



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

Out of County Placements

May 2018



Cardiff Council

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CHAIR'S FOREWORD

I would like to thank the members of the committee who took part in the task and finish inquiry into out of county placements. I would also like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence in front of the committee during the process. Last, but not least, Martyn Hutching's support and professionalism during this sometimes difficult and challenging inquiry has been immense and I am truly grateful for this.

This was always going to be a challenging, interesting, thought provoking Task and Finish inquiry. The fact is that this is an issue that is not just affecting our city, it is affecting local authorities across the whole nation. During the process, the committee had the privilege of interviewing young people who had been affected by being placed out of county, so it was not just from an adults or agencies perspective that the outcomes and recommendations are based on. This report's outcomes and recommendations are based on what is best for the young people and what as a committee we feel is the way forward for the local authority; we believe that, in time, the recommendations will have a hugely positive effect on young people and their families. The report will also help Children's Services to continue their improvement in the coming years.

Thanks again to everyone who took part



**Councillor Lee Bridgeman
(Chairperson)**

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 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)**

R19 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 31/07/17

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.

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;

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 placed 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 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

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