

## **Agenda Supplement – Public Accounts Committee**

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Meeting Venue:

For further information contact:

**Committee Room 3 – Senedd**

**Fay Bowen**

Meeting date: 23 October 2017

Committee Clerk

Meeting time: 13.45

0300 200 6565

[SeneddPAC@assembly.wales](mailto:SeneddPAC@assembly.wales)

### **– Inquiry into Care Experienced Children and Young People: Consultation Responses**

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Please note the documents below are in addition to those published in the main Agenda and Reports pack for this Meeting

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#### **5 Care experienced children and young people**

(14.50 – 15.30)

(Pages 1 – 91)

PAC(5)-27-17 Paper 3 – Analysis of consultation responses

Attached Documents:

CECYP\_01 Tros Gynnal Children and NYAS Cymru

CECYP\_02 Fabric

CECYP\_03 Youth Offending Team Managers

CECYP\_04 Barnardos

CECYP\_05 Children's Commissioner for Wales

CECYP\_06 Children in Wales

CECYP\_07 The Fostering Network

CECYP\_08 Camarthenshire County Council

CECYP\_09 Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

CECYP\_10 Children and Young People's Mental Health Policy Group

CECYP\_11 Individual

CECYP\_12 Individual

CECYP\_13 Individual

CECYP\_14 Cross Party Group on Looked After Children



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales  
Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee

Ymchwiliad i blant a phobl ifanc sydd wedi bod mewn gofal / Inquiry into care  
experienced children and young people

PAC(5) CECYP - 01

Ymateb gan Tros Gynnal Plant a NYAS (Y Gwasanaeth Eiriolaeth Ieuentid  
Cenedlaethol) Cymru / Evidence from Tros Gynnal Children and NYAS (National  
Youth Advocacy Service) Wales

**1. It is our view that the overall cost to and value for money of the range public services aimed at improving outcomes for Care Experienced Young People would be;**

a) Enhanced by the involvement of LAC advocates outside of the statutory active offer entitlement, for example, return interviews by independent LAC advocates when children go missing from care or are arrested by police and subjected to the judiciary system; this would ensure they are accessing their rights and entitlements.

b) Enhanced by the involvement of Independent Visitors as per the revised legislative guidelines. The access to an IV service is currently not transparent or equal in terms of access across Wales.

c) The resources for LAC children/young people need to be linked to other public spending particularly on leisure, art, cultural events, sport, transport etc. which are sponsored or provided by the local authority. We believe care experienced children and young people should access these services for free across Wales. More collaborative working could be achieved across public sector to achieve this.

**2. Our view on whether the WG desired outcomes for Care Experienced CYP are being delivered by the current levels of public expenditure is outlined below;**

a) Whereas we welcome the commitment and improvement to the educational attainment of looked after children, and CCfW Raising Ambitions Report 2016 along with the “When I am ready” initiative. We need to know these outcomes are being monitored and evaluated for the long term.

b) We currently do not have an outcomes framework to measure the impact of statutory advocacy intervention.

c) We are concerned as to how the deployment of pupil development grant is being implemented and monitored and are aware that the leaving care grant is not equitable across Wales. Therefore young people do not access their full rights and entitlements when going through transition to adulthood.

d) The responsibility of being accountable for LA expenditure for LAC should reside with Corporate Parents to compare the impact of outcomes framework with the level of expenditure per authority.

**3. From our experience it is our view that the extent of spending specific to care experienced young people is not balanced across the range of public services.**

“Local Authorities are hamstrung by the year on year funding model that means that middle managers budgets often make placement decisions on in year budget considerations rather than based on the best interests of the child over the whole life time of the child” (Prison Reform Trust “In Care Out of Trouble” 2016)

As advocacy providers we undertake cases where evidence of care plans are not always inclusive of the views of children and young people. Their views, wishes and feelings are not always taken into account and foster placements are not seen as a long term option for children/young people but a holding solution before adoption or return home or other outcome which may become a reality.

**4. We do not feel public bodies have placed sufficient emphasis on a long term preventative spend approach in line with the wellbeing of future generations (Wales) Act 2015, to maximise the benefits of public expenditure for this group of children.**

We have concerns about the commitment long term funding for Welsh Government policies and initiatives for example the current financial improvements to enable LAC to access their statutory advocacy entitlements. We are very concerned that in 2019 this current level of funding will be absorbed to the revenue support grant with no sanctions to ensure that it sustained at the current level.

This response will firstly provide background information on Fabric as the respondent to the consultation response before looking at the individual questions posed by the committee followed by views in relation to goals and principles within the Well-Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.

## 1. Background

Fabric is an award winning social enterprise which opened in 2016 to provide accommodation and support to 16 and 17-year olds who are the responsibility of the Local Authority. Fabric is in the process of expanding its services via a grant from Welsh Government's "Innovate to Save" programme. Fabric will provide a step-down provision, "Community Accommodation", where young people can remain post 18 until they are ready to be supported to live in accommodation reflective of that entered by their peers in the general population.

## 2. Committee Questions.

- Overall cost and value for money in the range of public services aimed at improving outcomes

Overall costs for children in care are difficult to ascertain for Wales due to different funding streams and agencies involved. The weekly cost of a child in care depends on where they are placed but can range in weekly cost (for a cost in a provision like a foyer for 16+) to £865 (median cost of Foster placement) and up to £5,769 for the costlier residential provisions.

More data is needed to assess the value for money in these services. Fabric supports young people who have left foster placements and residential homes and have assessed that these young people have very limited semi-independent living skills. All placements for young people should be supporting young people to develop these skills regardless of what age the original plan is for them to move on. Plans for young people change and therefore all young people should be supported to develop these skills prior to the age of 16 which the point at which they can move into supported accommodation provisions. Not having these skills delays them entering independent living which is the key goal for most young people in supported accommodation and causes bed blocking.

Pathway plans need to be put into effect at a younger age to ensure placements are working on developing these skills with young people. Whilst foster care is providing a family environment for young people it should still be focused on the fact that these young people will become independent currently at a much younger age than the general population as the foster carers stop getting paid at a certain age (18 or 21 with the “When I am Ready” scheme). There often appears to be a belief that as foster carers are paid to look after young people that they are paid to do things for young people, better training needs to be provided on how foster carers can support the development of semi-independent living skills (a service Fabric offers).

Better accountability should be placed on residential units to ensure that young people are being supported to develop semi-independent living skills and not simply “containing” young people. Evidence from young people who have been referred to Fabric suggests that young people in residential care are less well equipped than those in foster care to manage in semi-independent living skills. Pathway plans put in at a younger age would assist this alongside better training for residential staff on supporting young people to develop these skills (a service offered by Fabric).

- Whether the Welsh Government desired outcomes for care experienced young people is being delivered by current expenditures.

It would be useful if there was an accessible list of the desired outcomes for care experienced young people to provide an accurate response to this question.

One basis for a response could be that Welsh Government recently published a strategy (28<sup>th</sup> January 2016) on children in care which emphasised the importance of education in achieving better outcomes. This strategy was subject to consultation and set many targets on improved outcomes but no information appears to be available on the achievements to date. The last update on progress was published on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2017. Additional funding has recently been allocated to support existing service provision and to assess other approaches to improve outcomes. It is too early to assess how effective these measures will be.

Another basis for response could be to discuss against the concept of corporate parenting which is described by Welsh Government as that which seeks “the same outcomes for children in care and care leavers that every good parent would want for their own children by ensuring they do everything possible to give them the

best possible start in life.” Statistics for care leavers highlight the difference in their outcomes in comparison to their peers in the general population.

LAC/ Care leavers are:

- 3 x more likely to be cautioned or convicted of an offence
- 4 x more likely to have a mental health disorder
- 5 x less likely to achieve 5 good grades at GCSE (A\*-C)
- 8 x more likely to be excluded from school

These disadvantages continue into adulthood since:

- 14% of young women leaving care are already pregnant or already a mother
- 20% of homeless people are care leavers
- 25% of adult prisoners have been in care
- 70% of sex workers have been in care.

Experience from within Fabric would highlight that often young people are not provided with the placements that meet their needs best. Inappropriate placements are detrimental to young people’s well-being and progress. Identification of appropriate placements earlier on decrease cost and risks to Local Authorities, young people’s behaviour becomes more chaotic when their needs are not being sufficiently met.

To be effective Corporate Parents, Local Authorities need to be directed to supply a service which replicates that of a young person living at home. The average age a young person leaves home in the UK is 24 yet young people leaving care are (if not in a “When I am Ready” placement) are independent at 18. To quote a resident “the Local authority remove me from my family, impact on my relationship with my family, put me in homes where some may care and some may not and then say goodbye to me at the point I need them most.”

From Fabric’s experiences and statistical data that is accessible one point of view could be that whatever is provided is insufficient but on the other hand more could possibly be achieved by taking alternative approaches in some areas.

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

More transparency in the money being spent on services delivered to young people would allow for a thorough examination of the resources and services that are being used to deliver these outcomes. An example of this would be the role of the Young Person's Adviser (YPA), this role is often separate to the people that are delivering support to young people daily. Our residents would prefer their YPA to be a member of Fabric staff with whom they have a close working relationship and would alleviate frustrations about limited access to/contract from their YPA.

- Whether public bodies have placed sufficient emphasis on long term preventative spend approach in line with the Well-Being of Future Generations Act to maximise benefits of public expenditure.

