
- **Initial Assessment:** Social services undertake an initial assessment to establish if the child is in need and requires protection. This should be completed within 7 working days. A strategy discussion may be required following this assessment. The person making the assessment must see the child and speak to or communicate with the child, to an extent where they are satisfied that the child is and feels safe. The initial assessment may be very brief and lead directly to a strategy discussion/meeting, and/or core assessment.
- **Strategy Discussion:** Following the completion of the initial assessment, it may be decided that a strategy discussion is required. Police and social services should share and discuss all information received/gathered and with other professionals/agencies as appropriate, and decide on the next course of action within 24 hours or without delay if there is immediate concern for the child.

- **Strategy Meeting:** A strategy discussion may agree that a strategy meeting should be held. Those attending a strategy meeting should include police and social services staff, the staff member or professional making the referral, together with other staff members and professionals who can assist in the planning process for the child protection enquiries, if they are to take place. This meeting should be held as soon as possible but no later than a maximum of 8 working days from the receipt of the referral.
- **Child Protection Section 47 Enquiries by Social Services and/or the Police:** At the strategy discussion/meeting, a decision must be made on whether the child protection section 47 enquiries will be undertaken as a single agency or jointly, depending on the seriousness and type of abuse. Information gathered during this formal stage of enquiries should be recorded in the core assessment that can begin before a child protection conference but is unlikely to be concluded by the time the conference meets.
- **Child Protection Conference:** a child protection conference and the preparation and implementation of a child protection plan may follow the child protection section 47 enquiries. The child protection plan will be informed and updated by the core assessment of the child's needs, which runs in parallel with the section 47 enquiries.

Placement process

21. Children and young people can be put into looked after placements for lots of different reasons. Sometimes it can be because their parents can't look after them properly and it is decided that it's better for them to live somewhere else. This can also happen if a child's parent isn't well, has to go into hospital, or dies. Other children and young people in Looked After placements have birth parents who just couldn't cope, while some have parents who neglect or abuse them.
22. Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children and young people in their own right, are responsible for ensuring that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs.

23. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies are responsible for ensuring that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.
24. In matching children and young people with carers, responsible authorities are expected to take into account their cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious needs. Matches are intended to be achieved by means of information sharing and consideration involving all relevant professionals, the child and her/his family and potential carers, their families and other children and young people in placement.
25. Written foster placement agreements are intended to contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer.
26. Responsible authorities are expected to provide the foster family with any additional training, support and information required for the particular needs of a child.
27. The introduction of The Placement of Children (Wales) Regulations 2007 and guidance 'Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future' requires local authorities to take into consideration the placements arrangements for children looked-after. The legislation pays particular attention to any placements that are proposed to be out side the local authority's geographical boundary.
28. Where this is to be the case the local authority must convene a panel where representatives from Education, Health and Children's Services attend, discuss and agree the proposed arrangements. Where members do not agree, and negotiations have reached an impasse the case can be referred to the Chief Executive of the Local Authority, and the Local Health Board for resolution.
29. The purpose of the panel is:
 - To determine that there is no placement in the area capable of meeting the Child's needs or that an out of area placement is more consistent with the child's welfare.

- To satisfy themselves that the child's education and health needs will be met within the placement.
- To agree arrangements for meeting the Child's education and health needs and
- To agree funding for the placement.

30. Panel Membership - The core membership of panel should be consistent, where members would include senior officers from Children's Services (Chair), Local Health Board and Education, who have responsibility for budgets and commissioning services.

Members of the panel:

- Operational Manager, Looked After Children Service
 - Operational Manager, Children in Need Service
 - Senior Achievement Leader or Senior Educational Psychologist, Education Service
- Panel will be supported by - Professional Advisor, Placements Officer, Panel Administration Officer.

31. The Panel Remit is:

- The principle underpinning the panel process is that all arrangements including funding need to be resolved prior to a child being placed, ensuring that all health and education provision is confirmed and available before a child is moved.
- Where the plan is to move a child to an out of area placement the case should be referred to the Out of Area Placements Panel prior to confirmation of arrangements, and prior to the placement being made.
- In the event of a child being placed in an emergency, the requirement is for a referral to be made to panel as soon as practical after the placement yet no later than 25 working days after the date of placement.
- With regard to retrospective cases, any decision to move a child, or for not referring the case to a panel prior to the placement move will need to be evidenced in writing, (including any pertinent reasons) and endorsed by the Assistant Director (for out of area residential placements) or the Operational Manager, Looked After Children Service (for out of area foster placements). A copy of the report will be placed on the child's file.

32. The Panel Process

- a) The administrator will be the contact point for all requests for authorisation of Out of Area Placements.
- b) Requests for authorisation of Out of Area Placements should be made using the Request for Out of Area Placement exemplar. Each request must be completed by the Operational Manager, Looked After Children Service.
- c) Case managing services must forward requests for authorisation of Out of Area Placements to the Panel Administrator as soon as it becomes apparent that an out of area placement is likely to be needed for a child.
- d) The Panel Administrator will process requests that are received up to 7 working days prior to panel so that, in consultation with the Panel Advisor, the information can be circulated to the panel members.
- e) The panel will inevitably also need to consider some requests for authorisation that cannot be made within the timescale referred to above. It is essential that such requests reflect circumstances in which it has become necessary for the case management service to forward the request to the Administrator within 7 working days of the panel meeting.
- f) The relevant Operational Manager will feedback decisions to case responsible teams following the panel and prior to minutes being circulated.
- g) Minutes will be distributed after they have been approved by the Panel Chair and recorded on CareFirst.
- h) Children's Services Operational Managers are responsible for ensuring that, in respect of children's placements, planning and appropriate inter-agency consultation and negotiation, is undertaken prior to the panel and the placement being made.

Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR)

33. The Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) is an e-sourcing tool. Its purpose is to support local authorities to find appropriate placements / care settings for looked after children in Wales. It is a joined-up government initiative, with partners including the Welsh Assembly Government, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services in Wales. The service is hosted by

the Local Government Data Unit; funded originally by the Welsh Government now funded through a Consortium partnership of Local Authorities and Providers.

34. CCSR is centred on a real-time, online database. The database holds details on a large number of accommodation providers - including independent foster agencies, independent children's homes, charitable service providers and residential special schools. In addition to information on the business, the database includes considerable details on their individual care settings. These details – including whether there are vacancies - are updated by providers ensuring local authorities have the most up-to-date information possible.
35. The database also facilitates electronic tendering. Local authorities can securely post information about a child's placement requirements inviting providers to respond with potential placement matches in accordance with a defined timescale. Invitations can be restricted in some way (e.g. only framework placements (see further below) or only foster placements) or left open.
36. Launched in 2006, CCSR increased the speed and efficiency of placement searching whilst at the same time giving local authorities knowledge and access to a much wider market. Prior to its introduction each local authority managed its own list of approved providers. Consecutive searches were conducted by making a series of phone calls to the providers on the list to determine whether they had any potential placements. Electronic tendering effectively allows local authorities to simultaneously search a much large number of providers. This has reduced duplication of effort and generated cost savings, but more importantly, it has meant local authorities benefit from a wider selection of possible placements when considering what represents the best match for a child.
37. Moreover, CCSR has facilitated the sharing of best practice in the development of standardised processes and forms for local authorities to follow when completing searches. These forms enable providers to have a much clearer understanding of the needs of the child when they are considering whether to propose a placement and package of support.

38. CCSR was a critical tool in the development of a common contract to govern the placements of looked after children. The All Wales Pre-Placement Agreement was signed by the 22 Welsh local authorities in 2008. All providers registered on CCSR have been required to agree to sign the Agreement and thereby comply with the conditions contained therein. These included the following expectations:-

- All details of individual care settings are accurate and up to date, including the information on available services and facilities.
- Services and facilities are realistic (e.g. it is inappropriate to say that speech therapy is available through the provision if it is actually provided in the usual way by a local NHS facility)
- Vacancies in provision are updated on at least a weekly basis.
- Only actual vacancies are to be recorded; these will be either those available immediately or those available from a specified date.

39. There are in excess of 200 independent providers registered on CCSR and thousands of individual placements.

40. The fifteen local authorities in South and Mid Wales collaborated further by establishing the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (the 4Cs) in 2012, Pembrokeshire County Council will be joining in April 2018. The 4Cs is a regional commissioning team. It has developed, and now manages, framework agreements for commissioning the following types of placements: i) fostering; ii) residential care; iii) parent and baby foster placements. Following a full procurement exercise in 2012, a total of 30 organisations were successfully validated and entered onto one of the framework agreements. Validation was based on the optimum combination of quality, local capacity and price. North Wales joined the Fostering Framework in 2014 and have the option to use the Residential Framework if need exists. This makes the Frameworks a genuine Welsh Collaboration to improving placement commissioning and contracting.

41. A further procurement exercise was completed in 2016 and the current framework agreements have the option to extend to 2022. Providers have won their place on the framework through rigorous service quality and business scrutiny. Annual quality checks

are completed and all providers are committed to developing their service provision in Wales in response to clear needs analysis presented by local authorities.

42. As signatories to the framework, the local authorities contractually agree to search (via CCSR) for placements with providers on the framework in the first instance. If there are no suitable placements proposed following a framework search then the local authority can open the search to all providers on CCSR. Searches 'off framework' are open to the 200+ providers on CCSR.
43. 4C's links with CIW so that all providers registered have up to date Inspection Reports available and are informed of any care standards concerns. If a provider has care standard or safeguarding issues CCSR can temporarily conceal a provider from tendering for placements until standards have improved.
44. The improved commissioning practices which followed the introduction of CCSR are a key component in local authorities strategies to secure improved placement matches for our looked after children. The Framework is outcomes focussed and participation through a Young Commissioner's programme is at the core of the Framework. Of course identifying a successful match is far more difficult when searches are completed in an emergency. Wherever possible, local authorities try to search for placements in a planned way, while recognising the nature of safeguarding work will always have some same day emergencies, the vast majority of placements can and should be planned to support the best outcomes possible for the child. Guidance on using CCSR recommends running searches for a minimum of 2 -3 days where possible, based on provider feedback of how long it takes to review a tender, complete a thorough matching exercise, discuss matches with potential carers and then tender a child specific rather than generic response.
45. Capacity challenges in the current fostering market extend across local authority, charitable and independent provision. Consortium partners have made a commitment to work together to tackle this issue by working together in Wales. Welsh Government has also recognised these capacity issues through the funding of a National Fostering Framework exercise. Lack of capacity in the fostering market is inevitably having a knock on effect to capacity in the residential market. While the capacity issue is tackled

it is important that all commissioners optimise use of existing capacity and follow best practice guidance in the commissioning process to maximise the potential for good matching despite scarcity of resource. A key element of best practice is optimising the use of CCSR.

46. A substantial investment by 4C's in the upgrade of CCSR commenced in September 2016. There is a 5 Phase Programme which is due to be completed by April 2018. The upgrade includes review and amendment to functionality with user level input plus background systems modernisation.

47. A record of Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) use will also be required to evidence the attempts by the Placements Unit to identify placements.

Number of Out of County Placements

Children's Services

Out of County Placements 21/07/17

Placement Type	Total
Children's home outside LA boundary	38
Foster placement with relative / friend outside LA	14
Independent living	4
NHS / Health Trust / medical or nursing care establishment	1
Placed with foster carer provided by LA outside LA	12
Placed with parents / person with parental resp.	10
Placement with agency foster carer outside LA	155
Residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home regulations	1
Residential School	2
Secure unit outside LA boundary (within Wales)	1
YOI or Prison	6
Grand Total	244

Number of Cardiff Council fostering places	181
Number of foster care places occupied	92 (as at 30 Sept 2017)

Cardiff Council Residential Home

48. Crossland's Children's Home - Crosslands children's home is currently the only children's home directly provided by The City of Cardiff Council. All children's homes must be registered with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). Crosslands is registered with CIW to accommodate up to 6 young people aged 11 to 17 years.
49. The registered manager is Siobhan Teague, the responsible individual is Debbie Martin Jones and the registered provider is the County Council of the City and County of Cardiff.
50. A CIW unannounced inspection and took place on the 8th of June 2017 between 2:30 pm and 7:00 pm. The inspection employed the following methodology:
- Viewing the premises and gardens and selected records and documentation.
 - Consultation with young people, residential support staff and managers.
 - Observation of the engagement between young people and staff.
51. The report was published on the 17th July 2017. The findings are summarised in the report as follows:
- “Overall we found that overall the young people are safe, confident and engaged in constructive lifestyles and activities. They are encouraged to express themselves and to develop self-responsibility and the three young people we spoke with, said they like the staff and feel assured by the support they provide them. They enjoy placement stability; staff continuity and consistency and are encouraged to develop relationships and attachments with their carers. ‘Normalisation’ is promoted along with the rights of the young people to thrive and feel valued. The premises provide well for their purpose; there are a sufficient number of skilled and experienced staff and the arrangements for the management and leadership of the home are robust”.

CIW INSPECTION REPORTS

52. Cardiff Council has been inspected twice in the last 4 years, the first inspection report dated August 2014 was Cardiff Council's element of a National Inspection Safeguarding and Care Planning of Looked After Children and Care leavers, who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours. This was followed in March 2016 by an Inspection of Children's Services.

53. The National Inspection - Safeguarding and Care Planning of Looked After Children and Care leavers, who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours, report for Cardiff Council, identified a number of positives but also highlighted a number of areas for improvement these included:

- There had been a placement strategy in place since 2011 from which a delivery plan had been developed. The progress of the delivery plan was tracked quarterly but the strategy had not been updated to reflect the current profile of the looked after population. The authority could improve the effectiveness of service planning and identifying gaps in provision if vulnerability and risk was included in the profile of the looked after population. Apart from the monitoring of the stability of placements there did not appear to be any arrangements in place which would provide an overview of permanency particularly for those 11 years and older.
- Despite good working arrangements, the resilience of the authority's relationship with health services remain overly dependent on children's social services providing funding and resources to assess and meet the therapeutic needs of looked after children and care leavers. Given the size of the looked after population the authority should consider the development of a participation strategy which is more systematic and which outlines the outcomes that could be achieved from such engagement.
- The quality of assessments seen was inconsistent, they were not routinely updated and so did not reflect the current needs of looked after young people.
- The recording of care planning was limited and there was little evidence of how young people were engaged in the process. The format of the plans did not

facilitate easy access to information or engagement and did not have a specific section to record the views of children and young people.

- There was a lack of primary mental health services available for those young people whose wellbeing was compromised but did not meet the threshold for the Children and Young People's Mental Health Service (CAMHS).
- The format for recording risk assessment did not facilitate good organisation of information or analysis. There was little evidence of how risk assessments were shared between partner agencies working on the case or how young people had been engaged in the process. There was an over reliance on the expertise and experience of the operational manager which could be mitigated by the adoption of a more formalised protocol in relation to clarity and consistency around the mechanisms used for risk management. Relevant risk assessment training which was specific to adolescents would improve consistency in this area.
- Good progress had been made in improving arrangements to manage missing children and young people; however there was little resilience in the service which was essentially co-coordinated by a single post. There did not appear to be any contingency to cover staff absence for a service which is essential and deals with a high volume of referrals.
- Workers raised concerns about their uncertainty around the timing of the planned restructure of field work teams to establish a specialist service looked after children. Although staff had been consulted in December 2013 there had been no definite confirmation of when arrangements would be implemented. Social workers were optimistic about the planned changes which they believed would improve continuity for children and young people and improve capacity to carry out direct work.
- I.R.Os felt confident to challenge arrangements for young people and social workers and managers confirmed this was the case. However this was difficult to evidence and inspectors saw examples around of situations which had not been resolved despite the issues being raised appropriately. Consideration should be given to how challenges brought by I.R.O.s could be evidenced and of how outcomes are influenced.
- The authority has plans to include pathway plans in the formal reviewing process but there was no timescale agreed for implementation at the time the inspection took place.