No information is available to assess the effectiveness of preventative spending. It is likely that given the outcomes and numbers of Looked After Children that we see, the majority of spend is used in a reactive manner. If Local Authorities took an innovative and preventative spend approach to the current Looked After Children and Care Leaver population there would be significant financial benefits in the future. For example, if 14% of care leavers are pregnant or already mothers when leaving care, the percentage of them having children below the average age

### **3. Goals within the Well-Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.**

There are 7 goals within the Act, the first 5 can be applied to this inquiry

1. A Prosperous Wales. This goal makes specific reference to a Wales which "develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities allowing people to take advantage of wealth generated through securing decent work."

As of 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2017 there were 5,600 children who are looked after in Wales. Of these 5,600 children 940 were aged 16 and 17. 43% of care leavers are classified as Not in Education, Training or Employment. Whilst the looked after numbers will vary from care leavers (care leaver age range is substantially wider) a calculation based on the above could suggest that there are 400 young people not in education/training/employment which means 400 people that are significantly less likely to be contributing to the economy in the coming years.

There is no data available on the numbers of care leavers accessing university, experience indicates that this number is substantially lower than representation from the general population. Fabric is in the process of making links with Swansea University to access some data regarding this.

The educational attainment of children in care is markedly lower than other children. A study from 2009 found that 53% of looked after children leave school with no formal qualifications. Only 13% obtain 5 A–C Grades compared within 47% of children in the generation.

There is no available statistics/information regarding care leavers accessing benefits however reports have suggested that young people leaving care are over two times as likely to be supported to access benefits than they are to access education/training/employment. Experience from Fabric also highlights that many apprenticeship placements offer wages of £50 per week. This is not sustainable for care leavers post 18, meaning their decisions about career paths are dictated by surviving financially and not by what future they want to create for themselves.

2. A Resilient Wales: This refers to “healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change.”

There are numerous costs to society in Wales of Care Leavers, impacting on the social and economic resilience via unemployment, homelessness, substance misuse, prison and intergenerational transmission of social services involvement including children being brought into care.

The Care Leavers Association found that 25% of the prison population has been in care, 49% of the young men under the age of 21 in the Criminal Justice System have spent time in care and 27% of the young men in custody have spent time in care (33% for 15–18-year olds). These statistics should be taken together with the cost of the UK justice system in the points below

3. A Healthier Wales: “A society in which people’s physical and mental wellbeing is maximised and in which choices and behaviour that benefit future health are understood.

Over 25% of the prison population has been in care. In the UK, it costs £65,000 to imprison a person and after that it costs £40,000 for every subsequent year.



65% of children in care are assessed as having a mental health disorder as opposed to 10% of the general population

One research study found that 42% of the prostitutes interviewed had been in care however other studies show the % as high as 70%.

4. A More Equal Wales: A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic circumstances).

It would be useful to know the % of care leavers that have children at a young age and the % of child protection cases where parents are young parents themselves. Experience would indicate that young people who have a history of being in care are more likely to have social services involvement in the future which indicates that young people in care are less able to fulfil their potential as parents.

5. A Wales of Cohesive Communities: Attractive, Viable, Safe and Well-Connected Communities

As noted above the likelihood of children who have been in the care system entering prostitution is significantly higher than the general population.

Statistics indicate that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Child Sexual Exploitation cases belong to the Looked After Children population.

Social isolation. 77% of care leavers surveyed stated that social isolation was very difficult leaving care and loneliness predicts increased morbidity and mortality.

Care leavers often end up in managed accommodation provisions as they struggle to enter the private rented market due to issues in providing a bond/rent in advance, providing a guarantor and being viewed unfavourably by landlords' due to age and negativity attached to label of having "been in care" alongside concerns for financial management of independent living. Fabric's expansion plans for Community Accommodation aims to impact on these barriers and to support young people to move away from managed provisions and to encourage integration into the community.

Better support and provision of services to improve outcomes for care-experienced young people would likely decrease the number of child sexual exploitation cases which would make communities more attractive, viable, safe and well-connected.

#### **4. Five Sustainable Development Principles within the Well-Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.**

1. Long Term: The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long term needs.

There is a lack of focus on working with care experienced young people to prevent them becoming the parents of children taken into care. There is a known pattern of this cycle within social services and is evident within the historical files of young people however little attention is paid to this factor. Improving experiences, self-esteem, well-being and outcomes of young people leaving care would provide a more positive and equal entry into adulthood reducing the likelihood of becoming parents before being ready to be.

Looked After Children are perceived as being safe in comparison to those young people who are subject to Child Protection plans. The impact of being taken into care e.g. the issues of grief and loss are not addressed and recommendations for additional work such as life story work are not undertaken in a timely manner. If the concerns for young people leaving care were compared to those that were highlighted in relation to when living with their parents it would likely identify similar issues with the addition of not having family networks highlighting the lack of achieved outcomes for care experienced young people.

The long-term needs of care experienced young people are not taken into consideration by the withdrawal of most of social services support at the age they legally become an adult. This is a crucial age in development and yet young people who have had significantly more difficult childhoods are expected to be independent at an age significantly lower than their peers who on average stay at home until their mid-twenties. The removal of Local Authority responsibility at 18 is setting young people up to fail financially, practically and emotionally. The figures on the incidence of crime and prostitution bear this hypothesis out. Current finances are being considered over the long-term impact that setting young people up to fail has on the economy in the long run.

2. Prevention: How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

Investment in the current LAC population will create a positive impact on the public purse in the future. Giving better well-being to care experienced young people will

benefit across all sectors. By placing an emphasis on improving the outcomes of the current LAC and leaving care population Local Authorities will be acting innovatively and preventatively to create a more positive future generation in Wales.

Improving access to supportive and nurturing semi-independent living provisions based upon an analysis of need and not finances or “legal status” led budgetary decisions will provide young people with the opportunity to transition successfully into independence at 18. The teenage years are a crucial stage in brain development which allows for positive interventions to have significant impact on outcomes moving forward, investment in this arena of children’s services will provide a substantial contribution to young people achieving better lives. Young people need to feel invested in to encourage them to invest in themselves, if services provided are not fit for purpose or do not show young people they are worthwhile then they are not likely to have any form of positive impact.

Support (financial, practical and emotional) to care –experienced young people should match that which is received by young people living in the general population. It would be beneficial for all services for young people leaving care (including financial support by children’s services) to be extended to 25. This may be costly in the short term but the benefits in the long run are likely to be considerably high.

3. Integration. Considering how the public body’s well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on each of their objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.

Organisations need to develop fully integrated systems to achieve improved outcomes. Local Authorities provide Looked After Children’s Services and the provision of education services yet there appears to be little integration which is designed to improve educational outcomes and thus improve the life chances of these children and young people

4. Collaboration: Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.

There is a clear need for collaboration between all the various agencies involved with Looked After Children and should also include organisations affected such as the criminal justice system. The statistics above show the impact of the current

arrangements so it is the interest of all parties to develop a more collaborative approach.

5. Involvement: The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which they serve.

Links should be made with organisations such as Fabric etc who are actively working to improve outcomes and doing work with the young people who reside with them. These young people can inform the way in which the provision of services is developed in the future. Fabric has undertaken Research and Design sessions with young people and have gathered realistic, fair and accurate responses by young people to their experiences within care. One of Fabric's residents met with Sally Jones to discuss their views on how to improve the experiences of care for future generations of young people.

This response relates to observations of the experiences of children and young people known to prevention and statutory interventions delivered by Welsh Youth Offending Services.

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

YMC are of the opinion that overall public expenditure is disproportionate and not geared towards or effective in improving outcomes for care experienced children. A high percentage of budgets are spent on children placed within profit making organisations. There is limited availability of placements that can deliver a therapeutic needs led service. Money “invested” in other placements can yield little by way of positive outcome and become counter-productive often resulting in placement breakdown and greater costs incurred. It is acknowledged that a lot of effort is now concentrating on avoiding children becoming looked after but numbers remain high. Once accommodated by a local authority, placements are often out of county making access to services and a return home more difficult.

The most important and powerful influence on looked after children is their placement and the carers ability to meet their holistic needs. There is such a critical shortage of foster placements and needs led residential placements that the market is now dominated by the private companies.

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

YMC believe that the desired outcomes regardless of costs are undermined by the urgency to find a placement and the lack of choice to allow the placement to be truly based on need. Matching children to appropriate placements is almost impossible in the current climate and this naturally can have a negative impact on the child at the time and also on their future development as grounded adults.

There is the potential for backwards steps in relationship building between YOT’s and Children’s Services teams where the likelihood of a secure placement through

the criminal route is seen as a solution to a problem and not an unacceptable outcome. This is a reflection on the desperate situation placing authorities can find themselves in when a child or young person with challenging behaviour is being refused placements. Numbers of children and young people entering secure under criminal orders are reducing year on year this needs to be sustained, lack of appropriate “welfare” placements could have a negative impact on this progress

Placement in secure is not a long term plan – these children and young people need to be prioritised for release. These are not new messages, they are repeated time and again, for example, they are contained in “Tell them not to forget about us” 2006.

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

Whilst local authority colleagues are transparent in relation to spend it is difficult to express confidence that the services delivered are as transparent. Contract management and holding providers to account can be difficult but crucial.

Although there is a deprivation grant for children who are looked after, the use of this additional funding in schools is not always transparent. It is not transparent what the money allocated to looked after children is used for.

Children who have been removed from families can very often be behind in their educational achievement due to the circumstances of the home life. Multiple moves can result in multiple schools or no school at all. The quality of education delivered in house by providers does not always meet minimum requirements or the child’s entitlement? When placed out of Wales the Welsh educational context is lost.

All looked after children are not currently, but should be prioritised for CAMHS consultation, assessment and therapy if required. CAMHS or other appropriate services should receive additional funding for Looked after Children specifically as currently they are unable to prioritise this group due to overstretched resources. The children with unresolved psychological issues whilst not presenting with mental illness are likely to present problems as adults (as supported by Adverse Childhood Experience research) therefore early identification and intervention by CAMHS/counselling/psychologist support should be considered as an important preventative approach to practice. Some Youth Offending Services where seconded

CAMHS nurses have been maintained within the team have utilised the nurse time to assist the residential unit where appropriate.

Whilst some authorities will prioritise care leavers for apprenticeships there could be greater focus in this. Being in the looked after system coupled with a criminal record are barriers to this group of young people, with enhanced support and allowances to maintain work placements this could be overcome. There should be increased opportunities for looked after children not to have to compete with peers.

4. 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.

YMC support the emphasis on early access to services and early intervention for those families who need additional support building resilience and the vision of Wales having self-sufficient confident future generations. This over time should reduce the number of children needing to be looked after.

Youth Offending Services have seen a shift in delivery as we prevent or divert increasing numbers of children and young people away from the justice system. YMC have expressed concern that the funding to continue this very important area of delivery is short term and constantly under threat even though the evidence regarding effectiveness is unquestionable.

There are many projects and approaches across Wales where Youth Offending Services are working in partnership to divert children and young people from becoming looked after using the staff skill base and partner relations that have made reduction in first time entrants so successful. Youth Offending Services are pro-active in their efforts to de-criminalise children and young people who have become looked after through effective joined up approaches with police, judiciary and care providers.

## **Value for money and the effectiveness of current arrangements.**

### **Information and working context of Barnardo's Cymru**

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities working in the country. We currently run 94 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with 17 of the 22 local authorities. In 2016-17, we worked with 8,250 children, young people and families directly and many more through less direct work; including open groups and outreach work. Barnardo's Cymru services in Wales include: care leavers and youth homelessness projects, young carers schemes, specialist fostering and adoption schemes, family centres and family support, parenting support, community development projects, family support for children affected by parental imprisonment, domestic abuse and parental substance misuse, short breaks and inclusive services for disabled children and young people, assessment and treatment for young people who exhibit sexually harmful or concerning behaviour and specialist services for children and young people at risk of, or abused through, child sexual exploitation, and young people's substance misuse services.

Every Barnardo's Cymru service is different, but each believes that every child and young person deserves the best start in life, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work with children to campaign for better child and social care policy and to champion the rights of every child. We believe that with the right help, committed support and a little belief, even the most vulnerable children can turn their lives around. Our work aims to support stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures for those we work with in order to secure better outcomes for more children.

### **Leaving care services.**

Barnardo's Cymru deliver services directly to care leavers in three local authorities and work with care leavers in other services that address youth homelessness, substance misuse and CSA/CSE/HSB services.



Between the ages of 16 and 18, young people have a social worker and a personal adviser (PA) but, on leaving care at 18, their relationship with their social worker ends and the PA assumes the central organisational and relational role in their lives.

The number of young people in care aged 16 and 17 rose by almost a third between 2010 and 2016,<sup>1</sup> swelling the numbers of those leaving care services aged 18–21. Meanwhile, the funding for PA services in many areas has either remained the same or decreased.

Currently, the pressure on some PA services is making it increasingly difficult for PA's to deliver the high-quality support young people require – or, in some cases, to meet their statutory duties with regard to the care leavers they work with. In 2015, the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) reported that 'not all care leavers had a Pathway Plan'.<sup>2</sup>

To address this issue Barnardo's Cymru believes it's time to consider how the capacity of PA resources can be increased, delegated and supported, or whether there is a need for increased investment to meet the current case demands.

### **Fostering and fostering providers:**

As a foster care provider Barnardos' Cymru are concerned about the lack of clarity in the financial remuneration to foster carers, the cost and quality of additional support services provided to foster families and how these relate to outcomes for fostered children and young people. There is no financial benchmark relating to level or degree of service which might support consistent financial remuneration and level of service delivery across Local Authority, Voluntary and Independent sector providers. Moreover without clear data relating to cost, level of service support and quality of provision it is impossible to assess what is effective in delivering good outcomes for young people.

This issue is discussed in the National Fostering Framework Phase One Report 2015–16<sup>3</sup> and, more recently, The National Fostering Framework Wales – Foster

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<sup>1</sup> Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age. StatsWales, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> National Inspection of safeguarding and care planning of Looked after Children and Care Leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.adsscymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/NFF-Phase-One-Report-English.pdf>

care allowances and payments survey 2016–17 evidences the significant inequity that exists across Local Authority and Voluntary sector services. The Independent sector did not participate in the survey, however the survey report notes that ‘one can hypothesise that one of the factors that influence many foster carers to remain with independent providers is that allowances and fees are comparatively higher than local authority providers’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>[https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/feesandallowances\\_tfnw.pdf](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/feesandallowances_tfnw.pdf)

The Children's Commissioner for Wales is an independent children's rights institution established in 2001. The Commissioner's principal aim, under the Care Standards Act 2000, is to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. In exercising their functions, the Commissioner must have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as stipulated in regulation 22 of the Children's Commissioner for Wales Regulations 2001. The Commissioner's remit covers all areas of the devolved powers of the National Assembly for Wales insofar as they affect children's rights and welfare.

The UNCRC is an international human rights treaty that applies to all children and young people up to the age of 18. It is the most widely ratified international human rights instrument and gives children and young people a wide range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights which State Parties to the Convention are expected to implement. In 2004, the Welsh Assembly Government adopted the UNCRC as the basis of all policy making for children and young people and in 2011, Welsh Government passed the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure, which places a duty on Welsh Ministers, in exercising their functions, to have 'due regard' to the UNCRC.

## **TAKING A CHILDREN'S RIGHTS APPROACH**

1. My work is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and I strive to ensure that it is implemented fully in Wales, not just by Ministers but by all those whose decisions have an impact in children's lives. I have recently created a guide entitled "The Right Way: a children's rights approach in Wales"[1](#) with expert advice from the Wales Observatory on the Human Rights of Children and Young People (based at Swansea and Bangor Universities) to encourage public services across the country to commit to the UNCRC and improve how they plan and deliver their services as a result. It contains information on ways to embed children's rights in organisations and the benefits of doing so, for organisations themselves as well as for individual children. Also included within the guide are some inspirational practice examples, which illustrate how some organisations are at the forefront of making rights a reality for children in Wales.

2. If local authorities embed this approach into their working practices, it will ensure that children's rights are at the core of their planning and service delivery. It will lead to better decision making, ensuring there's a real focus on the particular needs of children whose voices can be lost or silenced, creating an environment where public services are accountable to all of their service users. The UNCRC needs to be integrated into every aspect of decision-making, through procedures and actions. At its most basic this requires acknowledgement of the UNCRC as a framework for services impacting on children. Children's rights should guide decisions and actions having a substantial impact on children's lives in areas such as education, health or social care, but also in other areas such as planning, transport and the environment. There should be coordination across departments, and with external organisations, to ensure application of the principles and practice of a Children's Rights Approach. This will help ensure that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all decision-making affecting the child (as guaranteed by Article 3 of the UNCRC). Policy, procedures and actions, as well as budgets should all be developed and implemented taking into account their impact on children's rights. It should be clear and transparent where children's rights have been taken into account.
  
3. I am acutely aware of the current climate of budget cuts that local authorities have to work within to ensure statutory services are delivered in a sustainable way for their whole population. Whilst prioritising and investing in children's human rights may not be at the forefront of minds, my guide is intended to bring to life the real, positive impact public services in Wales can have on delivering a children's rights approach – an approach that will have meaningful impact on how Wales responds to and safeguards the long term needs of its children. By implementing such an approach, I remain convinced that we can live in a country where every child and young person can achieve their full potential.

The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 was a significant milestone on the journey to fully implementing the UNCRC in Welsh public life. The introduction of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, which brought forward a duty of due regard to the UNCRC for those exercising functions under the Act was also an important step in ensuring that children's rights filter down to

decision makers whose work can have a major impact on the daily lives of the children in their care. This is the clearest way to ensure that children's rights become a lived reality for children in Wales.

4. In relation to looked after children, taking a Children's Rights Approach also ensures that there a common set of values shared by everyone, including children, their families and all agencies, and that looked after children have the same rights to care, health, education and to fulfil their potential as all other children. It avoids using a deficit model that would emphasise what looked after children lack in terms of personal or material resources and also avoids casting them as a problem. In my report "The Right Care; children's rights in residential care in Wales"[2](#) young people actually commented on how they dislike use of the term "LAC" as they are not "lac-king" in anything. This is very important to avoid stigma and ensure shared goals and ambitious outcomes can be pursued.