- There were quality assurance arrangements in place but a lack of capacity had impacted on the effectiveness of the system to influence improvement. A particular concern was raised about the quality assurance of 'out of county' placements of which of necessity the authority had a high number. This had identified this issue and that there was a need to strengthen the approach to monitoring commissioning arrangements.
- There had been a lack of stability of placement and continuity of workers for young people in the recent past. These issues were being addressed by the authority but the high demand on the service continued to present a challenge.
- Young people reported that although they had experienced good support from schools, there were some barriers to further education. They were also unhappy about the range of supported accommodation available to them although there were a number of joint initiatives with housing working to improve the options.

54. The Inspection of Children's Services which was published in March 2016 included a number of recommendation for the Council to implement, these included:

Providing Direction

- Strong political and corporate support for children's services should be continued in order to achieve the council's vision for children and young people in Cardiff, while continuing to manage the consistent high volume of demand on statutory services.
- The council must strengthen the operational plans to support the effective co-ordination of the remodelling of children's services and its interface with the Early Help Strategy.
- The council should assure itself that arrangements for accommodation and 'agile working' which it was planning to implement will support effective social work.

Delivering Social Services

- The workforce strategy should be fully implemented to maximise retention of staff and action taken to promote more timely recruitment of staff.
- The council should consider how it can increase the opportunities for staff to be engaged in the development and transformation of services; and for the voices of children and their families to be included in service planning.
- Staff must have the capacity to complete the training which has been identified to support their professional development.

- The quality assurance framework should be systematically implemented across children's services. This should include management oversight of the quality and frequency of supervision.

Shaping Services

- The council must review its arrangements to ensure services can meet the needs of children and young people, particularly for those being subjected to domestic violence.
- A timely review of the effectiveness and the impact on outcomes for people of the remodelling of children's services and its interface with the Early Help Strategy should be included in the planning arrangements.

Access Arrangements

- A range of user-friendly information should be developed and made easily accessible for families, children and young people not only with respect to signposting to preventative services but also how children's services carries out its work.
- The council must develop more effective arrangements to ensure that the needs of children and young people are assessed if contacts and referrals about their well-being are repeated.
- The council must work with partners to agree a shared understanding of the threshold for statutory services.
- Careful consideration should be given to how the current effective interface between 'children's access point and the intake and assessment teams' is maintained when the remodelling of the service is implemented.
- Arrangements for children's services staff to access information held on parents who are users of adult services should be reviewed.
- The 'out of hours' arrangements for the completion of 'welfare checks' on children and young people should be agreed with partner agencies.

Assessment Care Management

- The quality of plans should be improved to be more outcome-focused and reflect the needs identified in the assessments.
- Work to agree a model of risk assessment should be completed with a strong focus on consistency in risk management.

- More emphasis should be given to recording the views of children, young people and their families.
- The council should review the use of written agreements with families which should only be used within safeguarding or public law outline arrangements. Guidance for social workers and managers for their use should be developed.

55. The actions identified by the Directorate to address all these recommendation was built into the Directorates Business Plan to enable them to be effectively implemented.

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EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSIONS

56. The Inquiry Members agreed a scope for the inquiry, which included receiving evidence from a number of internal and external stakeholders. The Inquiry also reviewed the content of a number of key reference documents. This information was utilised by the Inquiry members to identify key areas which if reviewed would positively impact on the wellbeing of children who are being looked after out of county.

Internal Witnesses

57. The inquiry initially invited the Cabinet Member for Children & Families, together with the senior management team responsible for Children's Services and out of county placements, to provide a briefing on the processes, challenges and plans for the future in respect of Out of County Placements of Children who are looked after. This was followed by a visit to a social worker team at Hafan Gobaith, who deal with out of county looked after children to fulfil the council's obligations as a corporate parent, discuss the reasons, in general, for their placement out of county, the challenges of dealing with children who are placed out of county and suggestions to minimise the impact of the extra work. Finally the members wish to understand the work being undertaken to help move children back to Cardiff, where appropriate.

External Witnesses

58. The Inquiry wished to receive as wide a range of evidence as possible in the short time that this inquiry was planning to work. To this end the Members agreed to invite

- The Chairman of the "Outcome for Children Ministerial Advisory Group" – Mr David Melding AM;
- Fostering Network in Wales – Colin Turner;
- Voices from Care - Christopher Dunn and Aden Richards;
- Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's) – Karen Benjamin
- Pembrokeshire County Council - Nichola Jones and Tracy Merritt.

59. The Inquiry Members also reviewed a number of documents which they had been specifically directed to consider by witnesses or Officers.

- Evidence from ADSS Cymru, WLGA and National Adoption Service to the National Assembly for Wales Public Accounts Committee's inquiry into care experienced children and young people (**Appendix 1**);
- 4C's 360 Degree Feedback – staying close to home (**Appendix 2**);
- 4C's Placement Finding Process and Fostering data for Cardiff (**Appendix 3 & 4**);
- Blaenau Gwent's Strategy to safely reduce the number of Looked After Children (**Appendix 5**);
- National Fostering Framework;
- The Councils Marketing Strategy for Fostering;
- Briefing on the management of the market for foster carers;
- Vale of Glamorgan Annual Placement Review;
- Coventry City Council's Redesign of Internal Children's Residential Care Provision.

60. David Melding AM Chairman of the "Outcome for Children Ministerial Advisory Group" was invited to the third evidence gather meeting of the Task Group to explain the work of the Advisory Group, comment on the evidence it has received and reports that the advisory group has produced and in particular the Group was keen to hear about the work on Permanency Planning and Building Stable placements work stream and answer any questions that the Group asked to help better inform the Inquiry.

61. Colin Turner - Director, The Fostering Network in Wales was also invited to the third evidence gathering meeting to explain about the work of the Fostering Network, and in particular the Network work and advice around:

- Recruitment & Retention of Foster Carers
- Your projects and programmes
- The Fostering Framework reports
- Your work with the Ministerial Advisory Group
- Your views on the benefits and challenges of out of county foster care placements

- The challenges facing Local authorities in providing an in-house fostering service, and possible actions to improve provision.
- Any views on the provision of children's homes in Wales.

Together with any Information on the new Fostering Wellbeing programme in partnership with Cwm Taf Social Services and Wellbeing Partnership Board, any areas of concern or barriers to improvement that you feel that the inquiry could help to address, and answer any questions that the Group asked to help better inform the Inquiry

62. Voices from Care were invited to the fourth evidence gathering meeting to present the views on the impact on those in care of being placed out of Cardiff. Two representatives attended where Members asked them to provide the inquiry with any comments around their perception from children who are being looked after of the impact on them of being placed out of county.
63. The Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4 C's) was also invited to the fourth evidence gathering meeting. This organisation was originally formed by the 10 South East Wales Improvement Consortium (SEWIC) authorities, 4Cs was renamed and expanded in 2012 to include five Mid and West Wales authorities. A Board which includes Heads of Children's Services and three Directors govern the 4Cs work programme. In 2012, 4Cs launched the first collaborative social care Frameworks in Wales for Fostering and Residential LAC placement services. These were renewed in May 2016, with the option to run until 2022.
64. Significant progress has been made by the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) to improve the way local authorities commission looked after children (LAC) placement services. As well as significant cost savings, benefits include improved management information, consistent and secure collaborative tools and processes across authorities to facilitate individual placement matching, contract award and contract monitoring, collaborative risk management, and quality assurance of providers; sustained reduction in prices; and an environment of partnership with the independent sector to commission new sustainable care models.

65. Regional Manager, Karen Benjamin, was invited to this meeting to explain:
- How the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru operates
 - The strategic commissioning process for looked after children
 - Market analysis, shaping and market sounding exercises
 - Social care placements
 - The all wales framework contract
 - any areas of concern or barriers to improvement that you feel that the inquiry could help to address

The Members also asked a number of questions to help better inform the Inquiry, particularly around the management of placements and commissioning of residential homes.

66. The Members were also briefed on the Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) is an e-sourcing tool. Its purpose is to support local authorities to find appropriate placements / care settings for looked after children in Wales. It is a joined-up government initiative, with partners including the Welsh Assembly Government, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services in Wales. The service is hosted by the Local Government Data Unit; funded originally by the Welsh Government now funded through a Consortium partnership of 4C's and Providers.

67. Nichola Jones and Tracy Merritt from Pembrokeshire County Council were invited to the fifth evidence gathering meeting to share the work that they had been undertaking, as they had been identified as a Council that had developed a number of actions to help reduce the level of out of county placements and help reduce the overall number of children being looked after. They were asked to explain to the Inquiry the key actions that had been implemented in Pembrokeshire County Council that had brought about change and how they can be utilised in Cardiff to improve the outcomes for our children who are being looked after.

REVIEW OF EVIDENCE

68. The Task & Finish Group undertook a review of all the evidence received and information presented to them and identified a number of key issues which they considered important enough to highlight for the Council to consider to help improve the well-being and outcomes for Children who are looked after and ensure that they are safeguarded and protected. The key areas that the Members identified from the evidence are:

- Impact on the well-being and safeguarding of children and young people who are looked after;
- Strategic operation of the service
- Social Worker workforce issues
- Management of the placement process.

69. They considered each element to identify the key issues arising from the evidence received, following this the Inquiry Members identified the key findings which would be highlighted in the report. A further discussion was had around each of the key findings to identify the necessary recommendation to address each of the key findings from the evidence received. This ensured that the resultant recommendations are clearly based on the evidence received by the Members during the inquiry.

THE IMPACT OF BEING PLACED OUT OF COUNTY ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

70. The members of the Task Group were quite quickly altered to the impact that being placed Out of County has on Children who are looked after. This issue was first raised by the Assistant Director of Social Service (Children's Services) who directed the Members to the evidence provided by the ADSS Cymru, WLGA and National Adoption Service to the National Assembly for Wales, Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into care experienced children and young people (**Appendix 1**). This evidence includes comments that, "The pressure of the cost of placements is exacerbated by the difficulties in placing children within or near to their home local authority and the lack of consistency in outcomes for children" and "The structural challenges of placements and the resultant failures to adequately meet children's needs is far from achieving desirable outcomes".
71. The Members also heard from Social Workers that they had difficulty accessing and liaising with local services such as Education, Health and other public sector services, when they had Children who had been placed out of county. The social workers explained that often Children had to be placed out of county for safeguarding reasons, such as Child Exploitation, however many others were placed out of county due to the lack of available placements in Cardiff.
72. The Members also commented that as the Welsh Education Curriculum becomes different from the English Education Curriculum, placing Children in England will mean that their Education would be set back considerably should they return.
73. The Task Group specifically invited Voices from Care to provide some views from Children who are looked after. They explained that their experience was that the impact was massive on those children. The Children commented that they lost all contact with friends, and family members. In particular Children often felt that their school was the most stable element of their lives and moving away from their school caused the most distress.

74. Finally the members received from the 4C's comments they had received as part of a 360 degree feedback on Staying close to home. Children had commented quite vehemently about their feelings about being placed out off county and the negative impact it was having on their well-being (**Appendix 2**).

- **KF1** The lack of provision in Cardiff needs to be addressed;
- **KF2** Former Looked After Children often have told us that they value consistency in their relationships with professionals and relatives;

CONCERN AROUND THE STRATEGIC OPERATION OF OUT OF COUNTY PLACEMENTS

75. The Members acknowledged that it was their duty as Corporate Parents to ensure that Children who are looked after are safeguarded, their well-being supported and provided with the best opportunity in life. The Members reflected on the evidence provided identified a number of areas where the strategic operation of out of county placements could be enhanced to ensure that they have the best outcomes.
76. The Members noted, from the evidence provided by Social Services (Children's services), that there had been an unceasing increase in the number of looked after children over the past 5 years and considered that there was an overwhelming increase in cases of children who needed to be looked after.
77. The Members heard from the Chairman of the Welsh Government Advisory Panel that they were gaining evidence to help them to working towards identifying what the key issues are and how the Welsh Government could improve outcomes. However the Members were informed that this could take up to five years and therefore Cardiff's inquiry should go ahead and would be received as key evidence to help shape the Welsh Government plans.
78. **KF3** As Corporate Parent, the Cardiff Council has a responsibility to ensure that all looked after children are safeguarded and that their outcomes are improved;
79. **KF4** The overwhelming increase in cases coming forward are concerned with neglect with significant increases in domestic violence, issues which are increasingly highlighted as a result of the support that is provided as part of earlier intervention services;
80. **KF5** The Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) is focussing on improving outcomes for children by working to three key work-streams 1. Improving Practice 2. Edge of Care and Risk Assessments, 3 Promoting Permanence. Cardiff Council should

continue to work closely with the MAG whilst accelerating its own development agenda;

81. The Task group was reminded by the Officers from Pembrokeshire County Council that Cardiff is the fastest growing City and is promoting itself as a great place to live. It was also noted that the Council's Corporate Plan "Delivering Capital Ambition" 2018-21, that Cardiff's priority "working for Cardiff" is

- Cardiff is a great place to grow up
- Cardiff has a safe, confident and empowered communities.

It was therefore surprising that Cardiff did not place more children within the County and did not have more residential homes.

82. **KF6** Particularly as Cardiff is the fast growing city and is promoting itself as the a great place to grow up;

83. The Task Group was informed by the Chairman of the Advisory Plan, 4C's, the Fostering Network and Pembrokeshire County Council that Cardiff needed to review its Strategy for placing looked after children, to address the continued increase in cases and to ensure that those Children that need safeguarding are protected. The Members read with interest, Blaenau Gwent's strategy to safely reduce the number of children being looked after (**Appendix 5**). The Members commended the list of management responsibilities included in the strategy and felt that Cardiff should develop and implement a similar strategy.

84. The Members also heard from 4C's that Cardiff should develop and implement an up to date Business Plan and have a comprehensive register of foster carers which identifies all foster carers who have vacancies. The plan should also aim to address the differences in payments and allowances between the private and local authority foster carers, help develop pre-planned placements and improve the support and services to the Cardiff Council Foster Carers.

85. The representatives from The Fostering Network, 4C's and Pembrokeshire County Council also reinforces the need to work collaboratively, wherever possible, with other

Council and to ensure that Foster Carers in each locality are supported and paid the same.

86. **KF7** To review the Corporate parenting Strategy to reduce the number of Looked After Children is key to helping safely reduce the number of looked after children, it should be supported a clear strategic approach to commissioning and an updated placement strategy, and include more residential specialist provision in Cardiff, in particular settings for over 14 year olds;
87. **KF8** There needs to be more collaborative working across Children's Services, and the wider Council;
88. The Members were interested to hear from nearly all the witnesses that prevention and intervention was key to helping reduce the number of children being looked after. It was also highlighted that Councils were finding it difficult to invest in intervention and preventative initiatives with families, due to the increasing number being taken into care.
89. Members also read in the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSS Cymru) evidence (**Appendix 1**) that there was an overwhelming increase in cases coming forward are concerned with neglect with significant increases in domestic violence, issues which are increasingly highlighted as a result of the support that is provided as part of earlier intervention services.
90. Pembrokeshire County Council highlighted the need to focus more support for parents of children with high needs to enable them to keep their children at home. Pembrokeshire County Council also stated they considered many of the initiatives as "invest to save" and quite quickly provided savings from the initiative.
91. Members were also advised by the 4C's that control over intervention and prevention initiatives should be under the strategic control of Children's Services to ensure that the Child is the focus of the work, and it is targeted effectively.
92. **KF9** That effective prevention and intervention strategies and improved outcomes are key to reducing numbers of children being looked after. Prevention and

intervention work is considered more effective under the full control of children's services;

93. **KF10** Parents of children who have complex needs, require specific support services to build their resilience and enable them to look after their children at home.
94. The Task group was briefed by 4C's on their current projects relating to the Placement Commissioning & Service Development and Placement Referral Social Worker Training. Members were also briefed on the Placement Finding Process via the All Wales Frameworks (**Appendix 3**), and the Local authority Regional/National Commissioning Arrangements via Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCRS) (**Appendix 4**).
95. The CCSR is centred on a real-time, online database. The database holds details on a large number of accommodation providers - including independent foster agencies, independent children's homes, charitable service providers and residential special schools. In addition to information on the business, the database includes considerable details on their individual care settings. These details – including whether there are vacancies - are updated by providers ensuring local authorities have the most up-to-date information possible.
96. The database also facilitates electronic tendering. Local Authorities can securely post information about a child's placement requirements inviting providers to respond with potential placement matches in accordance with a defined timescale. Invitations can be restricted in some way (e.g. only framework placements (see further below) or only foster placements) or left open.
97. The members were surprised to be informed by 4C's that Cardiff does not enter its data into the CCSR system correctly which prevents analysis of needs data to inform effective commissioning. If the system is used effectively it will allow identification of needs that cannot be currently met and gaps in provision. This in turn allows targeted market shaping which could encourage increased local services and reduce out of area dependency. The method currently used does not maximise finding appropriate placements / care settings for looked after children.