## INEQUALITIES

5. A report recently published by a collaboration of Universities and funded by The Nuffield Trust highlights the connection between social inequality and child welfare interventions. The single country quantitative study report for Wales[3](#) demonstrates that children are far more likely to be on the child protection register and come into care in the most deprived areas in Wales. This appears as a social gradient, with increasing intervention with every level of deprivation. This is broadly in keeping with trends in the other UK nations, but the social gradient is steepest here in Wales. There is also variation in the rates of child protection and children looked after by ethnicity category. It may prove useful for the Committee to consider that report's findings and conclusions further in assessing whether expenditure in public services for care experienced children is being targeted in the right areas and whether prevention and early intervention are seen as a high enough priority in relation to child protection and well-being.
6. Prevention and early intervention is part of the five ways of working under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This autumn I will be publishing a joint resource with the Future Generations Commissioner, aimed at all public bodies and the Public Service Boards in Wales. The resource will include a full guide to the principles of a children's rights approach in the context of the five ways of working and a self-reflective benchmarking tool for

public bodies to be able to assess how well children's rights are integrated into their existing ways of working and identify the opportunities to further embed a children's rights approach across their work. I will be happy to share details with the Committee once this resource is published.

## **BUDGETS AND PROFIT**

7. Whilst there is increasing pressure on public services budgets due to an ageing population, a focus on children and young people and the issues pertinent to them in budget setting will ensure that children's issues are not marginalised and the importance of early intervention, prevention and investment is appropriately considered.
8. Fostering and Residential Care provision are essentially 'marketplaces' and the range of placements available includes provision by private companies alongside local authorities. A placement with a private provider will typically incur a higher weekly cost to the placing local authority. In Scotland, all adoption agencies and fostering agencies must be "not for profit" but this is not the case in Wales.
9. There is no prohibition on profit making in residential care services in Scotland currently, however a report from Audit Scotland entitled "Getting it Right for Children in Residential Care"[4](#) has highlighted the need to know the "true cost" of the service that is being delivered and establishing value for money from a service. It recognises that certain services will cost more if they are put in place to cover higher risk circumstances or particular specialist needs, but that councils need to be aware of the true costs when commissioning services.
10. Sir Martin Narey has also looked at cost and commissioning arrangements in his 2016 report "Residential Care in England"[5](#). He was interested in the opportunities presented by regional commissioning and procurement, and joining together to provide services where there may not be a sufficient need for places within every local authority area but regionally this could address placement shortages. The work of the National Fostering Framework (NFF) is exploring commissioning in Wales and the provision of services at local, regional and national levels. Residential care is not part of the NFF but any shortage of places in foster care will necessarily have an impact on the range of provision in children's homes. My office has also heard a number of examples recently where pressure on places in children's homes has then

created pressure on secure accommodation also. It is therefore perhaps artificial to separate out the different types of placement when the issues are interlinked. In general, placements closer to home will assist in maintaining links to family members through regular contact and identity links to the area where a child is from. This is an important factor in promoting positive well-being for children in care, and in planning for the future when they move on from local authority care.

11. I recognise the need to ensure that all children in care are cared for by suitably qualified carers, and that carers are available to meet any specialist needs of children and young people. Many carers linked to private fostering agencies are experienced and highly trained in dealing with disability, supporting teenagers through difficult periods and transition, and in managing challenging behaviour. I recognise of course that it would not be a viable short term solution to simply prohibit profit making in children's services from a given date as this would create a risk of children in care not receiving the right care and support that they need in order to achieve positive outcomes. However this may provide a useful line of inquiry for this Committee to take forward, perhaps when the topic of placements is explored in more depth.
12. The duties under Section 16 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 should ensure that local authorities involve children and young people in the design and delivery of services, including services for looked after children. Increasing the range of not for profit services should mean that money invested in social care services can be spent on improving outcomes for children rather than providing returns for share-holders.
13. Grant funding for new or additional requirements on local authority provision is usually time limited, and money then rolls over in to the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) after the initial period. Ring fencing money for particular purposes will likely require regulatory or legislative changes in order to protect the purpose and the source of money for achieving a particular aim. Grant funding is also subject to reporting requirements to ensure that money is being spent in accordance with the stated aims and outcomes; once the money forms part of the RSG there is no requirement on local authorities to continue to fund that particular piece or work or priority area. Whilst I recognise that elected members at a local level need to retain a level of control over priorities for funding, and accountability back to citizens in their area, there are some

recent policy changes that may be at risk of discontinuance if not backed up by statutory requirements.

14. Examples of current grant funding for care experienced children that will go into the RSG, and therefore cannot be guaranteed past the end of the grant, are:
  - a. Money for the “Active Offer” of advocacy provision under the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy for Children in Wales;
  - b. The “St David’s Day” fund for additional support for care leavers, as identified through my “Hidden Ambitions” [6](#)report published March 2017; and
  - c. Funding for Personal Advisors for all care leavers up to the age of 25, which the Welsh Government has committed to as part of their response to my “Hidden Ambitions” report.
15. Children who are adopted will usually be care experienced, whether this is for a short time or for a number of years, and it is recognised that additional support should be available to adopted children and their families because of their early life experiences. In England the Adoption Support Fund is ring fenced money that can help pay for essential therapy services for adoptive families as and when they need it. It was set up because many families needed some kind of support during and following adoption but may have struggled in the past to get the help they needed. The funding does not replace the services that Local Authorities are required by statute to provide, but is protected to only be used for the specified purposes, and to achieve positive outcomes for these children and their families. There is no such equivalent in Wales and my Investigation and Advice service have been contacted by families struggling to access adoption support and therapeutic services in Wales.

## **OUT OF COUNTY PLACEMENTS**

16. I am aware that the Committee intends to undertake a separate strand of work in relation to placements, but feel that it is important to note the high cost of out of county private placements and the associated problems that this can create when bringing a placement to an end, when considering overall value for money.



17. In my report “The Right Care; children’s rights in residential care in Wales”[7](#) I undertook fieldwork with a sample of 34 young people living in residential care across Wales. A 16 year old girl who took part and is referred to in the report as Sonia, had been placed in an out of county placement, but her home local authority decided to bring her back to a more local placement. She had been expecting to stay where she was living until the age of 18 and felt settled and had a support network and friends in that area. She was acutely aware that this was a financial decision rather than a decision based on her best interests and focusing on outcomes for her. She said “They said I was going to be there until I was 18 but because it was so expensive to school me and everything, cos school is onsite, they had to move me back down... they waited until I got my GCSES, I thought that was fair, but didn’t like a decision about my future based on money given they had put me there in the first place”.
18. This is a familiar picture; when I have engaged with care experienced children at annual engagement events run by my office, or visited projects that support children in care and care leavers around Wales and at other events, I am struck by how often young people are aware of the financial considerations around their placements and how openly and candidly they refer to this. Young people have described to me that they feel like “commodities” and have said that if a placement is ended because it is ‘costing too much money’, this can make them feel that they are not worth that investment and that their wellbeing and outcomes are perhaps not as important as others.
19. My office organised a consultation event with care experienced young people from across Wales in October 2016, and we ran a workshop on housing needs. Young people were asked to write newspaper headlines and bullet points for a story about their experiences. One group’s headline was “I feel I’m for sale” – ‘Auctioning’ children” and their bullet points included the involvement of private companies and the “price tag” on looked after children.
20. Out of county placements can also create problems for care leavers accessing housing lists in that area. Where a young person has lived for many years in an out of county foster placement and wishes to remain living in that area, they do not have the same priority access to the housing list as a young person from care who originates from that area. In other words the only way to achieve priority status is for them to return to their home local authority area,

regardless of how far away this is or how long it has been since they lived there.

21. Here is an illustrative example of a case on this issue, which came through to my Investigation and Advice service in the last year:
  - A looked after child from Authority 1 is placed in Authority 2
  - The child remains in Authority 2 for 12 years, with no connection to Authority 1 and fully regards themselves as a young person from the Authority 2 area. On reaching 17 and wishing to move towards independent living when they turn 18, the young person enquires about accessing supported accommodation in Authority 2
  - The supported housing provision he wishes to access is specifically for looked after children from Authority 2
  - As such the young person is informed they are not eligible for the provision and one possibility is that the young person will have to return to Authority 1 to receive comparable accommodation—something which they do not want to do.
22. Despite the intervention of my office, this young person has not been able to access supported accommodation in Authority 2, and is now having to wait until they turn 18, and hope that Authority 1 will be able to “spot purchase” support for them in the area of Authority 2 through the third sector instead.
23. “Out of county” in this context can simply mean a neighbouring or nearby local authority, just crossing the county boundaries, as opposed to always meaning a child from South Wales being placed a great distance away in North Wales or vice versa. Where a young person has established their life in a particular area but is unable to remain living there past the age of 16 or 18, this may well incur additional public spending costs in the long term, due to the potential risk of experiencing greater difficulties with homelessness, loneliness and depression and lack of other support options. The current guidance under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 does not make reference to any ‘reciprocity’ between local authorities, whether in providing housing, support, or access to leisure activities. Understandably any local authority will be reluctant to offer services to people from outside of their area if it is unlikely that a reciprocal arrangements would be made in a similar situation.

Whilst each local authority is designated as being responsible for children from their own area, ultimately the question of whether or not the ‘state’ is recognising and meeting their needs is an issue that goes beyond county boundaries.

## OUTCOMES

24. The Welsh Government has set up the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG), which I attend. This is not solely concerned with care experienced children but includes children and families on the “edge of care” also. The MAG has a lengthy and detailed work plan which covers three key themes; Professional Practice, Assessment of Risk and Edge of Care Services, and Permanency Planning and Building Stable Placements.
25. The focus of the group is specifically, and rightfully, about improving outcomes for these children in Wales. Whilst I recognise that policy or societal change does take time to achieve and become embedded, it is important that this work plan contributes directly to improving outcomes rather than just generating information and research. The Committee may wish to look at the work of the MAG around professional practice in relation to Corporate Parenting, and Building Stable placements when those particular stages of the inquiry are reached.
26. The work of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Hub will also be important in measuring outcomes for care experienced children. The 2015 Children in Need (CiN) Census in Wales<sup>8</sup> noted that experience of ACEs such as domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and parental mental health were primary reasons for referrals being made to social services. Care experienced children are more likely to be disproportionately affected by ACEs and have poorer health or education outcomes as a result.
27. A recently published paper on the School Health Research Network’s work comparing substance use, subjective well-being and interpersonal relationships among young people in foster care and private households<sup>9</sup> notes that young people living in foster care experience significantly worse outcomes than young people not in care. This is likely to be due to a range of care and pre-care factors, which impact adversely on subsequent social relationships. Substance misuse and lower life satisfaction are partially explained by poorer quality social relationships, and so supporting healthy

social relationships should be part of any interventions to reduce substance use and improve well-being.

28. One item of work on the MAG work programme focuses upon the 'Reflect project' in Gwent, which works with mothers who have had multiple children removed from their care. Both the fact that some parents may lose successive children to the care system, and the fact that care-experienced parents are over-represented amongst their number, are social tragedies. I therefore welcome the plan for the Reflect project to be rolled out across Wales. We know from recent research in Wales conducted by [CASCADE10](#) that young people in and leaving care are more likely than the general population to become parents at a young age. There is some emerging evidence of high levels of intergenerational interventions by social services. Using data from the Wales Adoption Cohort Study, researchers have found that more than a quarter (27%) of birth mothers and a fifth (19%) of birth fathers with children placed for adoption were themselves care leavers. There were no significant differences between care leaver and non-care leaver birth parents in terms of their involvement in crime or substance misuse, but care leaver birth parents were distinguishable from other birth parents by their own experiences of abuse and neglect. Care leaver birth mothers were also more likely than their non-care leaver counterparts to have diagnosed mental health problems. The profiles of children placed for adoption between care leaver and non-care leaver birth parents were similar. Further work may be required in light of this research to support care leavers as they become parents and to address the problems of over-representation and stigmatisation of young care experienced parents.
29. It is my view that healthy relationships education should form part of the new curriculum in Wales, as part of a wider focus on children's human rights education. It will be necessary however to look specifically at the needs of care experienced young people in order to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in accessing universal education and improving their own personal outcomes as a result of their early life experiences. This may also be a relevant part of the subsequent strand of the Inquiry looking specifically at the Pupil Development Grant.

- 1 <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/The-Right-Way.pdf>
- 2 <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-right-care.pdf>
- 3 <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade/files/2017/02/Child-Welfare-Inequalities-Project-Wales-Country-Report.pdf>
- 4 [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2010/nr\\_100902\\_children\\_residential.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2010/nr_100902_children_residential.pdf)
- 5 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/534560/Residential-Care\\_in-England-Sir-Martin-Narey-July-2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534560/Residential-Care_in-England-Sir-Martin-Narey-July-2016.pdf)
- 6 <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hidden-Ambitions.pdf>
- 7 <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-right-care.pdf>
- 8 <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/wales-children-need-census/?lang=en>
- 9 Long SJ, Evans RE, Fletcher A *et al*. Comparison of substance use, subjective well-being and interpersonal relationships among young people in foster care and private households: a cross sectional analysis of the School Health Research Network survey in Wales. *BMJ Open* 2017; 7:e014198. Doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2016-014198
- 10 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2017.06.030>

Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation in Wales for children, young people's and their family issues, bringing organisations and individuals from all disciplines and sectors together to speak with one voice, to exchange knowledge and practice, and to provide opportunities to enhance policy and practice through shared learning. One of our core aims is to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) a reality in Wales. Children in Wales campaigns for sustainable quality services for all children and young people, with special attention for children in need and works to ensure children and young people have a voice in issues that affect them. Children in Wales facilitates the voice of children and young people to influence government policy making through its 'Cymru Ifanc/Young Wales' programme of work.

Children in Wales would wish to acknowledge the specific engagement with our member organisation **Voices from Care Cymru** who have kindly shared the notes from 3 engagement events they convened with care experienced children and young people to inform this inquiry and which took place in South East Wales, West Wales and North Wales. This is in addition to the policy exchange session with staff delivered by Children in Wales in September as part of collaborative arrangements under the **Getting More Involved in Social Care Programme of Work**. The comments by care experience young people are attached as appendices to our response.

## 1. Our Response

Children in Wales welcomes the opportunity to aid the Committee's Inquiry into care experienced children and young people, and to inform the four areas for scrutiny as outlined in the Terms of Reference over the course of this Assembly term.

1.1 This response focuses on the first line of inquiry – '**Expenditure and value for money of public services for care experienced children and young people**' – and is informed by our work over many years with the overarching aim of seeking to improve the well-being outcomes for all children and young people with care experience in Wales. This work includes helping to shape and inform policy and legislative developments through representation activity and engagement with our

member organisations<sup>1</sup>, as well as the delivery of specific projects with the direct engagement of looked after children, care leavers and the professionals and kinship carers which support them<sup>2</sup>.

1.2 We were delighted to have been able to accept the Committee's invitation to attend and provide verbal evidence to the **pre-inquiry stakeholder session** which took place in July 2017, with the aim of helping to further shape the Committees priorities for inquiry. Our response builds upon the comments made in that meeting and developments since.

1.3 **Care experienced children and young people should be seen as children first, each with their own individual identities, yet often sharing the same ambitions, aspirations and interests** as other children and young people with no experience or involvement in the statutory care system. However children and young people separated from their birth parents and their relatives, remain amongst the most vulnerable groups of children, often at greater risk of exploitation, abuse, gender based violence, bullying, hate crime and trafficking, as well as the stigma often associated with being in care which some young people have experienced.

1.4 Many will have faced a number of adverse childhood experiences prior to entering care and will require additional professional support and safeguards through a range of bespoke interventions from specialist services in addition to the universal social care, education and health provision to which all children have an entitlement.

1.5 Whilst the required resources and level of support required to meet the needs of each child will not be the same for every child in care, their entitlement to additional support and services underpinned by legislation should be consistent across all parts of Wales. **This the PAC will wish to examine further**

1.7 'Corporate Parents' should all have the same ambition and seek the same positive outcomes for care experienced children and young people in the same way as all of us do for all other children in Wales regardless of their background, circumstances or level of need. This should be the foundation for good corporate parenting arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, A Vision for Looked after Children's Care in Wales 2016-2020

<http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/resource/vision-looked-childrens-care-wales-2016-2020/>

<sup>2</sup> See Getting involved in Social Care project <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/our-work/looked-children-2/getting-involved-social-care/>

1.8 It is essential to avoid describing children with care experience in terms of their deficits and as problems that need fixing and that we promote an assets based approach, identifying and promoting their strengths, abilities and achievements, as well as ensuring that we fully involve them in the decision making process.

1.9 The safeguarding, non-discrimination, participation and best interest of the principles for children enshrined in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC) and applied through Welsh legislation is applicable to all children and young people, including those with care experience. All levels of government have an obligation to protect all children from violence and exploitation, to the maximum extent possible, which would otherwise jeopardise their right to life, survival and development.

1.10 The UN have issued supplementary guidelines on the alternative care of children to support governments meet their obligations to care experienced children and young people under the UNCRC<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. Allocation of Resources

The **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child** in June 2016 issued a series of recommendations (Concluding Observations)<sup>4</sup> in relation to care experienced children and young people which reflected a number of concerns put forward by non-government coalitions as part of the monitoring process. In relation to the allocation of resources, the UN Committee was ‘seriously concerned at the effects that recent fiscal policies and allocation of resources have had in contributing to inequality in children’s enjoyment of their rights, disproportionately affecting children in disadvantaged situations’ (11)

2.1 In our joint submission to the UN Committee<sup>5</sup>, we called for there to be improvement in the necessary systems to enable routine analysis of Government spending in all budget areas to ensure full compliance with the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. Similar duties for local authorities and relevant partners are in place under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, so similar arrangements should be put in place at a local level.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/protection/alternative\\_care\\_Guidelines-English.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/alternative_care_Guidelines-English.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dsilg/publications/cyp/160727-final-concluding-observations-2016-en.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> All documents submitted to the UN Committee can be accessed via the website of the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner - [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=987&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=987&Lang=en)



2.2 Regular child rights impact assessments of budget and economic decision-making processes should be undertaken and published, with budgetary lines for children in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations clearly defined. This should include children and young people with care experience as well as those children identified as being potentially at risk of entering the care system, including children with care and support needs (preventative spend)

2.3 The PAC will therefore wish to consider whether the Welsh Government, all local governments and other public bodies including Local Health Boards have firmly in place transparent and participatory budgetary decision making processes and regularly publish disaggregated budgets showing spending on children, including those most vulnerable.

2.4 We would support recommendations from the PAC for the Welsh Government, local authorities and health authorities to improve the existing systems to enable routine analysis of spend on children **and** care experienced children which would ensure there is compliance with duties prescribed in existing legislation. There is clearly a deficit of data on health expenditure in relation to spend on care experienced children. Similarly, there is predictably a need for extra support for care experienced children in relation to their education as they usually have periods of trauma and/or miss school for periods of time or have to move school according to their placements in which case this should be funded appropriately.