98. **KF11** Placement commissioning arrangements should be reviewed to ensure that the Council has a fit for purpose system;
99. The Members were informed by the Senior Managers of Children's Services that the number of looked after children had increase consistently over the past 5 years. In 2012-13 there was only 557 cases, however by September 2017 there was 780 cases. The Members felt that with this level of increase there could be 920 by March 2019. Members also reflected on the cost of these placements, the Inquiry group noted from the evidence provided by ADSS Cymru that the cost of a local authority foster averaged at £23,000, whilst an independent agency placement averaged at £43,000.
100. **KF12** In September 2017 The Council had approximately 796 looked after children this has increased from 557 cases in 2012-13; and Members projected that this could reach 920 by March 2019.
101. The Cabinet Member for Children's and Families informed the Committee that the growth in the numbers of looked after children has to be built into the budget, and it is having a big impact on children and the Council overall, there is therefore a need to hold our nerve and invest to save to help get numbers down. This was reiterated by Senior Managers from Children's Services.
102. Evidence from ADSS Cymru states that the increase in spend is evidence of the commitment that has been made by Council's to meet the demand being placed on services by the rising numbers of looked after children, however it is becoming unsustainable, with most authorities now anticipating significant overspends.
103. The cost of residential placements is similarly stretched with significant variations. The current lack of placements is contributing to a position where a provider's market is able to charge opaque rates with placements being currently purchased by Welsh local authorities ranging from £2,500 - £16,000 per week (non-regulated placement) regulated placements cannot exceed £11,500.
104. **KF13** There is an overspend year on year and is likely to continue for some time, we need to build this into the budget;

105. **KF14** Savings accrued from invest to save schemes such as moving residential children back to Cardiff can be reinvested into preventative and early help initiatives;

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SOCIAL WORKER – WORKFORCE CONCERNS

106. The Inquiry Group found the Social Worker work force to be to be highly professional and hard working. Meeting them at their work place enabled the Members to understand the work, pressures and responsibilities that they faced every day. It was clear that the Social Workers always put the needs of the child first.
107. The Members were informed by all witnesses of the importance of the Council having a full and stable establishment of social workers. Not just to help minimise the case load of each social workers but to improve their well-being. Members also noted that young people had indicated that the continuity of contact with one specific social worker was crucial.
108. The Task Group was also informed that the social worker establishment had been increased frequently over the past few years to help match the demand increases in caseloads, however vacancy rates have remained steady at around 20% for many years.
109. The Task Group asked all the witnesses what could be done to help improve the recruitment and retention of social workers, a number of ideas were put forward, including:
- Designated parking places for social workers in the County Hall car park to enable office visits to be made
 - Golden handshakes to encourage recruitment
 - Bursaries for students to study and then stay in Cardiff Council
 - Reduce case loads
 - Focus on the child not the system
 - Continuous advertising
110. The Members were also aware of the development and implementation of the Swansea model of “Signs of Safety” which Cardiff had started in early 2016. The Members considered that the speedy implementation of “signs of safety” would have

a significant impact on the number of children in care and the demand for placements.

- 111. **KF15** A stable and fully established social worker workforce is key for the well-being of children being looked after as well as the well-being of social workers themselves;
- 112. **KF16** The Council must do everything possible, to help recruit and retain children's services social workers
- 113. **KF17** The "signs of safety" model provides the Council with the ideal opportunity to both improve the outcomes for children, well-being of social workers and reduce the number of looked after children and placements.

PLACEMENT PROCESS – ISSUES

114. The main concern identified at the start of the inquiry process was an overspend on out of county placements. This concern was also highlighted by three Cabinet Members, together with the Chairman of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee and supported by the whole Committee.
115. The focus of all the evidence gathering was to enable the Inquiry to review the provision of out of county placements, the types of provision, cost and impact on resources. To identify gaps in local provision, social services, and education that result in the need to place children out of county and to identify the barriers to providing additional support in Cardiff and the impact on looked after children in being placed outside Cardiff.
116. The Committee considered the placement of children who are looked after in Residential settings, Special School, Foster Carers, and Foster Placements.

Residential

117. Most of the witnesses invited to comment on residential placements of children who are looked after, stated that Cardiff did not sufficient accommodation for its young people. Senior Management from Children's service explained that Cardiff has only one residential home, although plans are being made to develop another home for three young people in partnership with a third party.
118. 4C's and Social Workers commented that Cardiff could use its own housing stock to quickly develop residential settings for a number of Children so that they can live near their families, friends and schools.
119. The Members were informed by Social Workers, 4C's, and in feedback from looked after children that children need stability in their placements (**Appendix 2**) they need to be near their original home, where appropriate, and there was a clear need for

more residential settings in Cardiff, in fact it was commented that if Cardiff Council considered Cardiff to be a great place to live and grow up, why do not have more residential settings.

120. Social workers stated that they had great difficulty in placing over 14 year old and specific homes for these would make their work much easier and provide better outcomes for Looked After Children and improve their well-being.
121. The representative from 4C's explained that recently a number of private providers had been invited to Cardiff's Children's Service to identify opportunities to build residential settings in Cardiff, however staff were unable to provide them with details of what they required to progress their plans.
122. Children Service staff informed the Task Group that a monthly review of all out of county residential placements is undertaken to assess whether any placements either residential or fostering has become available in Cardiff which can meet the needs and well-being of a Child. This ensures that the needs and well-being of all residentially place children is maximised.
123. **KF18** Cardiff needs to have considerably more placements than it currently has, and where possible should utilise its own housing stock;
124. **KF19** Monthly reviews of out of county residential placements is undertaken to assess whether the needs and well-being of each Child could be fully met in Cardiff;

Special School

125. The inquiry was informed that Greenhill School is a day Special School for 56 secondary aged pupils. All pupils who attend Greenhill have Statements of Special Needs in relation to complex Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties. Greenhill also admits pupils with ADHD and other special needs including dyspraxia, mental health or medical needs. The local authority decides which pupils are able to come to Greenhill. Parents are consulted as part of the statementing procedure and the Local Authority also consults with the Head teacher and the

Governors. Currently all the pupils on roll are boys which results in all Girls who have Statements of Special Needs in relation to complex Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties are placed out of county.

126. **KF20** As Greenhill is only special schools and only takes Boys, Girls have to be placed out of county.

Foster Carers

127. The Task group also focussed on the availability of Foster Carers in Cardiff. The Members were informed that as at September 2017 the Council had 181 in-house foster carers, Cardiff also had access to at least 10 local independent providers.
128. The Inquiry was informed by the Fostering Network that Fostering was a market and it needed to be managed so that the Council would get the best out of what is available. Members were informed that Independent Agencies, pay their Foster Carers retainers, when not fostering, additional seasonal allowances and make additional payments.
129. Members also noted in the evidence from ADSS Cymru (**Appendix 1**) that despite local authorities' strong commitment to ensuring placement choice and stability most have struggled to recruit foster carers in sufficient numbers to provide the range and choice of placements needed, particularly for those young people with challenging behaviour and with additional needs
130. The Members were also informed of all the efforts being made by Children's Services to attract more Foster Carers, this included high profile internet search, a communication & media recruitment campaign supported by a "Make the Difference and Foster" project plan. The Members noted the success of the campaign but felt that the campaign needed to be ongoing to build on the previous success.
131. The Members heard from a number of witnesses that the recruitment of Foster Carers could also be enhanced, particular by using Foster Ambassadors, raise profiles in Ward Surgeries, and finders' fees.

132. The Task Group was however surprised and concerned to be informed, by the 4C's, that as at September 2017, Cardiff self-reported only using 92 of the 181 in-house fostering places, it was a concern that Cardiff was placing children Out of County when there was a 50% vacancy rate within Cardiff.
133. **KF21** To encourage more people to become Foster carers, it has been suggested that the Council should invest in its Foster Carers and identify ways of making working for Cardiff in-house Fostering service more attractive such as seasonal allowances, pay additional fees and retainers;
134. **KF22** That where safe to do so, Cardiff should maximise the use of all in-house foster carers whenever possible;

Placements

135. The Task Group noted from the ADSS Cymru advice to the Welsh Government that there was an increasing complexity of cases. Children who are looked after will have experienced forms of loss, abuse and neglect prior to entering the care of the local authority. The increasing number of children being presented with behaviours which families struggle to manage. Together with the wider understanding of the imperative to act to protect children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation.
136. Evidence from Children Services staff, Voices from Care and the Fostering Network highlighted to Members that a child taken into care has to be the right child in the right place at the right time. Most could be placed within the locality to where they presently live, however if there are safeguarding issues, such as sexual exploitation the child has to be placed in a safe place often far away from Cardiff. Ultimately placements have to be made in the best interest of the Child.
137. **KF23** The key issue that children have to be safeguarded in the setting which best meets their needs and well-being.
138. The Members received evidence from the Fostering Network, Voices from Care that placement planning is key to ensuring the best outcomes for Children who are

looked after. In addition advice from the ADSS Cymru to the Welsh Government also stated that the continuous and effective assessment and planning of all available residential and foster placements would not only ensure the best outcomes for Children who are looked after but would also enable better matching when emergency situations occurred.

139. The increase in complexity and number of cases being referred to Children's Services is negatively impacting on the Council's ability to find appropriate placements. The Members also heard from the 4C's that the Council's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), needs to ensure that it is always consistent with the use of thresholds and needs to be effective in signposting cases to the appropriate agencies.
140. The Task Group was also very concerned to be informed that Cardiff is not using a database, which allows users to match children with provision based on a profile of their requirements correctly. This collaborative initiative from the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru, help support all Local Authorities to seek and match children with appropriate Foster Carers (CCSR). The representative from 4C's explained that the data entered by all Authorities must be a set format however Cardiff does not enter the data correctly.
141. **KF24** the increasing complexity of cases and the growing numbers of children are negatively impacting on both the availability of appropriate placements as a result the pre-matching and planning of placements is becoming crucial to the effective placement of Children particularly in emergency situations;
142. **KF25** There is a high volume of inappropriate referrals to the Council's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub from stakeholders, stakeholders need to be supported to understand when to make referrals to the MASH and when to provide effective early help services;
143. The Members were surprised to hear from 4C's, that Cardiff places children aged 0 to 5 Out of County and in independent provision. Members were informed that this practice was very rare in any other authority and was not considered good practice.

144. **KF26** Cardiff is the one of only a few authorities in Wales to place 0 – 5 year olds out of county and in independent placements
145. The Task Group also wished to seek from all the witnesses, who had provided advice, comments and suggestions to this inquiry to provide some overview of how Cardiff could change it's provision to enable Children who are being looked after top have improved outcomes and improved well-being from their time in the Cardiff of Cardiff Council.
146. The key themes that the Members identified from these comments was that at present most specialist care was Out of County. The Council should therefore put in place plans and strategies to change its profile of care to provide more specialist care, as an “invest to save” scheme, which should also be part of a comprehensive Placement Commissioning Strategy. This will require a change in approach from the senior managers within the Council as a whole to focus, where safeguarding allows, on providing children who are looked after, with a safe and secure placement within Cardiff that meets their needs, provides the best outcomes, and improved well-being.
147. **KF27** If you want to reduce out of county placements then you have to change the approach as well as changing provision through an invest to save initiatives;

INQUIRY METHODOLOGY

148. It was agreed by the Committee that the Inquiry would hold a number of evidence gathering meetings with the Officer and key stakeholders.

149. The following Scrutiny Members took part in the evidence gathering during the Inquiry:

Councillor Bridgeman(Chair)	Councillor De'Ath
Councillor Joyce	Councillor Williams
Carol Cobert	

150. The Inquiry team was grateful to the staff and managers in Children's Services for the open and honest advice, comments and suggestions they made.

External contributions

151. The Inquiry also appreciated the advice, comments and openness of the Chairman of the Welsh Government Advisory Group, representatives from the Fostering Network, Voices from Care, the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru and Pembrokeshire Council who attended. The Group also considered papers from the ADSS Cymru and Blaenau Gwent Council.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

152. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without modification. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet / Council, will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal power of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. standing orders and financial regulations; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

153. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

To scrutinise, measure and actively promote improvement in the Council's performance in the provision of services and compliance with Council policies, aims and objectives in the area of children and young people, including the following:

- School Improvement
- Schools Organisation
- School Support Services
- Education, Welfare and Inclusion
- Early Years Development
- Special Educational Needs
- Governor Services
- Children's Social Services
- Children and Young Peoples Partnership
- Youth Services and Justice
- Play Services

To assess the impact of partnerships with and resources and services provided by external organisations including the Welsh Government, Welsh Government, Sponsored Public Bodies and quasi-departmental non-governmental bodies on the effectiveness of the Council's service delivery.

To report to an appropriate Cabinet or Council meeting on its findings and to make recommendations on measures which may enhance the Council's performance in this area.

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**



Councillor Lee Bridgeman
(Chairperson)



Councillor Dan De'Ath



Councillor Philippa Hill-John



Councillor Heather Joyce



Councillor Linda Morgan



Councillor Jim Murphy



Councillor Mike Phillips



Councillor Kanaya Singh



Councillor Rhys Taylor

Co-opted Members:



Mrs P Arlotte
Roman Catholic
Representative



Carol Cobert
Church in Wales
Representative



Ms Rebecca Crump
Parent Governor
Representative



Karen Dell'Armi'
Parent Governor
Representative

DRAFT

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1. Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Public Accounts Committee's inquiry on care experienced children and young people. Given that all too often children's needs are not prioritised it is appropriate to take time to consider the issues covered by the inquiry and look at how we can all best meet the needs of children and young people.

We know that outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC) do not compare favourably with other children. They are less likely to achieve good educational qualifications, have greater health and housing needs, are more likely to become involved in substance misuse and come into contact with the criminal justice system. However, we must recognise looked after children and their families will have accessed a plethora of universal services and interventions prior to reaching the door of Children's Services and their needs for the future will reflect their history of less access to resources and greater disadvantages prior to entering public care.