### **3. Invest in Children – Prevent spend**

We welcome the renewed emphasis on early intervention and prevention as prescribed in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Service and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014. Research to date has been very clear in that if there is sufficient investment made early enough when need is first identified, better outcome for children can be achieved without recourse to more costly services such as for mental health later on when problems have been allowed to progress.

3.1 Children in Wales has welcomed the creation of the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group in which we are a member, and the 3 core themes, including the need to identify what early intervention action could be taken to support families and children on the edge of care.

3.2 Investment in early intervention support and preventative services should not simply be about seeking to prevent children entering care however. For many children state intervention will be in their best interests and provide a place of safety from where many children go on to thrive and have positive experiences from which to build upon in later life as they reach adulthood. The focus should firmly be on preventing escalation of need, safeguarding and reducing harmful behaviours, with appropriate resources put in place to ensure that children are safe yet also thrive.

3.3 Significant cost savings could be made if there a move to a holistic prevention model supported by long term funding commitments, incorporating both universal and specialist services, and delivered by a range of public and third sector services. Unfortunately in these times of austerity, we know from our members that non statutory services are the ones that are being cut first thus reducing the opportunity for children young people and families to access support at the time they first need it. In particular third sector organisations have been adversely affected by either funding cuts or by total transfer of their services in-house by local authorities. This is not necessarily a cost saving to the public purse.

3.4 The PAC will also wish to take account of the emerging findings from the Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care<sup>6</sup> aligning resources with outcomes that create value for the whole health and care system, including well-being

#### 4. Deficit in service provision

The CSSIW inspection of care planning for looked after children and care leavers (2015)<sup>7</sup> reported that too many care experienced children and young people couldn't access appropriate services to meet their psychological and emotional health needs, when they need them, and for however long they need them.

4.1 For too many children, the availability of the services they receive can be dependent on where they live and information being made available about their existence. The challenge remains about how to achieve consistency of service provision that provides value for money and delivers improved well-being outcomes for care experienced children and children on the cusp of care. For children requiring **therapeutic services**, this can be a particular challenge. Whilst there are some multi-disciplinary services working across the third sector, health,

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<sup>6</sup> <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2017-07/170714-review-interim-report-en.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://cssiw.org.uk/docs/cssiw/report/150130Iacen.pdf>

education and social services<sup>8</sup>, these are not universally available for all care experienced children in all areas. Reducing mental health problems at an early stage through the provision of appropriate early intervention emotional and mental health services can help reduce the need for costly interventions such as CAMHS later on but also importantly help achieve stability and improved outcome for children in terms of their education, training/skills and placement.

## **5. Renewed emphasis on parenting and family support**

We welcome the investment made by Welsh Government on programmes, such as Families First and Flying Start, which in general seek to improve the well being outcomes for parents and their children who present with additional challenges or live in challenging situations due to external factors such as low income. Families First has witnessed many changes since its conception in 2012 with many Team Around The Family projects working with children and families presenting with a range of complex needs that do not meet the threshold for local authority children's services.

5.1 PAC will wish to consider recent evaluations of these programmes and the extent to which they are helping to support families and children in preventing the need for care proceedings and keeping families together, as well as the interventions they deliver when some children are reunited with their families after leaving care.

## **6. Kinship care**

Many children with care status are placed with family and friends. Children in Wales has produced a guide with and for kinship carers<sup>9</sup> to help grandparents and other family members to access support and information on their rights and have a clearer understanding of the responsibilities of others. Despite some studies showing that children report a high level of satisfaction with kinship care arrangements, the UK as a whole has a low level of kinship carer arrangements. To date however, our experience shows that there can be high levels of need for services for kinship carers (many of whom are grandparents) who are struggling to care for their young relatives. We would support a greater emphasis being given to quality kinship care placements.

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<sup>8</sup> For example

[https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/3417/moving\\_into\\_maturity\\_briefing.pdf](https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/3417/moving_into_maturity_briefing.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/resource/kinship-care-guide-wales/>

## 7. Resources allocated for LAC

The national data publically available indicates that Social Services Revenue Expenditure on LAC services has increased by 35% since 2010 (currently £244m) with 46% of this spent on fostering services, 27% on residential care and 8% on leaving care services. The data also shows that there is wide variation in expenditure between local authorities per child looked after.

7.1 In the context of the data which is made available, the PAC will wish to further explore

- Are the local authorities which are spending the most or the least per child spending their resources wisely and most efficiently and providing value for money in terms of improving the outcomes for children?
- What is the relationship between current spend on LAC services and spending on early intervention and preventative services?
- Where there has been a reduction in spend on LAC by some local authorities in spite of numbers increasing, what has been the reasoning for this?
- Disaggregated data for spend by e.g. education and health

7.2 In the context of **statutory advocacy** provision for care experienced children and young people, encouraging strides have been made by Welsh Government, working in partnership with ADSSC, advocacy service providers and the CCfW, in developing a 'Range and Level Mechanism' (RLM) as part of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy programme of work<sup>10</sup>. The RLM can consistently calculate the funding levels required to deliver the National Approach on a local, regional or national basis, based on the cost of an 'advocacy hour' plus average running costs set against a target 'take up' percentage of the eligible population. Whilst this is presently being implemented across Wales and will be subject to monitoring arrangements, it will enable local authority commissioners working collaboratively across 6 regions to effectively plan and allocate sufficient funds. There are some

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<sup>10</sup> See Children in Wales joint response to the NAFW CYPE Committee inquiry 2016-17 <http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s55968/SAP%2010%20All%20Wales%20Children%20and%20Young%20Peoples%20Advocacy%20Providers%20Group.pdf> and related information <http://senedd.assembly.wales/ieIssueDetails.aspx?Id=16199&Opt=3>

emerging concerns from our members that current levels of funding dedicated to statutory advocacy could be lost when it is absorbed into the RSG<sup>11</sup>.

7.3 There could be some mileage at least exploring the possibility of utilising the learning from the NASA example and seeking to apply it to other services for care experienced children and young people (where this is possible and indeed appropriate)

## **8. Placement choice, availability, suitability and stability**

Appropriate matching and placement stability are conducive to helping to improve the well-being outcomes for care experienced children and young people, but also help to avoid additional costly interventions and actions when placements breakdown. Presently, over 500 (1 in 10) of children in care experience 3 or more placements per year. This is totally unacceptable as placement breakdown leading to multiple placements is both detrimental and disruptive for the child and their family, and costly for the placing local authority. A wider pool of placements is needed to ensure successful placements.

8.1 To illustrate this point, research by Demos (2010)<sup>12</sup> has shown that a child experiencing multiple placements over 4½ years (Child A) can cost a local authority 12% more than a child in a stable placement over 14 year (Child B)

Child A

Total cost (long term foster care) = £352,053 for 14 years (£23,470 per year)

Child B

Total cost (3 periods in care in 10 placements) = £393,579 for 4.5 years (£56,226 per year)

8.2 The PAC will wish to explore the availability of placements as well as the decision making process around matching and placement. Are non-emergency placements influenced in any way by where there happens to be a vacancy available at a particular time or solely determined by considerations around their suitability for the child with regard to their best interests, wishing & feelings, as

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<sup>11</sup> See the joint response of NYAS Cymru and Tros Gynnal Plant to this inquiry

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.demos.co.uk/files/In\\_Loco\\_Parentis\\_-\\_web.pdf](https://www.demos.co.uk/files/In_Loco_Parentis_-_web.pdf)

well as the need for the child to retain meaningful contact with their siblings, relatives and friends where it is appropriate and safe to do so.

8.3 We know that there is an issue of capacity within foster care with a lack of foster care families in Wales, particularly for teenage children. Appropriate financial recompense may be one factor amongst many other factors. PAC will wish to explore the implications of this in terms of the challenges this presents for local authorities seeking to place a child in an appropriate setting.

8.4 Given the focus of this inquiry, PAC will be particularly interested to learn how a lack of placements can impact on current spend and budgets, and whether children can/are being placed in more costly and less appropriate settings, for instance in placements out of area (and often outside of Wales<sup>13</sup>) and/or in costly residential care settings (over a ¼ of social service revenue expenditure is for residential care for less than 5% of the looked after population)

8.5 PAC will also be interested to explore the decision making process in respect of whether children are placed in care settings managed by profit making private care providers, local authority care providers or third sector not-for-profit providers. What factors are driving decisions and is full consideration being given to any additional needs a child may present which could be addressed by the placement provider. We do not believe that profits should be made by providers in relation to children's placements.

8.6 A placement should not be seen as simply a place to stay, but should provide wrap around quality support to help address needs and to help children recover, as well as seek to empower, build skills and resilience amongst children and young people. Are placement providers reinvesting in children in Wales? We welcome the recent example of co-production and cooperation between third sector foster care providers in Wales with the recent launch of collaborative arrangements between Action for Children, Barnardo's Cymru and TACT Cymru<sup>14</sup>.

8.7 There is a real need for a full assessment of placement planning processes undertaken at a local level

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-39861470>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.tactcare.org.uk/news/charitable-fostering-providers-cymru/>

## **9. Renewed emphasis on Tackling Child Poverty**

30% of children in Wales are in low income families, a figure which has increased over the past year and remains higher than in England and the other devolved nations. Independent projections suggest that child poverty will rise to around 5 million children across the UK by 2020 with the situation exacerbated by changes through welfare reform<sup>15</sup>.

9.1 The link between poverty and care has long been debated. A recent study by Cardiff University<sup>16</sup> examined the link between child protection, care and social-economic status and reported that there was a higher chance of a child becoming 'looked after' if they came from a deprived area.

9.2 One could conclude that channelling sufficient resources to tackling deprivation and child welfare inequalities, alongside helping to prevent family breakdown where a lack of income is an aggravating factor would help stem the number of children entering the care system. The PAC may wish to consider seeking assurances that the maximum extent of available resources is being channelled to help tackle child poverty in Wales to help avoid children entering the care system due in part to income related pressures in the family. How many children enter the care system due in part to socio economic factors is not known. Capturing and reporting on this would be a welcome recommendation from the PAC to both Welsh and local governments.

## **10. Engagement with care experienced children and young people**

Children with lived experience of living in care will be well placed to share their experiences and there are a number of third sector providers who would be best placed to support the PAC in accessing young people. Children in Wales through our Young Wales and Getting Engaged projects has worked with Voices from Care Cymru who convene a series of regional events throughout. The Chief Executive of Children in Wales also Co-Chairs Voices from Care Cymru with a young person.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/resource/child-family-poverty-wales-results-child-family-survey-2016/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade/files/2017/02/Child-Welfare-Inequalities-Project-Wales-Country-Report.pdf>

## 11. Other considerations related to ‘value for money’

PAC will also wish to consider the cost for other services, for example the **Police**, when children go missing from their placements<sup>17</sup>, and the great risk to children placed in residential placements of child sexual exploitation<sup>18</sup>. A recent report of the summit hosted by the South Wales Police and CSSIW made several key recommendations which if implemented, would not only reduce the risks to vulnerable children but in the context of this inquiry, have a positive effect on finite resources<sup>19</sup>. These included removing barriers to multi-agency working, improved sharing of information and communication, and more placement options to allow for good quality care. Compliance with Part 9 Statutory Guidance on Partnership Arrangements to strengthen cooperation and strategic planning is a prerequisite to improving outcome for care experiences children.

11.1 We welcome the recent announcement of a recurrent **£1m St. David’s Day Fund** to help care experience young people aged 16–25 to be able to access a range of opportunities following calls from the CCfW for such a scheme to be put in place. Whilst the fund is still very much in its infancy, the PAC will wish to enquire what monitoring and reporting arrangements are in place to ensure the best use of these funds and to enable shared learning across local authorities as the administrators for this fund. It would be useful to know what of this funding if any is being used for services delivered by third sector organisations.

11.2 Finally, we are particularly interested in the emerging issues of how care leavers who are young parents themselves are supported or otherwise to become successful parents. This issue was originally raised by Voices from Care and is currently being researched by Cascade in Cardiff University. .

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/shocking-figures-show-hundreds-wales-13369630>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-right-care.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <http://cssiw.org.uk/our-reports/national-thematic-report/2017/170818-joint-police-summit-report/?lang=en>



## APPENDIX 1

### Issues

- I moved around a lot and to places that weren't suitable for my needs eg. Too strict / didn't fit in. I settled better in a care home and told them that's what I wanted from the start but nobody listened. Not everyone wants to be fostered, some would prefer a residential, or vice versa.
- There needs to be more than 1 designated teacher in each school that has experience supporting young people in care. If you don't like that one person, you miss out on all the support on offer.
- I've had 14 different placements in 1 year.
- More training is needed for carers about LGBTQ+ and other cultural / religious backgrounds. You shouldn't have to celebrate the faith of your carers – it can be disruptive.
- Short-term placements should be considered when there are concerns about safety but some placements last 5–6 days and aren't right for the individual – too disruptive.
- Lots of experience of older foster carers – assumed grandparents. Need to consider individual needs.
- Needs of the individuals need to be considered eg. Likes and dislikes (pets etc)

### Support

- What support do you receive as care experience children and young people?
- **Good support**
- Barnardo's – listening and free Sunday lunch
- Aftercare – apprenticeship
- LAC nurse – BUT only once a year
- Voices from Care – let us take the reins, talk to people and make connections ourselves

- Advocacy – good when you know about it

Council tax – helped to set up payment plan when struggling with payments

### **Bad support**

- CAMHS – long waiting lists, don't listen and referrals take very long time, if referred at all
- Barnardo's – closed so support stopped
- Aftercare – all depends on the social worker, very inconsistent
- You are seen as a casefile by your social worker
- Advocacy – need to know about it to get something out of it
- Housing Association – not helpful with rent and have also been put in some dangerous housing (dangerous boiler)
- Supported housing – I was 18 and was put into a house with a 53 year old violent, alcoholic.
- I've been moved around too often
- Mistakes! Only get 1 chance and then you are thrown out – not sympathetic to the fact that it might be your first time living on your own and being independent.
- Aftercare don't learn from their previous cases

### **Challenges**

Are there any challenges in accessing the support you need?

- When you leave care the access to support shrinks
- Aftercare is the only support but it isn't fit for purpose
- In care – access to loads of stuff but once leave there is nothing. Huge disparity as no money to continue doing the things you had access to previously

- Once you leave care, you don't want to go back to your carers to say you are struggling. You feel they have moved on or perhaps feel they were doing it for the money only (lack of confidence in whether they actually care about you).

### **Changes for the future**

If you could change one thing for care experienced children and young people, what would that change be?

- Second chance in housing post 21
- Smaller case files and input from the young people (need to know how to access and check all the information is accurate)
- Training for foster carers (LGBT / dealing with anger etc)
- More recruitment of good quality foster carers and from ALL walks of life (eg. Even those with minor criminal records so they can show us how change is possible)
- Second chances and more social workers

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Support**

What support do you receive as care experience children and young people?

#### **Good support**

- Had a good structure/routine
- Inspirational support for future job opportunities
- Constant contact with carers – even after leaving
- Always had housing support
- Events to attend to get our voices heard as care experience young people
- Opportunities to get information to help young people with benefits
- PA – personal advisor

- Emotional support
- Education support
- Christmas support – providing Christmas hampers and Christmas gifts
- Providing social activities such as trips to Alton Towers
- Some Local Authorities provide free gym passes

### **Bad support**

- Social worker
- Housing support
- Money and lack of funding for different support – some Local Authorities have more funds per person to help care leavers into independence
- Mental health support
- No support and poor adult social worker
- Being lied to by workers
- Not enough bereavement support available
- Being misunderstood and disappointed – not enough support to discuss who they are as a person
- Some in the group said they'd had good routine and structure but others disagreed
- Not being able to express yourself in certain ways
- Transitions – can't work or rent is higher, had to lose jobs and leave college course when moved

### **Changes for the future**

**If you could change one thing for care experienced children and young people, what would that change be?**

- Better accommodation / housing

- PA support beyond the age of 21
- Mental health – lack of proper transitional support to adult services
- Make funding the same across Wales i.e. setting up home grant and funding for university
- Funding post 22 – i.e. housing benefit and benefits for college
- Better social work support after 18 – feel dumped when turning 18
- First homes grant – £1250 is not enough to set up first home
- Offer independent living skills training when in care – currently not given
- Give care experienced young people a chance to be a foster carer in the future
- More education and employment support
- Look at the transition from 17 to 18 – if you're in a job when you're 17 it's difficult to keep it long term if you have all the stress of moving when you're 18 and leaving care, especially when your new place is far away from your job and you need help and support with transport
- More support for the older ages of care experienced young people
- More support for transgender youths – transition in youths
- More education about the LGBTQA+ community
- Easier access to transport
- More social activities – this will help with mental health problems too
- Mental health awareness month events
- More information about public service jobs

### **APPENDIX 3**

#### **Support**

What support do you receive as care experience children and young people?

## **Good support**

- Went on holiday with foster carer
- Foster carers taking an interest
- Foster carer letting me do what I want
- PA helps me with travel
- PA listens to me
- Aftercare help me financially
- Paid for my uni tuition
- Had a learner mentor

## **Bad support**

- No support since leaving care (I'm 21)
- Change in support workers
- No much support with budget
- Lack of support when part-time worked and got benefits cut so got into debt with housing
- Foster carer annoys me
- Foster carer doesn't always listen to what I like
- Not going on holiday with foster carer (going into respite instead)
- Not listening
- Not explaining

## **Challenges**

Are there any challenges in accessing the support you need?

- Not knowing the support is there is the big challenge

- Barrier in accessing counselling because of how the list is
- Social worker – may need to be more understanding, need to listen, need to help
- Get rid of most of social services (not Jamie or Nicky)
- No phone to contact anyone to get support
- Transport (lack of links and lifts) and access to activities and some cost too much
- Being allowed to do things

### **Changes for the future**

**If you could change one thing for care experienced children and young people, what would that change be?**

- I'm happy – don't need to change anything right now!!
- Nothing much at present but maybe the education system especially GCSE department as you need a grade C and above
- Social workers to listen more and understand how you feel
- To be able to use my phone / ipad through the night and have no cut off time to be able to listen to music when I feel anxious
- Access to more things (activities)
- Easier transport to places
- More social workers, less work (smaller case loads) and better pay

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. We have been leading the fostering agenda for more than 40 years, influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level. We are passionate about the difference foster care makes to children and young people, and transforming children's lives is at the heart of everything we do. As a membership organisation we bring together individuals and services involved in providing foster care across the UK. We have approximately 60,000 individual members and nearly 400 organisational members, both local authorities and independent fostering providers, which cover 75% of foster carers in the UK. 21 of the 22 local authorities in Wales are members of The Fostering Network. Our views are informed by our members, as well as through research; in this way we aim to be the voice of foster care.