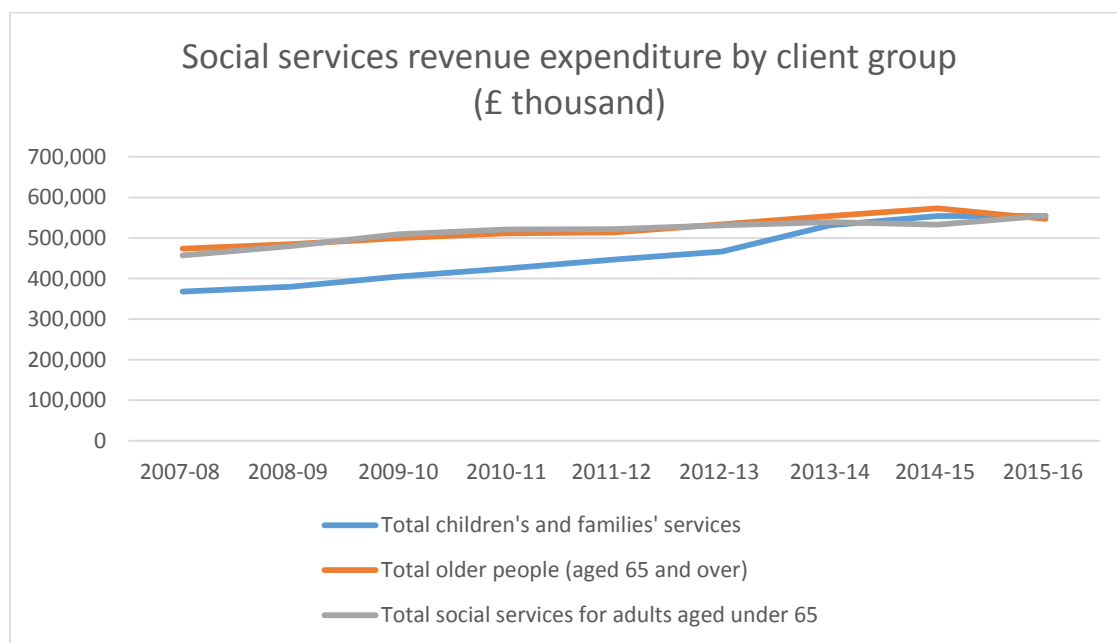
The reasons why children become looked after and their needs while in the care system are complex. Children who are looked after will have experienced forms of loss, abuse and neglect prior to entering the care of the local authority. Ensuring they can achieve their full potential and lead happy childhoods followed by enriching adult lives requires compensatory resource and care from all agencies beyond that provided routinely to their peers. Achieving an impact on the child's outcomes that is both positive and enduring requires their needs to be prioritised by all agencies while they are looked after and, in some circumstances, afterwards. For some children this will be regardless of whether they return home, remain looked after or are placed permanently elsewhere through adoption, special guardianship or residence.

Prior to addressing the four key points laid out by the Committee we will set the background of the current funding and pressures across Children's Services.

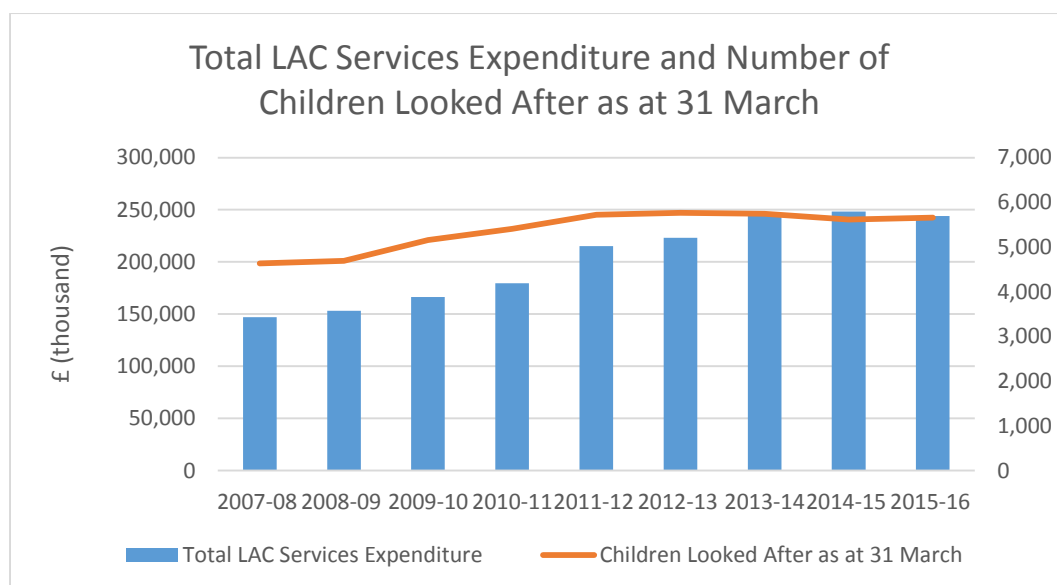
2. Overall Cost

Over the past decade the number of children in the care system in Wales has risen, with a 25% increase in children looked after and a 32% increase in children placed on the child protection register compared with 10 years ago. This has been reflected in the expenditure on Children's Services over the same period.

The graph below demonstrates how the revenue expenditure on children's and families' services has increased over the last 10 years, with a 51% increase between 2007 and 2016. This increase has brought spend on children's and families' services in line with that of expenditure on both adults under 65 and on older people. Children's and families' services now make up a third of social services expenditure:



The most significant area of spend within children's and families' services is in relation to services for Looked After Children which has seen a 66% increase in expenditure over the same period of time. The graph below shows this spend against the number of recorded looked after children by authorities as at 31 March, which demonstrates that both follow a similar trajectory.



This increase in spend evidences the commitment that has been made by local authorities to meet the demands being placed on services by the rising numbers of looked after children. However, this is becoming unsustainable, with most local authorities now anticipating significant overspends on their children's services budgets for this year.

This increase in expenditure comes during a period of significant financial austerity faced across the public sector. In his Financial Resilience Report, the Auditor General has calculated that between 2010–11 and 2016–17, there was a real-terms reduction of £761 million (17%) in aggregate external finance (core grant) for local government. This has had varying impacts across local public services with some areas experiencing real terms reductions of over 50%, and spending at levels not seen since the 1990s. Pressures are set to continue, with the work undertaken for Wales Public Services (WPS) 2025 on Future Pressures demonstrating that pressures in social services budgets drive around 2.9% growth each year, which is around £47m annually up to 2021–22. This includes increases in LAC as well as the elderly population.

The recent draft budget announcement will mean a further reduction in the revenue settlement (Aggregate External Finance) of 0.5% compared with 2017–18. This is in addition to local government's spending pressures which will total around £212m in 2018–19 which will have to be absorbed by councils.

3. Children's Services Pressures

In particular we would wish to highlight the following four key areas where pressures are being experienced in relation to children's services:

Workforce

Child and family social work is challenged by high turnover and vacancy rates and a reliance on agency staff, with demand for permanent, experienced workers outstripping supply (with children's social work now on the national occupational shortage list). The average working life for social workers is under eight years, compared to 16 for a nurse and 25 for a doctor¹. This represents a low return on the investment in training and real challenges for building and retaining professional expertise.

The number of individuals wishing to train as social workers has fallen with colleges experiencing gaps in social work degree courses. The public perception of particularly children's social work is likely to be contributing to the fall in those wishing to train.

Experienced social workers leaving the profession impacts on the quality of services since it is through experience that workers develop the expert knowledge and analytical skills that are vital elements of complex child protection and looked after children casework. Similarly, less experienced social workers often do not have the range of knowledge or skills to comprehensively plan for or directly deliver services to move on children with very complex needs. Since new practitioners learn through interaction and peer support, a shortage of experienced staff also reduces the quality of the 'community of practice' for those entering the profession.

The flow of staff out of the profession impedes a culture of "growing" managers and hence decision makers. Safe decision making and a willingness to safely manage risk in Children's Services is crucial and churn in relation to middle management posts presents high degrees of risk and uncertainty. The pressures exerted on some managers from partner agencies who may be risk averse adds to the burden of personal responsibility and stress levels experienced.

¹ Curtis L, Moriarty J and Netten A (2010) 'The expected working life of a social worker'. *British Journal of Social Work* 40(5), 1628-1643.

A lack of skilled workers reduces service users' and other agencies' confidence in social workers and the gaps left by those who leave cause additional pressure for remaining workers. Continuity of relationships for service-users can be compromised by high staff turnover and can exacerbate the issues children and young people face. This increases particularly the stresses for children in long term foster care and/or residential care.

The nature of social work with children and young people is increasingly complex and focused on the most complex child protection, often with children and young people who have experienced significant trauma from their earliest years. This is particularly challenging for those less experienced social workers, with the knock-on effect being that more people leave the profession earlier. This has meant that for some authorities the use of agency staff has been hard to avoid when trying to recruit experienced staff. This can further destabilise teams, since agency workers have the apparent flexibility to leave difficult situations. Those workers who remain can become more unsettled and may look to leave themselves.

Parts of Wales have seen challenges in retaining staff when better rates of pay have been offered in other areas. For example, some authorities have reported losing staff, particularly across the border, to other local authority children's services placed in special measures who are able to offer better pay as a way of recruiting experienced staff to help improve performance.

External demands and complexities

We are seeing unprecedented pressures on families for a range of reasons. Cuts to those services that previously kept people's heads above water have meant more families are finding their way through to even more expensive child protection services. The ongoing introduction of welfare reforms and a decade of austerity has amplified the challenges for families.

On 12.10.2017 the Local Government Association reported during the ten years 2008 – 2017 a 90% increase in child protection referrals with a 130% increase in care proceedings. Currently in England 90 children a day come into local authority care with a two billion shortfall in funding. The trajectory in Wales is similar with Children's Services increasingly being confined to fire fighting.

As with the rest of the UK the declining emotional well-being and increasing poor mental health of children and young people whilst not fully understood impacts directly on the need for family support as does the increasing number of children being presented with behaviours which families struggle to manage. We can theorise as to the impact of social media, increased bullying, academic expectations and societal fragmentation but the outcome for families is a need for support and an increasingly complex web of difficulties.

Recent high profile scandals have increased our understanding of the likelihood of risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and the wider understanding of the imperative to act to protect children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation has increased referrals. We have seen an increase in the number of initiatives that are aimed at early identification and intervention such as the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) 2015 Act, the evidence based work in respect of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Flying Start and Families First. An unintended impact that we perhaps need to consider is the resulting increase in referrals received by local authorities. Anecdotally, the overwhelming increase in cases coming forward are concerned with neglect with significant increases in domestic violence, issues which are increasingly highlighted as a result of the support that is provided as part of earlier intervention services.

In response local authorities are looking at different ways of mitigating the additional costs arising from these pressures including the use of reserves and additional funding to support the development of preventative 'Edge of Care' Teams. Local authorities have also revisited their prevention strategies as well as their LAC strategies in recent years. This has been a necessity, not only to face the increase in LAC population but also increasing financial pressures facing local authorities and more latterly in order to plan for and implement the Social Services & Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014.

Considerable investment has been put into support teams which work directly with children and young people and their families to work at levels of need at intensive and remedial intervention levels. Most of these work with families to try to prevent children coming into care, work with families to return children home within weeks of becoming looked after as well as working with rehabilitation plans for those children who have been in long term care.

The development of the National Adoption Service for Wales, the collaborative of all 22 local authority adoption services, has placed a focus on improving adoption support services so that the ongoing needs of this group of children, rooted in their early childhood experiences but often unmitigated by their care experience, can be met. Research has demonstrated that within the cohort of children placed for adoption in Wales in 2014–2015 47% had experienced 4 or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) before they were placed. This places them at the highest risk of later life impact and compares to just 14% of the general population. It is likely that there is a comparable level of ACES in the other groups of children whose needs we seek to meet.

Recent years has seen significant investment in Children and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS) through the Together for Children and Young People Programme (T4CYP), with Welsh Government announcing an additional annual investment of £7.65m in mental health services for children and young people in Wales in 2015. We recognise the fact that CAMHS in Wales are under more pressure than ever before, and in spite of additional investment and staffing, does not have the capacity to meet demand. However, despite some very committed work by individuals within health, local authorities continue to face a challenge in sourcing health services to offer sufficient priority to the emotional and mental health needs of children in care and care leavers. This results in the burden of responsibility being placed on local authority children's social services. There has been a long standing disconnect between the access threshold applied by CAMHS and the presenting emotional resilience needs of looked after children and care leavers. The issue of looked after children and care leavers' rights to an appropriate range of provision to meet their psychological and emotional health needs, when they need it and for as long as they require it, including the transition into adulthood, needs to be urgently addressed on an all Wales basis. There are isolated examples of psychological therapies being deployed to good effect by health services to meet the needs of specific groups of looked after children which, if extended across Wales, could go some way to addressing this.

The requirement for psychological and psychiatric assessment, intervention and support through the Family Courts and then into placements continues to be an area of unmet need. Local authorities are resorting to filling the gap with expensive and often unsustainable solutions to broker between the demands of the courts and the availability of the health services.

Placements

The majority of children who are looked after are cared for by foster carers where children receive positive and nurturing care in stable placements. Residential care also provides many children with positive care and across local authority and agency providers for both foster care and residential care there are committed, enthusiastic and positive carers.

However, the increasing complexity of cases and the growing numbers of children are negatively impacting on both the availability of appropriate placements and the cost of placements. An ageing foster carer population and the increasing costs of providing residential care are draining the sector. Despite the initiatives of the National Fostering Framework, the work of the Welsh Government Residential Task and Finish group, the commitment of local authority placement teams and the work of the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) the lack of appropriate placements for looked after children is approaching a crisis position.

Despite local authorities' strong commitment to ensuring placement choice and stability most have struggled to recruit foster carers in sufficient numbers to provide the range and choice of placements needed, particularly for those young people with challenging behaviour and with additional needs. Local authorities report similar shortages in the independent sector. This apparent deficit in the foster carer market raises complex challenges across Wales. A similar deficit is increasingly apparent in residential provision and particularly in the availability of placements for children presenting with the most complex needs.

The table below details the relative spend across local authority placements and independent fostering agency placements for Welsh children placed in foster care in 2014–15.

Provider	Costs	No of Placements	Average cost of placement per year
Local Authority	£51,320,599	2,200	£23,327
Independent Agency	£52,271,037	1,205	£43,378

The provision within independent agencies is spread between not for profit organisations and those seeking to profit. The businesses providing care are multimillion pound enterprises with some being traded on the stock markets and with income for directors and shareholders running into millions.

The pressure of the cost of placements is exacerbated by the difficulties in placing children within or near to their home local authority and the lack of consistency in outcomes for children.

The cost of residential placements is similarly stretched with significant variations. The current lack of placements is contributing to a position where a provider's market is able to charge opaque rates with placements being currently purchased by Welsh local authorities ranging from £2,500 – £16,000 per week. The desperation of local authorities to secure placements has led to children being placed across the UK. The planning for placements becomes lost in the need to place a child anywhere at that point in time. Meaning that good practice in matching and planning for safe and positive placements can be lost in crisis situations.

Our understanding of the costs of providing support to children who exit the looked after system, into adoption for example, is still developing. Work undertaken by the Institute of Public Care for the National Adoption Service in 2017 indicates that the cost of providing support would be significantly less than the current costs of the small level of adoption breakdowns and ongoing placement costs for children whose adoption placement is delayed due to the complexity of their needs.

Legislation and work with the Courts

Although recent years have seen a stabilising of overall numbers of looked after children in Wales a number of authorities are very recently reporting substantial increases in the number of looked after children in their care which places significant pressures on budgets. The last few years have seen a substantial increase in the number of care applications that have been made, with a significant increase in the number of children subject to care proceedings, rising from 1,371 in 2015–16 to 1,642 in 2016–17. Despite this increase cases in Wales were completed in an average of 24.5 weeks compared to an England and Wales performance of 27 weeks. The completion of cases within the timescales and all

the concomitant work is placing substantial demands not just directly on Children's Services but also on the legal teams within local authorities.

The total number of children involved in public law proceedings in 2016–17 was 3,012, an increase of 17% on the previous year. Public law applications have increased over the past three years, with a 24% increase since 2014–15. The main driver in public law work is Section 31 (care) applications. Section 31 applications are made to the court by a local authority where it has significant concerns about the safety or welfare of a child, which saw a 25% increase on the previous year. These issues as well as the expectations from the judiciary continue to add to the pressures and burdens being placed on children's services staff, as well as coming with significant costs attached.

The expectations emerging from legal judgements have created a challenging environment for staff and managers in individual care planning as well as unexpected trends in outcomes which impact on the ability to strategically plan services. A 38% fall in Placement Orders for adoption granted over a two year period was sharply and unexpectedly reversed by a 15% increase in 2016–17.

Of those applications coming before the courts the majority are deemed to be sound applications by both the court and CAFCASS. An enduring criticism of the courts is that the local authority should have sought orders earlier with a perception that the local authorities are failing children by not commencing proceedings. Addressing the reasons for the rising numbers of looked after children and the increasing rate of proceedings extends far beyond the door of Children's Services. The interventions of Children's Services are for the most vulnerable and the most at risk. The challenge is to address why there is such a seeming increase in the numbers of vulnerable and at risk children and young people.

4. The overall cost to and value for money of the range public services aimed at improving outcomes for care experienced children and young people

In March of this year the Welsh Government announced a £1 million St David's Day fund for children who have experienced care in response to the Children's Commissioners 'Hidden Ambitions' report which asked the Welsh Government, local authorities, charities and private enterprise to pledge their support to make sure that young people leaving care have the right support to realise their ambitions. Funding is being made available to eligible young people aged between

16 and 25 and either still in local authority care or care leavers to help them progress towards independence. Whilst this new initiative, and the funding that has been provided alongside, is to be welcomed in recognition that there is still more to be done to be able to support children and young people in Wales and to promote their wellbeing, we do need to appreciate that this is funding for additional responsibilities and does not support in the meeting of on-going pressures being faced.

The WLGA has consistently called for the need to protect and invest in social services as one of our most vital public services, supporting people of all ages across a wide spectrum of need to live as independently as possible and providing valuable protection from harm in vulnerable situations.

We need to acknowledge that whilst the additional funding announced for social services in the budget is helpful this will not cover the expected increases in cost and demand facing social services. The additional funding made available as a result of consequential funding in 2017–18, which included an additional £8m to prevent children from entering care and improve outcomes for those leaving care, from the UK government's March budget was awarded for specific areas of work with restrictions placed on what it could be used for, rather than providing local authorities with flexibility to meet local demand and needs. If part of this additional funding is for new responsibilities then it cannot be said to be funding any existing pressure.

Some children leave care at an earlier age and we would wish to ensure that these children do not have repeat looked after episodes. There is a cost to providing this support that is not easily found in a system that requires a level of 'throughput' in order to be able to 'ration' and 'stretch' scarce resources in the face of changing (usually increasing) need, demand and legal duties. A small amount of the consequential funding has been made available to for adoption support services but it is unclear how the ambition of a consistent adoption support offer will be fully realised even if existing expenditure could be guaranteed and focused.

5. Whether the Welsh Government's desired outcomes for care experienced children and young people are being delivered by the current levels of public expenditure

As outlined in the four key areas of workforce, external demands and complexities, placements and legislation and work with the courts the current and growing pressures within Children's Services are preventing the delivery of positive outcomes for care experienced children and young people. The increasing numbers of looked after children would at any point in economic cycles place pressure on the resources available to meet their needs but when the increase comes at a time of increasingly strained budgets in local authorities the prospect of being able to deliver good outcomes becomes ever more elusive. The structural challenges of placements and the resultant failures to adequately meet children's needs is far from achieving desirable outcomes.

Comparing outcomes across the range of options for looked after children is not easy nor is it currently undertaken in Wales. There are other challenges in this not least of all the ability to track children who are no longer in receipt of a significant level of intervention. In the context of understanding cost and value for money compared to outcomes however it is something that should be considered. There is some relevant research available for England where a wider data set is collected by government and facilitates such analysis. Expanding the data may be something for Wales to consider. This may well assist in the longer term in ensuring that resources are effectively targeted to supporting, enabling and extending the promotion of positive outcomes for looked after children and those who leave the system at various ages and stages.

6. Whether the extent of spending specific to care experienced children and young people is sufficiently transparent across the range of public services

Gaining a full picture of the resources being spent within social care and in other services is challenging.

The spend within local authorities is identifiable within budgets but achieving common understanding and reporting of the spend is less straightforward. While some work has been undertaken to address cost benefit analysis of some interventions recognising all of the financial inputs across the time of a child's involvement with a local authority is at an early stage.

Direct placement costs can be identified. However, breaking down those costs to understand component elements and particularly profit is rarely achieved.

Other areas have shown that whilst pooled budgets in some circumstances may provide potential benefits there are significant complexities around their delivery. In the case of the National Adoption Service for example only one of the NAS regions has committed to a shared funding arrangement for some of its functions; whilst that has achieved some early savings it has not been possible to re-invest this. There are similar challenges in other public services; NAS has been working with the Welsh Government since it extended the Pupil Deprivation Grant to adopted children in an attempt to monitor spend and impact on adopted children. This has not been possible thus far for this grant.

There is considerable data available in Wales focussed on looked after children but tying said data to budgets across universal services is currently immensely complex. Looked after children access all the same services as all other children in Wales and first separating those costs and then identifying those that have arisen because of the looked after or care experienced status of a child is riven with difficulties.

7. Whether public bodies have placed sufficient emphasis on a long-term preventative spend approach, in line with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, to maximise the benefits of public expenditure for this group of children.

The Welsh Government has developed grant funded early intervention services, in particular through Flying Start and Families First Initiatives. We believe that there is a need to consider these existing funding streams and how best they can be aligned to facilitate approaches that contribute to this agenda and provide additional support for families, resulting in the maximum prevention / well-being impact. Local authorities continue to face challenges with the use of specific grants, they come with separate and individual accountability and reporting obligations; with authorities having minimal discretion over how the grants are used and over what period they can be spent. They are also subject to change which can make long-term planning difficult. The Independent Commission on Local Government Finance Wales published last year recognised that, “the increased bureaucratic burden falling to local authorities diverts focus and local priorities without demonstrably improving outcomes for service users.” As such consideration needs to be given to the incorporation of existing grants within the RSG, unless there is a compelling case for a time-limited use of a specific grant.

The Early Intervention Foundation's latest analysis, 'The cost of late intervention: EIF analysis 2016', puts the cost of late intervention at almost £17 billion a year, £6.2 billion of which falls directly on children's social care. Councils have found it increasingly difficult to invest in the early help services that can prevent children entering the social care system, and help to manage needs within families to avoid them escalating.

We retain a firm belief that investment in preventative services must be the core priority for Welsh Government, in line with the philosophy of both the Social Services and Well-being Act and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and in terms of sound budgetary policy. Many preventative services in local government, such as leisure centres, parks, youth work and community facilities are provided at the discretion of local councils. Unfortunately, in recent years it is these services that have faced the brunt of cuts to local authority budgets as statutory services such as education and social services have been protected.

It is imperative that we stem the decline of local preventative services and that we find a way to make some significant investment into new and existing preventative services. The WLGA has previously called for the establishment of a new Preventative Integrated Care Fund for Wales. This fund, focussed throughout the life-course, would enable some double running of new investment in preventative services alongside 'business as usual' in the current system until savings are realised and reinvested back into the system.

Preventative spend requires an understanding of the root cause of the problem and tackling that, not just the symptoms of the problem. If there is a lack of understanding and a lack of willingness to address the root causes then services will be faced with a never ending and increasing number of these cases for future generations. Simplistically, common root causes if not addressed will exacerbate the situation and if addressed and funded there will still be a 'backlog' of those currently affected which also needs funding until the preventative measures have their full effect.

A further issue is the time that it takes to realise significant savings or improvements in social outcomes. One of the few studies that attempts to quantify the preventative impact of the Social Services and Well-being Act is the LE Wales' Paying for Social Care report. Over a 24-year period the costs of Adult Social care are estimated to increase by 114% in the base line scenario, under the preventative scenario they increase by 108%. Whilst this should provide some savings in the

long term holding off the need for more costly interventions, which are worth realising, these preventative services still need to be supported and developed, requiring additional investment. Whilst the LE Wales report is only based on Adult Social care it does highlight the challenges in realising savings in taking a preventative approach across the whole of social care. It is unlikely that this approach will release the significant savings expected, particularly within the context of increasingly complex needs which need more intense support for longer periods of time.

We have highlighted the fact that local authorities have already placed considerable investment into preventative approaches, however, investment in preventative services requires an invest-to-save approach and there are very real challenges that local authorities face in making this a reality, which is why in some cases local authorities are having to use reserves to be able to make this investment. Local authorities, and in particular those with higher rates of LAC are spending a higher proportion of their total council budget on services for looked after children. As a result, local authorities are being asked to invest in prevention and early intervention on top of an already high spend on LAC services (in real terms and proportionally).

8. Conclusion

Councils are doing their best in very difficult circumstances but services are rapidly becoming unsustainable and nearing breaking point. Councils have done everything they can to respond to the growing financial crisis in children's social care, including reducing costs where they can and finding new ways of working. However, they are at the point where there are very few savings left to find without having a real and lasting impact upon crucial services that many children and families across the country desperately rely on.

Unless urgent action is taken to reduce the number of families relying on the children's social care system for support, this gap will continue to grow. The huge financial pressures councils are under, coupled with the spike in demand for child protection support, mean that the limited money councils have available is increasingly being taken up with the provision of urgent help for children and families already at crisis point, leaving very little to invest in early intervention. Alongside this improvement initiatives such as the National Adoption Service, the National Fostering Framework will not deliver to their full potential unless they are resourced.

The reality is that services for the care and protection of vulnerable children are now, in many areas, being pushed to breaking point. Government must commit to the life chances of children and young people by acting urgently to address the growing funding gap.



4C's 360 Degree Feedback Questionnaires – Children & Young People Quotes

Theme: Staying Close to Home

- Comments about being in placements close to home:

'I don't really do things that I enjoy much, but the only things that I do like and do is shopping with my friend in town and hallving (having) a lot of contact with my mum.'

'I still get to go to the same school and see my mates after school which is cool.'

'It('s) a house not home but it('s) better than the last place which was miles away and I couldn't get anywhere'

'I'm responsible for my bus pass and I can use it to visit my friends nearby as long as I tell Andrea where I'm going and what time I'm coming back.'

- Comments about being in placements away from home:

'I hate being stuck in the countryside, I want to go back to town where I cna (can) do my stuff.'

'My mum has to come on the train to see me and it takes ages so she doesn't come as much as I want. I want to go home.'

'I miss my girls. I don't have mates here. Its to (too) far.'

'its shit they won't let me use my phone so I can't even speak to my mates and its to (too) far to visit.'

'I don't do nothing fun and can't watch or play football with my mates cos I'm in this stupid place and I hate it and I want to go back closer to home.'

'I get bullied in my new school cos I'm not form (from) round here'

*'My social worker is a c*** putting me here I keep running way til he puts me somewhere closer to home.'*

'Mike and Simon are good because if I want to meet up with friends or have contact they drive me there and they pick me up afterwards, even though its ages away'

'It's ok the staff like but it's so far away from anywhere stuck in the middle of fields, I can't go nowhere or go into town or go shoppin(g) so I do feel lonely'

'Why is it so far away!?????'

'It's really different living with Marie and far away but she makes it nice and she lets me use the phone if I want to speak to my old friends'

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Placement Finding Process via the All Wales Frameworks

All 4C's and Framework signatory Local Authorities commit to using the IPM process to commission independent sector placements. Below is a hypothetical example of what the process looks like. Authority processes may vary regarding authorisation of a search but the search (tender) process via CCSR is contractual and should be observed by each Authority with the exception of same day emergencies.

Step 1: Allocated Case Managing Social Worker
Prepares Placement Request and Care Plan for Senior Manager / Panel to agree to search for a Looked After placement. Agreement to need for accommodation required before search starts.

Stage 1 Consider all viable internal placements. If no internal or Inter Authority placement match is available the need for an independent placement is considered by Senior Managers / Panel. If Independent Provider searches are agreed progress to Step 2.

Step 2: Placement Finder	Step 3: Placement Finder	Step 4: Placement Finder	Step 5: Case Managing Social Worker (Placement Decision Maker)
<p>Use the CCSR to create a placement search (tender) for a specific placement type eg short term foster placement.</p> <p>All of the Framework Providers, specific to the search type, receive the e-invitation to offer a placement.</p> <p>The search will have a specified closing date and time. The optimum search time to find a good match is 48 - 72 hours. Searches open for 24 hours or less receive fewer options and may not be as good a match as possible.</p> <p>The quality of the information provided on the child's needs, allows providers to make best informed matching decisions at this stage.</p>	<p>At the close of the search (tender) compile provider responses; review matching documents and conduct a short-listing exercise.</p> <p>Short-listing exercise should assess matching considerations with the needs and outcomes of the child as detailed in the IPM placement request and care plan.</p>	<p>Send the best matched placement offers to the Placement Decision Maker for consideration.</p> <p>Timeline for return to be specified as placements will be 'held' by providers during this process.</p>	<p>Assess the placement options identifying the best match for the child.</p> <p>It is good practice to involve the child or young person where appropriate.</p> <p>When a match is identified a placement planning meeting should be arranged and progress to Step 8.</p> <p>If none of the offers are suitable the Placement Decision Maker informs the Placement Finder who may send through remaining offers from the providers</p>

Stage 2 Does the Placement Decision Maker need more information on particular placements? If so these questions should be put to Provider to enable match. If a match is identified a placement planning meeting should be arranged and progress to Step 8. If they decide that none of these placements are appropriate, ensure the reasons are documented and communicated back to the provider to aid future development of placements.

Step 6: Placement Finder & Placement Decision Maker
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If there is no match, and subject to approval from Stage 2, Placement Finder repeat Steps 2-5 for Non Framework Providers for a Spot Purchase.

STAGE 3 Does the Placement Decision Maker need more information on particular placements? If so these questions to be put to Provider to enable match.
If a match is identified a placement planning meeting should be arranged and progress to Step 8.
If they decide that none of these placements are appropriate, ensure the reasons are documented and communicated back to the provider to aid future development of placements,

Step 7: Case Managing Social Worker to reconsider specific placement type required to meet child's needs and the care plan.

Return to Step 1 if necessary.

Placement Confirmation Process

Once the best matched placement is selected the Case Managing Social Worker should as the Placement Decision Maker communicate their decision back to the Placement Finder to formally confirm the successful placement via CCSR and inform those who have been unsuccessful why their placement was not a match.

The process then should follow as below:

STAGE 4 Is the proposed fee correct? Check to confirm the fee is not higher than the published Framework prices for the provider and includes available discounts.

Step 8: Placement Finder	Step 9: Contracts Officer
Placement should be confirmed with the provider by accepting the tender on CCSR and detailing the appropriate placement start date. Basic Award Information completed. Internal Notification sent to Contracts Officer.	Individual Placement Contract (FIPC) should be completed and signed by both the local authority and the provider. IPC exchanged electronically using the CCSR. Contract review dates recorded.

Search Content Tips

- ✓ Good quality paperwork focussed on the child's *current needs* assists matching and maximises placement options. *Focus content on the information needed to identify well matched carers and a stable placement.* Focus on the child not parents/family.
- ✓ Give a *balanced pen picture* of the child that helps carers consider what they could offer to make a difference to that child's life.
- ✓ Be specific when discussing behaviours rather than use a phrase that could represent a range eg physical aggression: could be a push or repeated punching.
- ✓ Give context to behaviour triggers eg when with peers will.. when frightened will..

Search Process Tips

- ✓ *Only search for one placement type at a time* for clarity and to get best response from providers. Multiple searches make providers reluctant to commit to hold a placement if the Care Plan is unclear and may deter offers.
- ✓ Optimise search results by *searching for minimum 48 - 72 hours*; anything less will limit the options returned.
- ✓ Completing *unnecessary multiple searches* can label a child as hard to place and negatively impact placement options. Invest time in making each search clear, focussed, informative and timely to achieve the best outcomes for that child.
- ✓ *Avoid searches 'to see what's out there...'* This clogs up the system, creates unnecessary work for providers and creates a poor perception of commissioners.

For additional support and guidance on how to best use the Placement Finding Process in your Local Authority contact 4Cs@rctcbc.gov.uk.



Local Authority Regional/National Commissioning Arrangements via CCSR

The Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) is an e-sourcing tool. Its purpose is to support local authorities to find appropriate placements / care settings for looked after children in Wales. It is a joined-up government initiative, with partners including the Welsh Assembly Government, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services in Wales. The service is hosted by the Local Government Data Unit; funded originally by the Welsh Government now funded through a Consortium partnership of Local Authorities and Providers.

CCSR is centred on a real-time, online database. The database holds details on a large number of accommodation providers - including independent foster agencies, independent children's homes, charitable service providers and residential special schools. In addition to information on the business, the database includes considerable details on their individual care settings. These details – including whether there are vacancies - are updated by providers ensuring local authorities have the most up-to-date information possible.

The database also facilitates electronic tendering. Local authorities can securely post information about a child's placement requirements inviting providers to respond with potential placement matches in accordance with a defined timescale. Invitations can be restricted in some way (e.g. only framework placements (see further below) or only foster placements) or left open.

Launched in 2006, CCSR increased the speed and efficiency of placement searching whilst at the same time giving local authorities knowledge and access to a much wider market. Prior to its introduction each local authority managed its own list of approved providers. Consecutive searches were conducted by making a series of phone calls to the providers on the list to determine whether they had any potential placements. Electronic tendering effectively allows local authorities to simultaneously search a much large number of providers. This has reduced duplication of effort and generated cost savings, but more importantly, it has meant local authorities benefit from a wider selection of possible placements when considering what represents the best match for a child.

Moreover, CCSR has facilitated the sharing of best practice in the development of standardised processes and forms for local authorities to follow when completing searches. These forms enable providers to have a much clearer understanding of the needs of the child when they are considering whether to propose a placement and package of support.

CCSR was a critical tool in the development of a common contract to govern the placements of looked after children. The All Wales Pre-Placement Agreement was signed by the 22 Welsh local authorities in 2008. All providers registered on CCSR have been required to agree to sign the Agreement and thereby comply with the conditions contained therein. These included the following expectations:-

- All details of individual care settings are accurate and up to date, including the information on available services and facilities.
- Services and facilities are realistic (e.g. it is inappropriate to say that speech therapy is available through the provision if it is actually provided in the usual way by a local NHS facility)



- Vacancies in provision are updated on at least a weekly basis.
- Only actual vacancies are to be recorded; these will be either those available immediately or those available from a specified date.

There are in excess of 200 independent providers registered on CCSR¹ and thousands of individual placements.

The fifteen local authorities in South and Mid Wales collaborated further by establishing the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (the 4Cs) in 2012. The 4Cs is a regional commissioning team. It has developed, and now manages, framework agreements for commissioning the following types of placements: i) fostering; ii) residential care; iii) parent and baby foster placements. Following a full procurement exercise in 2012, a total of 30 organisations were successfully validated and entered onto one of the framework agreements. Validation was based on the optimum combination of quality, local capacity and price. North Wales joined the Fostering Framework in 2014 and have the option to use the Residential Framework if need exists. This makes the Frameworks a genuine Welsh Collaboration to improving placement commissioning and contracting.

A further procurement exercise was completed in 2016 and the current framework agreements have the option to extend to 2022. The Framework Providers are listed for reference at Appendix 1 of this document. These providers have won their place on the framework through rigorous service quality and business scrutiny. Annual quality checks are completed and all providers are committed to developing their service provision in Wales in response to clear needs analysis presented by local authorities.

As signatories to the framework, the local authorities contractually agree to search (via CCSR) for placements with providers on the framework in the first instance. If there are no suitable placements proposed following a framework search then the local authority can open the search to all providers on CCSR. Searches 'off framework' are open to the 200+ providers on CCSR.

4Cs's links with CSSIW so that all providers registered have up to date Inspection Reports available and are informed of any care standards concerns. If a provider has care standard or safeguarding issues CCSR can temporarily conceal a provider from tendering for placements until standards have improved.

The improved commissioning practices which followed the introduction of CCSR are a key component in local authorities strategies to secure improved placement matches for our looked after children. The Framework is outcomes focussed and participation through a Young Commissioner's programme is at the core of the Framework. Of course identifying a successful match is far more difficult when searches are completed in an emergency. Wherever possible, local authorities try to search for placements in a planned way, while recognising the nature of safeguarding work will always have some same day emergencies, the vast majority of placements can and should be planned to support the best outcomes possible for the child. Guidance on using CCSR recommends running searches for a minimum of 2 -3 days where possible, based on provider feedback of how long it takes to review a tender, complete a thorough matching exercise, discuss matches with potential carers and then tender a child specific rather than generic response.

¹ As at May 2016
4Cs.ccsr



Capacity challenges in the current fostering market ² extend across local authority, charitable and independent provision. Consortium partners have made a commitment to work together to tackle this issue by working together in Wales. Welsh Government has also recognised these capacity issues through the funding of a National Fostering Framework exercise. Lack of capacity in the fostering market is inevitably having a knock on effect to capacity in the residential market. While the capacity issue is tackled it is important that all commissioners optimise use of existing capacity and follow best practice guidance in the commissioning process to maximise the potential for good matching despite scarcity of resource. A key element of best practice is optimising the use of CCSR.

A substantial investment by 4C's in the upgrade of CCSR commenced in September 2016. There is a 5 Phase Programme which is due to be completed by April 2018. The upgrade includes review and amendment to functionality with user level input plus background systems modernisation.

CCSR website <https://www.ccsr-wales.net/portal/>

4Cs support for new users email 4Cs@rctcbc.gov.uk or telephone 01443 744589

Further guidance documents:

Placement Process

Framework Search Flowchart

² As at October 2016
4Cs.ccsr



Appendix 1

Framework Providers

Children's Services

Strategy To Safely Reduce The Numbers Of Looked After Children

2017 – 2020

**SOCIAL
SERVICES
DIRECTORATE**

Version number:	1	Date Written:	May 2017
		Date Approved:	
Status:	Final	Date of Issue:	
		Review Date:	
Approved by:			
Author:	Tanya Evans		
Supporting documents:			
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Change history			

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1. INTRODUCTION

Part 6 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 sets out the Local Authority's duty to assess and meet a child's needs for accommodation if that child cannot reside within their family of origin and there is no viable alternative to placement.

However, it is accepted that outcomes for children in care are not always good and that, wherever possible, children should be supported to remain within their birth family.

It is also accepted that provision of appropriate placements for children looked after is an expensive option and the safe prevention of children becoming looked after is a preferable option from a moral, legislative and financial perspective

The needs of our Looked After Children (LAC) and young people are being met in a variety of ways: through provision of in-house foster placements; through provision of independently provided foster placements; through placement at home with their parents; through kinship fostering arrangements; through provision of residential placements; through Secure arrangements; through independent living arrangements.

For some children, their time being Looked After will be relatively short-lived as we implement plans which secure their safe discharge from the Looked After system. However the impact of the trauma and upheaval of being removed from their families cannot be easily assessed over the course of their lives. Suffice to say that their removal will have an impact regardless of their permanent care plan.

It is generally acknowledged that outcomes are poorer for Looked After Children than their peers. The NSPCC website (accessed on 10.04.17) helpfully summarises some of the key findings in relation to outcomes for Looked After Children. The findings relate, primarily to English studies but have relevance in Wales:

- they are more than four times likely to experience poor mental health; they are likely to do less well than their peers in school;
- 34% of care leavers are not engaged in education, employment and training at aged 19, compared to 15.5% of the general population;
- the rates of children who run away are higher for children in care than the general population and
- children in care are more likely to experience sexual exploitation.

There is a multiplicity of reasons for this but, in general terms, long-term care, by whichever method, should only be considered in the absence of any other alternative to family life.

As a Social Services Department we strive to:

- Promote independence
- Minimise dependency
- Only intervene when necessary

This strategy will embed these principles in practice which in turn will drive change in the way we deliver services to ensure the best possible outcomes for those children and families we work with

2. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014, The Children Act 1989, Adoption and Children Act 2002, Children Act 2004 provides the legislative and regulatory framework which underpins this strategy.

3. PURPOSE

The Purpose of this strategy is to achieve three key objectives. These are:-

1. To support families to stay together and reduce the need for children to be Looked After by ensuring a focus on early intervention and prevention across all service provision for children, young people and their families.
2. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the 'edge of care' by making sure that need is accurately assessed, resulting in the right children being accommodated at the right time. This includes supporting families to avoid children becoming accommodated unnecessarily and by making private arrangements within their wider family networks.
3. To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements that meets the diverse range of children's needs.

Figure 1 and 2 sets out the range of social care provision for children, young people and their families provided by the Council and key partners

Figure 1: Tiered Model of Children, Young People and Family Services

Multi Agency Tiers of Intervention

PROTECTION

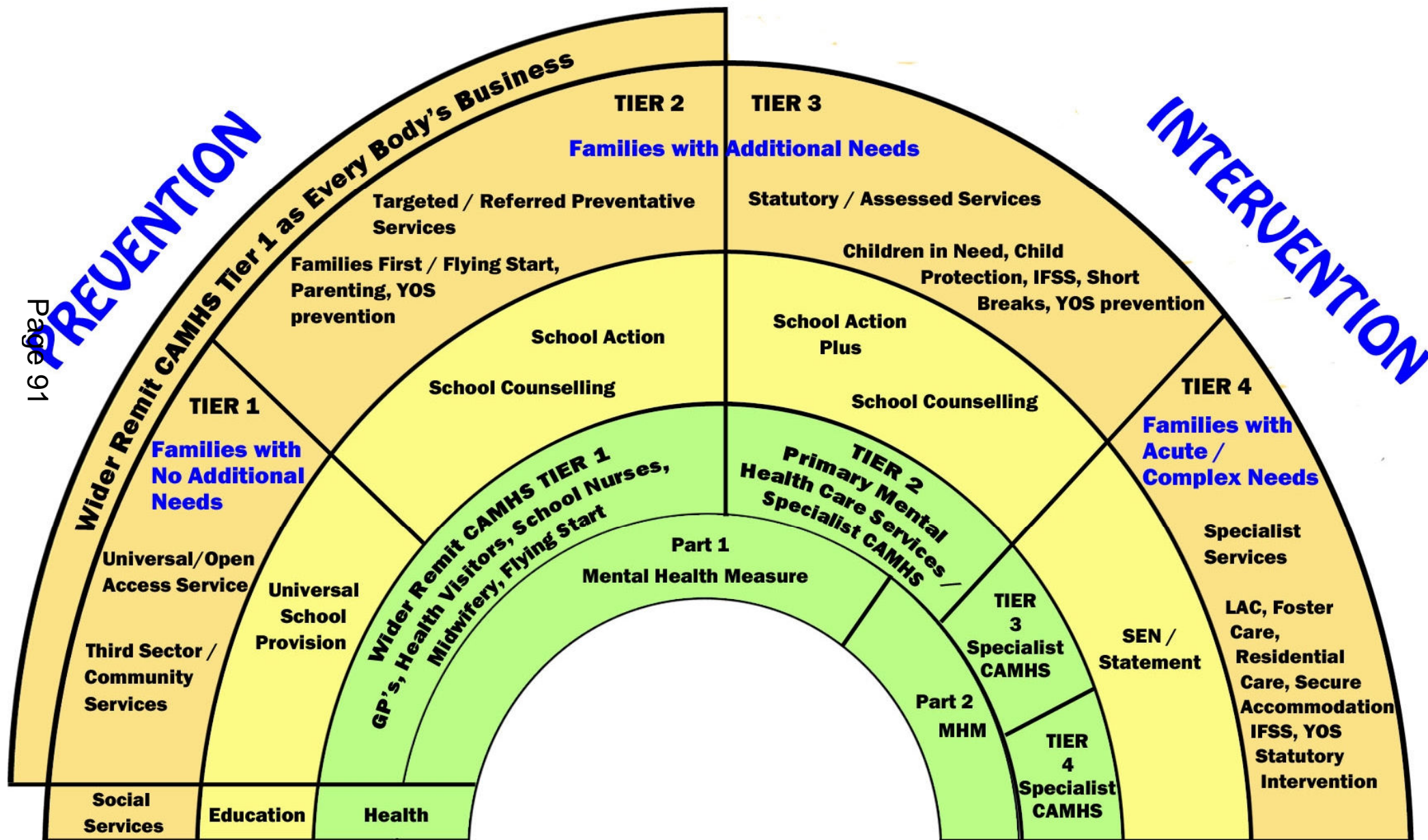


Figure 2

Level of Need and Type of Support or Intervention	Service Response and Priority	Service Context	Assessment, Planning and Resources
Tier 1 Universal Needs	Universal provision and /or access to health services, childcare, education, information, advice, guidance and other opportunities.	All children and young people, including all vulnerable groups and those with any type of special needs, for example Family Information Service	Universal – across a broad range of services.
Tier 2 Additional Needs	Either a single agency response or a multi-agency response where this is required.	Community based support for children and families suffering early stresses and temporary crises. Team Around the Family/Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) processes in place. Flying Start Programme and Families First Programme	Above plus Team around the Family model (Supporting Family Change) which implements JAFF as and when required. YISP, School Action and School Action Plus; Targeted Youth Support etc.
Tier 3 Complex Needs Health or development likely to be impaired without services but no immediate risk of significant harm. This tier includes; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children in need (Children Act, 1989). Some risk of significant harm/family breakdown 	Threshold for specialist assessment by services including Health, Social Care, Youth Offending. For Social Care: response within 24 hours and children seen within 7 working days as part of an “initial assessment”.	No immediate risk of significant harm. Community based support for children, young people and families facing a range of stresses, from moderate to severe Children and young people supported to remain living at home or within family network.	Above plus specialist assessment. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children’s Services Initial Assessment and Core Assessment Child in Need planning Child Protection planning Immediate Response Team Children’s Services Commissioned Services Short breaks services for disabled children and young people. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Tier 2/3 Services YOS assessments/preventative services Multi Agency Resources Panel (consideration of placement options)
Tier 4 Acute Needs High risk or actual family/social breakdown including children with significant health care needs. Statutory intervention.	Immediate service response required and subsequent service guaranteed.	Community based support for children and families facing severe stresses and at risk of family breakdown AND services to children and young people not living at home. Children accommodated in foster care or in some form of specialist provision.	Above plus Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) Foster care/ residential care Multi-agency Complex Needs Panel Specialist Health Services Specialist CAMHS YOS statutory interventions
Permanence	All children allocated to appropriate professional	Placed for adoption or in other long term and permanent care placements	Above plus Permanence Panel

4. TRENDS IN DEMAND FOR BLAENAU GWENT AND COMPARATOR AUTHORITIES

The Welsh Government data unit gathers information from all local authorities across Wales. This enables authorities to compare their performance with authorities with similar characteristics. The authorities identified as being the standard comparator authorities with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council currently are:

- Rhondda Cynon Taff
- Merthyr
- Caerphilly
- Torfaen

NB Newport have also been included as a neighbouring authority who has a developed Edge of Care Team which has been independently evaluated

This section of the report provides information on the following

- The numbers of **referrals** made into Childrens services
- The numbers and % of **re referrals** made into Childrens services
- The numbers of **children in need** and rate per 10,000 population
- The numbers of **children on the child protection register** and the rate per 10,000 population
- The numbers of **children looked after** and the rate per 10,000 population

Figure 1

Referrals to Children's Social Care Services:

Local Authority	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Rhondda Cynon Taff	2,767	3,017	3,441	3,102	3,765
Merthyr	741	928	825	698	802
Caerphilly	3,058	2,836	2,237	1,907	2,006
Blaenau Gwent	1,049	1,127	1,194	1,071	1,103
Torfaen	1,945	2,331	2,284	1,985	1,447
% per head of population					
Wales	45,905	39,817	35,285	35,423	33,536
Newport	4,304	3,524	1,935	1,871	2,018

Figure 1 shows a consistent picture in relation to the numbers of **referrals** being made into Blaenau Gwent Childrens services. What it does not show is the change in the nature of those referrals. The Blaenau Gwent safeguarding report which is produced 3 times a year and presented to Joint Scrutiny Committee has during 2016/17 seen a sustained increase in the number of child protection referrals. This inevitably means a higher level of intervention and work load.

Figure 2

Re-referrals into Children's Social Care Services:

Local Authority	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Rhondda Cynon Taff	532 19%	644 21%	775 22.5%	622 20%	908 24%
Merthyr	157 21%	239 26%	218 26%	112 16%	132 16%
Caerphilly	755 25%	760 27%	544 24%	400 21%	417 21%
Blaenau Gwent	172 16%	170 15%	154 13%	141 13%	148 13%
Torfaen	554 28%	593 25%	597 26%	530 27%	323 22%
Wales	13,635 30%	10,749 27%	7,839 22%	7,459 21%	6,727 20%
Newport	1,883 44%	1,374 39%	604 31%	438 23%	502 25%

Figure 2 shows that Blaenau Gwent has consistently had a lower number of re-referrals back into childrens services compared to our comparator authorities and the Wales average. This would suggest the needs of the children and families have been successfully met first time preventing further re referrals back into the service

Figure 3Number of **Children in Need**:

Local Authority	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rhondda Cynon Taff	1,880	1,865	2,115	2,095
Merthyr	555	575	615	530
Caerphilly	1,355	1,400	1,245	1,245
Blaenau Gwent	520	525	620	670
Torfaen	995	995	915	865
Wales	20,240	19,920	20,145	19,385
Newport	1,090	1,045	1,085	1,110

Figure 4Rate of **Children In Need** per 10,000 population by authority:

Local Authority	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rhondda Cynon Taff	375	370	425	420
Merthyr	440	460	490	425
Caerphilly	340	355	320	320
Blaenau Gwent	365	370	440	480
Torfaen	500	510	470	445
Wales	320	315	320	310
Newport	330	315	325	335

Figure 3 and 4 shows a continual rise year on year in the number and % per 10,000 population of child in need cases being open in Blaenau Gwent. It also shows in 2015 Blaenau Gwent had the highest number of children in need in relation to our comparator authorities and the Wales average.

Figure 5Number of Children on the **Child Protection Register** as at 31st March by authority

Local Authority	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Rhondda Cynon Taf	420	365	470	450	460
Merthyr Tydfil	105	115	135	105	105
Caerphilly	245	165	215	205	195
Blaenau Gwent	70	60	70	65	70
Torfaen	150	95	135	100	150
Wales	2,885	2,955	3,135	2,935	3,060
Newport	110	135	190	185	140

Figure 6

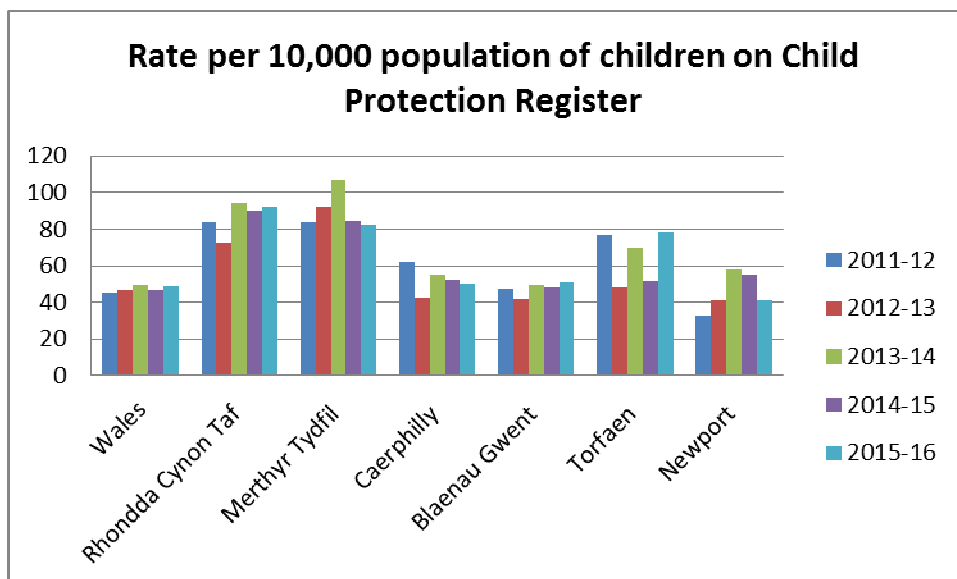


Figure 5 and 6 show the numbers and % per 10,000 of children on the Child Protection Register in Blaenau Gwent is lower than our comparator authorities RCT, Merthyr and Torfaen but within similar numbers and % per 10,000 population as Newport and Caerphilly. The children's services senior management team regularly scrutinise those children who are on the child protection register to ensure risks are being appropriately managed and scrutinises those cases where children have remained on the register for over 12 months. This has had the impact of very few numbers of children remaining on the register for over 12 months without a clear multi agency decision being about the ongoing risk to those children.

Figure 7

Number of **Looked After Children** by authority at 31st March:

Local Authority	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Rhondda Cynon Taf	595	620	650	620	625
Merthyr Tydfil	190	180	175	165	140
Caerphilly	310	305	275	270	275
Blaenau Gwent	135	135	145	135	195
Torfaen	300	300	295	290	270
Wales	5,720	5,765	5,745	5,615	5,660
Newport	275	280	285	285	292

Figure 8

Rate of **Looked After Children** per 10,000 by authority:

Local Authority	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Rhondda Cynon Taf	119	124	130	124	125
Merthyr Tydfil	153	145	140	131	113
Caerphilly	78	77	71	70	72
Blaenau Gwent	96	96	102	98	139
Torfaen	152	153	152	150	142
Wales	90	91	91	89	90
Newport	83	84	86	86	88

Figure 7 and 8 demonstrates a significant rise in the numbers and % per 10,000 in Looked After Children numbers in Blaenau Gwent during 2015/16. For many years Blaenau Gwent had been comparable to the Wales average however the 2015/16 figures now places the authority out of kilter with this position. It is interesting to note that Newport and Caerphilly who have Edge of Care Teams in place have maintained a low rate of looked after children per 10,000 population. It is also interesting to note Torfaen up until 2016 had a reducing number per 10,000 population. Part of this strategy involves learning from research currently being undertaken by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board to learn from best practice within the Gwent area

5. ANALYSIS OF BLAENAU GWENT'S LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN POPULATION AND PROVISION OF LOCAL FOSTER CARE

Figure 9

Breakdown of looked after children by age as @ Feb 2017

	Number	Percentage
Under 5	50	26%
5 – 11 years	70	36%
12 – 15 years	49	25%
16+	25	13%
Total LAC	194	

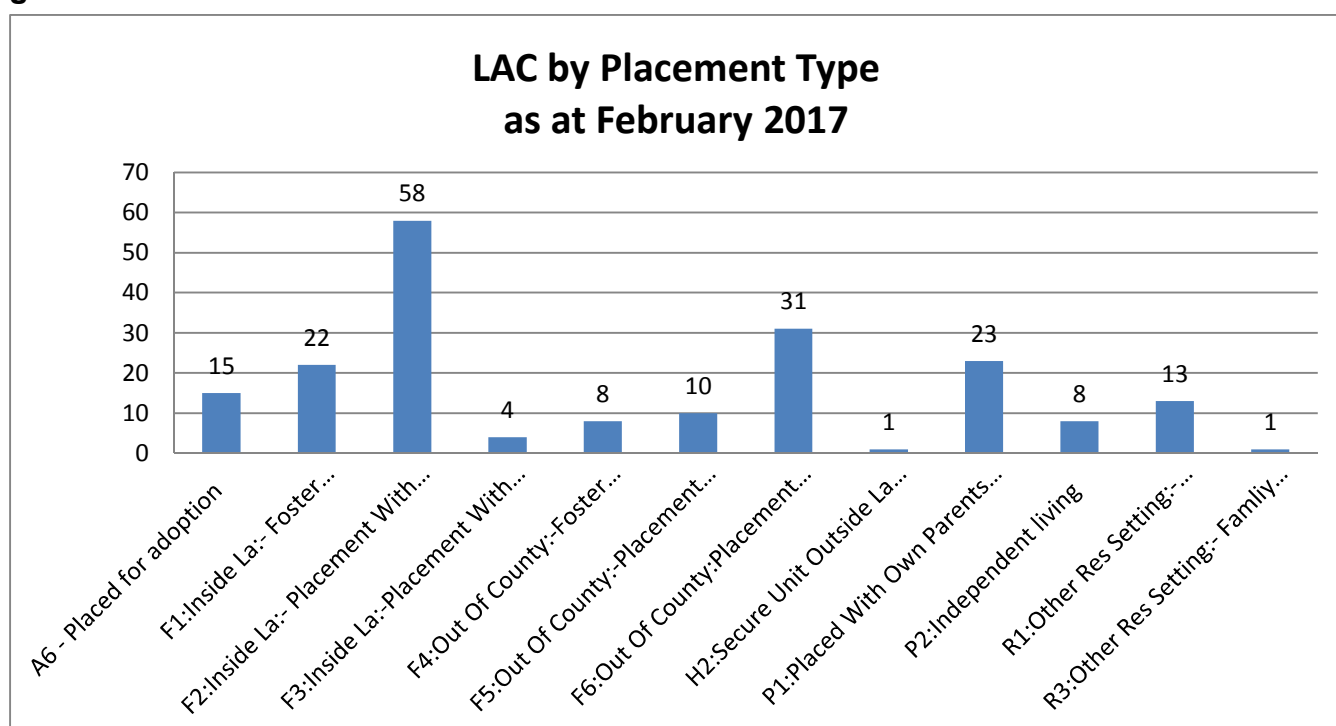
Figure 9 shows us the age profile of out looked after children. This information is not easily available to enable us to compare ourselves to our comparator authorities. It is important we understand this demographic. This cohort of children most likely to exit the looked after system is the 0- 5 year olds. It is this cohort who is most often involved in care proceedings and will either return to the care of their parents or extended family members or be adopted. The older the child the more likely they will remain in the looked after system.

Figure 10

Breakdown of Placement type as @ Feb 2017

Placement Type	Number	Percentage
A6 - Placed for adoption	15	8%
F1:Inside La:- Foster Placement With A Relative Or Friend	22	11%
F2:Inside La:- Placement With Other Foster Carer Provided By La	58	30%
F3:Inside La:-Placement With Foster Carer, Through Agency	4	2%
F4:Out Of County:-Foster Placement With A Relative Or Friend	8	4%
F5:Out Of County:-Placement With Other Foster Carer Through La	10	5%
F6:Out Of County: Placement With Foster Carer, through Agency	31	16%
H2:Secure Unit Outside La Boundary	1	1%
P1:Placed With Own Parents Or Person With Parental Responsibility	23	12%
P2:Independent living	8	4%
R1:Other Res Setting:- Residential Care Home	13	7%
R3:Other Res Setting:- Family Centre Or Mother And Baby Unit	1	1%
Total LAC	194	

Figure 11



Figures 10 and 11 show where our looked after children are living. The highest proportions are living with our own local authority foster carers inside the local authority borough. Overall approximately two thirds are with our own foster carers and one third are with independent foster carers and yet the budget for each cohort is the same. This is not to say those living with

independent foster carers receive a high quality of care (this is simply not the case) it just costs more. It is imperative we try to redress this balance not least from the point of view that most independent foster placement are outside of Blaenau Gwent making it difficult for children to stay in the same school and maintain friendship groups and contact with family.

Figure 12

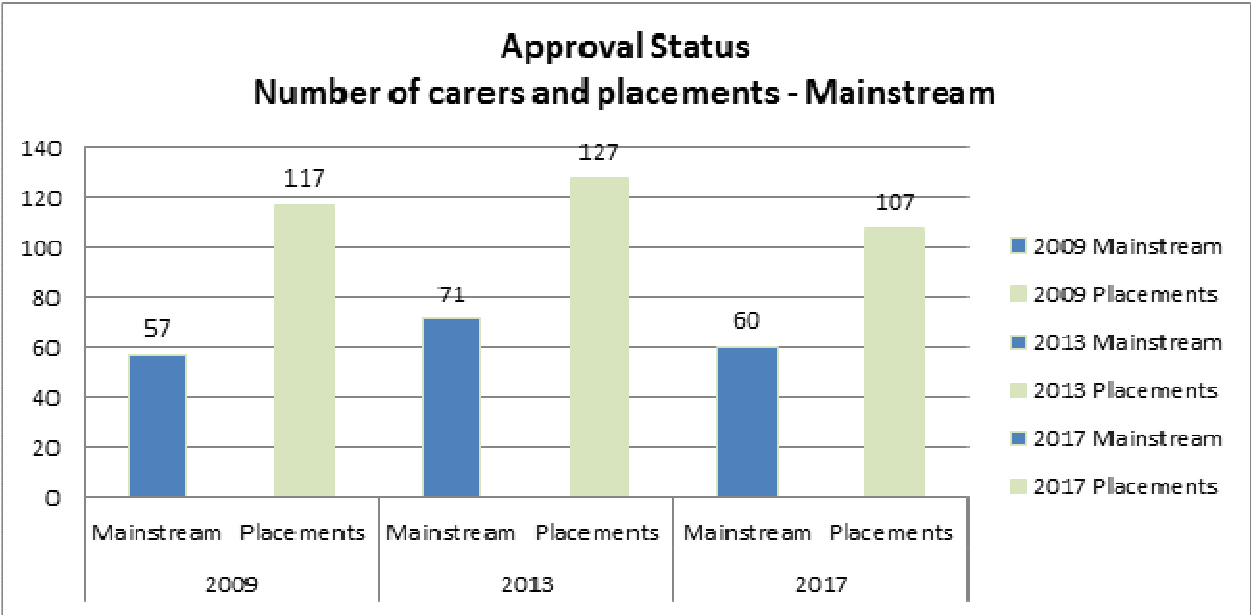


Figure 12 shows how the numbers of Mainstream (local authority) foster carers have decreased since 2013. This is not a picture that is unique to Blaenau Gwent which is why Welsh Government through the Ministerial Advisory Group for Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children are in the process of developing a National Foster Framework. There is a recognition Wales is in the middle of managing a declining number and aging population of foster carers when the demand for foster placements is increasing.

Figure 13

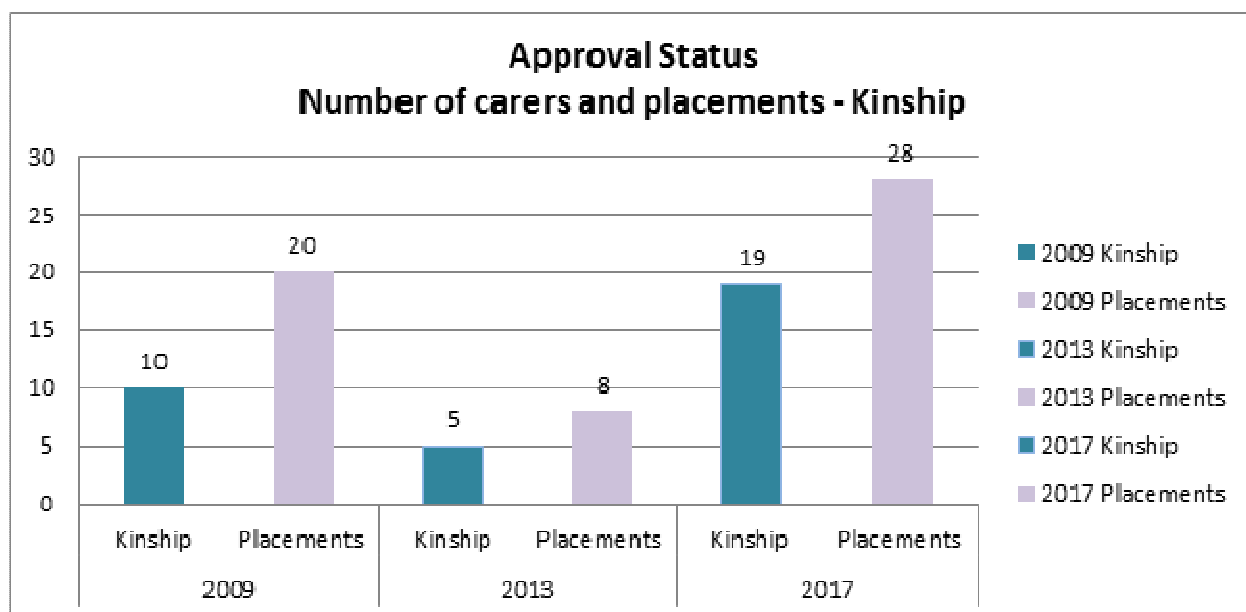


Figure 13 show the increase of Kinship placements since 2013. Kinship placements are family members who have been assessed as foster carers who care for their children. This cohort of carers includes grandparents, aunts and uncles. Historically these placements have been made informally by the local authority but case law has made these informal arrangements very difficult to achieve. The Social Service and Wellbeing Act 2014 puts a great deal of emphasis on prevention and early intervention. Part of this strategy is using this aspect of the Act to return to the use of these informal arrangements when it is appropriate and safe to do so.

6. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE OBJECTIVES

The following are the principles which underpin this strategy

1. The responsibility for meeting the needs of children and young people Looked After or at risk of becoming Looked After rests across all services for children, including statutory and independent providers.
2. The majority of children are most likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own families and communities.
3. Preventative services and early intervention to support children in need and their families should be provided to give them every chance to stay together.
4. Where children cannot be supported within their immediate family, families will be supported to make private arrangements within their wider family and friendship networks and, where necessary, to make these arrangements permanent through the use of Child Arrangement Orders and Special Guardianship Orders

5. Family and friends fostering arrangements will be explored as the preferred alternative arrangement where it is necessary for the local authority to share parental responsibility or intervene in managing risk and protecting children
6. Where a child's needs cannot be adequately met through the arrangements described in principles 4 and 5, the majority will have their needs met best in a substitute family, preferably with in-house foster carers and, if not, with Independent Fostering Agency carers wherever possible living within Blaenau Gwent County Borough.
7. Residential care placements will be made only where the complexity and challenge of a child or young person's needs mean they are unable to live within a family setting or where a young person is subject to a Court Ordered Secure Remand.
8. Placements should be local (unless safeguarding concerns dictate otherwise) to enable children and young people to remain in their communities, maintain their networks and minimise disruption in their lives.
9. All Looked after Children of statutory school age should receive appropriate education provision regardless of their placement and ability to access school. Providing appropriate support to enable engagement in education is just as important as finding suitable care placements for Looked after Children.
10. Placements should support a positive transition to independence, adulthood, education, employment, and training and where applicable, resettlement back into the community from custodial settings.

7. OBJECTIVE 1: TO SUPPORT FAMILIES TO STAY TOGETHER

Resources available to help achieve this objective

Information, Advice and Assistance – Blaenau Gwent is well placed to deliver the provision of a service that provides people with information and advice relating to care and support, and assistance in accessing care and support. The service provides the critical entry point to Children's and Adults Services and has a key role in assessing the needs of children, young people and their parents and carers and signposting them to the most appropriate solution to meet their needs. The service enables early intervention and access to preventative support to reduce the need for statutory care and support.

Prevention and Early intervention - We need to work together in building the resilience of parents and families and giving them the skills and confidence to provide a positive and safe family environment in which children and young people can thrive. This includes direct support when families are struggling as well as developing and building capacity in families to sustain effective strategies for managing change and difficulty without the need for ongoing professional support. This will include responsive assessments and provision of Direct Payments for children with complex needs, to provide additional supports at the lowest level of intervention.

There is a range of provision available within the Borough which includes:-

- **Flying Start** - a Welsh Government grant funded programme available in targeted areas of Blaenau Gwent and supports families where there are children between the ages of 0 and 3 years to give them a Flying Start in life. The scheme has 4 core elements which include, enhanced health visiting support, free part time child care, parenting, speech and language support. Flying start also has an outreach element to the programme which works with children under the age of 3 whose names are on the child protection register.
- **Families First** - a Welsh Government grant funded programme, established to target early intervention and prevention services to children, young people and families, minimizing the need for higher level support and intervention from statutory services. The initiative recognizes that some of the difficulties children and young people present are as a result of factors affecting other members of the family. The programme aims to provide families with holistic, multi-agency support, tailored to the needs of individuals and the family as a whole.
- The Families First programme in Blaenau Gwent has been restructured and the new delivery model will start from April 2017. The programme will comprise of a Team around the Family model plus a small number of commissioned services. The majority of interventions will be delivered by 2 hubs covering the North and South of the Borough. This multiagency Team will undertake an assessment of need and deliver a plan of intervention according to that need.
- **Reflect Service** - Reflect provides support to women, and where appropriate their partners, following the compulsory, permanent removal of one or more children due to child protection concerns. The service will provide holistic support to enable women to make positive changes for the future, which can include avoiding pregnancy through the use of long acting reversible contraception systems (LARCS)
- **Gwent Missing Children Hub** – This project aims is to improve the lives and outcomes for children who go missing by reducing the number of missing episodes for children by using the independent debriefing service which seeks to meet with every child following a missing episode to establish the reasons why and provide support to prevent this from reoccurring.
- **Youth Offending Service (YOS)**– Prevention Service - provides voluntary family support to those families of children and young people assessed as ‘at risk of offending’ through their prevention service and to those ‘at risk of re-offending’ whilst under supervision of a statutory court order where the family agree to engage with family support services to reduce the risk of offending.

The YOS offers eligible parents access to 1:1 or group work programmes to improve their skills in managing and changing inappropriate behaviours. The YOS will also supervise parents of children and young people on Statutory Parenting Orders imposed by the Court, as defined by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 when a young person’s risk of offending or re-offending determines such action is required.

Actions Required

Management responsibilities

- Embed the new family's first structure from April 2017 to deliver targeted interventions to prevent needs from escalating.
- Continue robust delivery of the 4 core elements of Flying Start and maximize the use of the outreach element to identify need at an early stage and deliver interventions to prevent needs from escalating
- Commission legal advice on a regional level to establish how children can be placed with extended family without the need to become looked after under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014.

Developing Practice

- Ensure regular review of children placed at home with parents under a care order, and ensure revocation of the order is done at the earliest opportunity.
- Ensure the option of rehabilitation back to family members is discussed at every looked after Childrens review
- Embed a family meeting culture across the service to enable family to establish their own support and solutions when a child is at risk of becoming looked after
- Peer reviews of cases will be undertaken to ensure thresholds are consistent.

How will we know the objective has been achieved?

- We will be confident we are looking after the right number of children
- There will be a stabilisation or possible reduction in the numbers of looked after children
- There will be a possible reduction in the numbers of children receiving statutory social services
- Also possible lower numbers of children on the child protection register

8. OBJECTIVE 2: TO MANAGE RISK CONFIDENTLY AND SUPPORT FAMILIES AT THE EDGE OF CARE

What is available to help achieve this objective?

We need to ensure the right children become accommodated at the right time. Where early intervention and preventative services do not meet the needs of a child or young person, eligibility for further services is established if their needs can, and can only, be met by the preparation of care and support plan.

To do this, we need to be able to manage risk successfully with families who are approaching the threshold for care by providing effective assessments and interventions which support families to make changes whilst always ensuring that children and young people are kept safe.

Building on the service developments outlined in Objective 1, we need to support staff to make evidence-based risk assessments and implement strategies to manage identified risks. This will require managerial oversight and agreement of risk management plans. It will also require other family members, agencies and out of hours services to be clear about their role in implementing risk management plans.

In addition, the following key areas contribute to supporting children, young people and families 'at the edge of care':

- **Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS)** – funded by Welsh Government, IFSS is a regional multi-agency team working intensively with children and families where parental substance misuse co-exists with concerns about the welfare of the child.
- **Engagement of wider family and friendship networks-** Where a family is struggling to cope or has reached the point of crisis, we will support the family to explore whether there is capacity within the wider family and friendship network to provide appropriate care for the child or young person either temporarily or when necessary on a permanent basis through private family arrangements. This will be achieved through adoption of Family Group Meeting/ Mediation approaches to all our work.
- **Risk management tools-** These tools were adopted by the local authority and all staff received mandatory training during January/February 2016. The tools support social workers and managers to clearly identify risks to then agree appropriate interventions
- **Provide shared care and short breaks to enable families time limited opportunities to have respite or to resolve issues impacting on their parenting capacity-** Sometimes families need respite from caring duties or time and space to resolve stressful, chaotic situations and achieve change. Traditionally, short breaks care and respite care has only been provided for disabled children and young people. Offering short breaks and shared care arrangements for children and young people on the edge of care can be a positive action that reduces the need for them to come into longer term or permanent care. Use of childminding can assist families to access the most appropriate level of support when they need it.
- **Ensure placements made in an emergency or at short notice have robust time limited care plans-**We need to continue to ensure that the right children are accommodated at the right time and in the right placement. It is difficult to provide well matched and value for money placements in emergency situations or where requests are made at very short notice. However, we must acknowledge that a small number of children and young people may require immediate accommodation as a result of a Court Order or because of their involvement in the Criminal Justice System.
- **Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless-** A key group of young people on the edge of care are 16 and 17 year olds who present to Social Services or Housing as homeless. In the majority of cases, mediation will be attempted and will determine whether a Social Work Assessment and/or other services are required in order for young people to be supported to return home. It should only be those young

people who genuinely do not have a suitable place to live that can access accommodation provided by the Council. In those instances where there are additional complexities, the Social Work assessment may conclude that the young person should become Looked After. If we are to succeed in supporting this group of vulnerable young people, it is important that we continue to work in partnership with Housing Services and Supporting People to enable access to appropriate short-term accommodation that allows the assessment to be completed and any family mediation to be undertaken. Such accommodation allows us to avoid making more expensive short-term arrangements which can often create false expectations and hamper efforts to return young people home.

- **Supervision of Staff-** All staff receive monthly supervision. This is an imperative priority to maintain a safe working environment and support staff when managing risk.
- **A workforce trained and confident to deliver appropriate interventions-** The workforce development team have a key role play in commissioning and delivery of the training needs identified within the child care workforce. Team/ Service Managers have a key role in identifying the training needs of the workforce.

Actions Required

Management Responsibilities

- Propose the development of an edge of care team to work intensively with families whose children are on the edge of becoming looked after. An edge of care team is a dedicated team of workers who do not case hold but work intensively with families who are experiencing issues such as substance misuse, domestic violence, mental health issues, etc.
- Engage with the Gwent Children and Families Partnership Board who are undertaking research into preventing the escalation of complex needs and use these findings to improve and shape future service delivery...
- Develop a system to highlight those cases on the edge of care
- Review the way in which IFSS deliver services to widen their remit

Developing Practice

- Use the South East Wales Safeguarding Childrens Board multi agency supervision guidance to review cases where children continue to be on the child protection register following their 3rd review.
- Ensure the workforce are trained and skilled in a variety of interventions such as motivational interviewing, adopting strengths based approach to practice.
- Support social workers to manage risk for children on the edge of care.
- Embed a family meeting culture in practice
- Embed the use of risk management tools to ensure accurate assessment of risk
- Roll out attachment theory training currently being provided by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) Psychology and embed into practice using bi monthly Team consultations to discuss complex cases.

How will we know when the Objective is achieved?

- We will be confident we are looking after the right number of children
- There will be a stabilisation or possible reduction in the numbers of looked after children
- There will be a possible reduction in the numbers of children receiving statutory social services
- Also possible lower numbers of children on the child protection register
- Evidence via case audits that family meetings are occurring and embedded in practice.
- Feedback from the workforce via staff survey they feel confident and supported when managing risk and delivering a variety of interventions.
- Evidence of children being cared for by extended family members without having to enter the care system

9. OBJECTIVE 3: TO PROVIDE AND COMMISSION FLEXIBLE AND AFFORDABLE RANGE OF HIGH QUALITY PLACEMENTS

For children and young people who are accommodated we will continue to ensure we have the right range of placements available to promote positive experiences and meet diverse need.

The Placement Team aims to recruit a range of foster placements within the County Borough to meet demand and to meet the individual needs of children and young people.

In order to ensure our range of placements are good value for money and affordable within the budget available, we need to focus on achieving the following areas:

What is available to help achieve this objective?

- **Placement Team** – Blaenau Gwent has a dedicated Placement Team who are responsible for the recruitment, assessment and ongoing support of our in house foster placements. The Team is also responsible for identifying Independent foster placements and residential placements when the need arises.
- **Childrens Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs)** - The Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru is a partnership of authorities across Wales who work together to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people and achieve value for money through working together collaboratively. As a collaborative partnership of 15 Welsh local authorities 4Cs continue to shape the children's placement market to deliver the range and volume of placements needed in South, Mid, and West Wales at value for money prices which deliver quality outcomes, in particular placement stability and a range of positive transitions for vulnerable children
- **(Greater Gwent) Children and Families Partnership Board-** This Board aims to strategically direct the multi-agency development and implementation of services for vulnerable children, young people and their families/carers across agencies in the Greater

Gwent area (services to be identified by the Partnership). The Partnership will be between Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and the Local Authorities of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire and Torfaen ('the 5 Authorities') and the Independent Sector (to be identified as work streams develop).

Actions Required

Management Responsibilities

- Increase the number and capacity of in-house fostering placements to ensure we have enough families with the right combination of skills who are supported to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in the Blaenau County Borough
- Reduce our dependence on Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and clearly specify their role.
- Work with Supporting People and the independent providers of accommodation to ensure an appropriate range of accommodation for young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years
- Continue to work with the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group to implement the work programme which includes the development of a National Fostering Framework.
- Continue to collaborate with authorities in Gwent to develop a regional approach to providing and supporting local authority foster placements.

Developing Practice

- Manage demand for residential placements ensuring children and young people only use this resource for the minimum amount of time possible before moving on to alternative accommodation which will meet their needs
- Ensure all foster carers have the correct level and access to training according to their needs

How will we know when the Objective is achieved?

- An increase in the number of local authority foster placements
- Reduce the number of Blaenau Gwent children being placed with independent fostering agencies.
- Regional ways of delivering a fostering service will have been explored and improvements to service delivery will have been made.
- The current research projects being undertaken by the Greater Gwent Children and family partnership Board will be complete and service delivery changed as a result of the findings.
- Service delivery will be maintained within the looked after children's budget

10. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This Strategy sets out how we will deliver our commitment to families to stay together, to manage risk confidently and ensure when children do need to be looked after we have the a wide range of placement options to meet these needs.

The development of this Strategy simply marks the start of a journey. It is delivery of the objectives included in the document that will make the difference. The work will require a continued, coordinated Council wide effort.

The Children Services Departmental Leadership Team (DLT) will be tasked with overseeing the delivery of the strategy, monitoring the impact on children and their families and driving forward the focus on reducing admissions to care.

The Actions required to deliver this strategy will be contained within the Childrens Services Annual Business Plan. Progress against each action will be reported quarterly through the DLT.

We will continue to refine the plans and build our evidence base over coming months; as our thinking evolves, so will this Strategy. As a result, this Strategy and the associated action plan will continue to be live documents, regularly updated and reviewed on an annual basis.