**Response to the Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly to inform their enquiry into care experienced children and young people.**

The Fostering Network welcomes the Public Accounts Committee's inquiry into care experienced children and young people (who are, or have been, 'looked after' by a local authority under the Children Act 1989 and the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014).

Over the last few years the political and policy focus has rightly been on promoting and improving well-being outcomes for all looked after children. The Fostering Network now welcomes this opportunity to contribute to this consultation by specifically referencing a number of pertinent points and issues in respect of those children and young people who are looked after within foster care. Whilst our response does not address the specific points as listed in the committee's terms of reference, we hope you will find our contribution helpful to the enquiry.

As over three quarters of children in the care system are cared for by foster carers. Improving the outcomes of most children in care therefore starts with improving foster care, and it is right that it receives focus within the committee's inquiry. We know that good foster care is a protective factor for fostered children's education and wellbeing, despite the trauma of coming into care and the difficult starts these children have often had in life.



Our written response here highlights what we believe to be key issues in respect of fostering and makes recommendations for change, based on our extensive experience and research, most notably the findings of our State of the Nation's Foster Care 2016<sup>1</sup> which was published earlier this year. Our survey covered key practice and workforce issues such as matching, placement stability, training and support of carers and status and authority of the workforce. We received a record 2,530 (UK Wide) responses which has given us a unique insight into the issues currently facing foster carers across the UK. We would be happy to expand on any of the points highlighted in our response.

Fostering, while rooted in providing families for children, is not a single entity. Some foster carers offer occasional short break care, others emergency or short-term placements, while some provide children with a home for their whole childhoods and transition into adulthood. Many foster carers do a mix of these forms of fostering. Some foster carers are approved to provide care specifically to members of their extended family; these "kinship" or "family and friends" foster carers may have different needs and expectations from some of their "mainstream" colleagues. Our recommendations throughout this submission principally relate to mainstream foster carers. It is important that these differences are recognised in any recommendations made by the committee.

Throughout the text, where we refer to local authorities, this includes fostering services with statutory responsibility for children in care. Independent fostering providers refers to both non-profit and profit-making fostering services and includes charitable fostering agencies.

### **Introductory Points**

We know that good foster care is a protective factor for fostered children's education and wellbeing, despite the trauma of coming into care and the difficult starts these children have often had in life. Foster carers provide children with stability, security, attachment, and often their first positive experience of family life. As well as providing this family environment, foster carers are also the primary advocates and first educators for the children they look after. Foster carers make a difference which is recognised by schools, by local government, by CSSIW, Social Care Wales, and by many others in wider society.

Various research by Sinclair, Schofield<sup>2</sup> and others also shows the positive impact of the care system on many vulnerable young people. We also know that there are many challenges within the care system that make it more difficult for foster carers and others working with fostered children to do their jobs properly and successfully, and that these challenges contribute to poor experiences and outcomes for some fostered children. These challenges include foster carers' "terms and conditions" as well as systemic issues around the way foster care is structured and delivered. We are clear that while some issues in fostering may best be addressed by legislative and regulatory change, many are actually problems to do with practice and the prevailing culture, both of which need challenging where they are causing problems or preventing an improvement in outcomes for children and young people.

Currently it is unclear how we measure outcomes for children and young people in care and who has the national and local oversight for outcomes. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the ongoing work programme of the National Fostering Framework will undoubtedly address some of these issues. However, challenges around collecting a comprehensive and consistent set of data and measuring the impact of fostering (or any other form of care) in terms of children's outcomes remains problematic as is a general lack of understanding of what contributes towards the cost of care.

The legislative framework, policies and structure of local service delivery teams creates a barrier to providing a smooth continuum of care for young people up to age of 21 years. Policies and services focus on 0-18 years and then the young person becomes a 'care leaver'. If legislation, policies and support structures were more child/young person focused and saw this as one journey from child to adulthood it would overcome many of the problems that currently exist for care experienced young people.

The issues currently being experienced in foster care are complex and require detailed investigation. However, foster care needs also to be seen in the wider context of the children in care system and the links and dependencies it has on other forms of permanence and care options and of course returning children to live with their birth families.

The approach over the last decade has generally been to review parts of the care system in a piecemeal fashion rather than looking at the children's social care system in its entirety and starting from the child or young person's perspective. These reviews have mirrored the complexities of a system that focuses on placement type and legal status rather than the young person at the centre, and as such have been unable to develop a clear picture of the system as a whole and then deliver potentially radical solutions which focus entirely on the needs of children.

## **Submission layout**

We have structured our response into four interlinked areas:

- the **foster care system**, which includes the way in which fostering is commissioned, delivered, regulated and inspected;
- the **foster care workforce**, to include the status, role and function of foster carers;
- **outcomes for children and young people** in foster care; and
- **'When I'm Ready'** implementation issues.

In each of these areas we have highlighted the key issues in fostering, both those which require legislative or regulatory consideration or those which require practice or culture change. We have also put forward possible solutions. Many of these issues are complex and solutions will need to be debated and tested as part of the committee process.

## **Part one: Foster care system**

The increased demand for children in care services coupled with the drastic cuts to local authority budgets due to austerity measures has placed a growing pressure on the care system in Wales. The number of looked after children in Wales is now at its highest as is the demand for foster placements.

In Wales, the vast majority of children and young people in care are living with foster families and consequently, any change to the demand and funding of looked after children's services will impact heavily on fostering.

It is not just the increase in demand in terms of numbers but also the complexity of needs of the children and young people coming into care. Children and young people coming into the care system may, for example, have been exposed to child sexual exploitation, trafficking domestic abuse, parental drug and alcohol misuse, in addition to abuse, neglect and family dysfunction. This changing landscape of need places an increasing pressure on foster carers to develop new skills and expertise.

In addition to the above, the cuts to other parts of the social care system requires foster care to fill these gaps e.g. the closure of parent and child specialist units and residential care provision. Also, funding cuts to other areas of social care such as early intervention services and tightening eligibility criteria to access mental health services impact on foster care.

As a consequence the foster care system has had to develop from an informal, voluntary and unregulated activity to a more formalised, highly regulated and professionalised system of care for vulnerable children and young people, often with complex needs.

In this section we have outlined the key issues for the different aspects of the foster care system. We have started to outline possible alternative models and approaches to structuring the foster care system.

These ideas are at an early stage of development and require detailed discussions and testing with the sector. All the recommendations we put forward in this section have a central aim to improve outcomes for children and young people.

### **Assessment of children and young people's' needs**

All services for children and young people in the care system are dependent on accurate, high quality assessments of need and effective commissioning to meet the identified needs. In order to get the right placement first time for each child there needs to be an accurate assessment of their needs. When a child has to move placements this can be hugely unsettling and often results in poorer outcomes for the child as well as being more costly.

The Fostering Network understands the challenges around assessing and predicting need but we believe there is much room for improvement. It is essential that individual social care assessments of children and young people are

aggregated in each local area or region in order to strategically plan the services required for the looked after children population.

The Fostering Network believes that Local authorities must assess not only the placement needs of children and young people but also the other social care, educational and health needs in order to provide therapeutic services and support for children and young people, many of whom have suffered, abuse and neglect before coming into the care system.

Cuts to local authority services have led to a severe reduction in early intervention children's services. Early support services prevent problems from escalating and risks being identified at an early stage. If there are further cuts to this type of support we will be left with a situation of crisis intervention which will result in more children and young people entering the care system with severe emotional and behavioural problems and requiring specialist support.

We believe that planning for children and intervention should happen in a timely manner and not just in response to crisis. Planning for individual children should allow them to be matched to a carer in the context of that carer's household and the needs of the other children living there, rather than each child's care planning being considered in isolation with no thought being given to competing or conflicting needs of the wider household.

### **Recommendation**

- **Each local authority or region must conduct an annual needs analysis of their local looked after children population** in order to determine types of care placements required and to inform a targeted recruitment programme for foster carers who are able to meet the needs of the current care population. Local authorities must work with IFPs to achieve this whilst the demand for IFP placements prevails. If this was done at a consistent standard and framework at a local level, it would be possible to aggregate results regionally and nationally for other purposes i.e. recruitment campaigns. It is encouraging that the National Fostering Framework has recognised this as a priority within their work programme.
- **Effective use of the foster care workforce**
- **Recruitment and managing vacancies**

Recruitment of foster carers is a year-round activity. In an ideal world, this recruitment would only be to find foster carers to meet children's needs; all recruitment would be targeted and based on needs analyses, with local authorities and IFPs working together to identify who is needed and where. In reality, however, all fostering services are able to recruit foster carers without regard to whether the skills they bring and homes they offer are actually needed for children, or to whether other carers already exist who could provide the necessary placements.

As a result, there is likely to be a fundamental disconnect between the supply of foster carers and the demand for their services – local authorities have responsibility for all looked after children and therefore can choose to place them with their own foster carers or those fostering for IFPs. IFPs can recruit as many foster carers as they like, but often have little knowledge of current and future demand trends and no influence over commissioning of services. Therefore, if no local authorities choose to use their services, or if these carers don't provide the skillsets or homes required, few children will be placed with them.

The mixed economy has therefore led to a situation in which recruitment in foster care is often driven by increasing numbers rather than by meeting the needs of children currently in the care system. Anecdotally, we hear of local authorities recruiting foster carers to bring children back "in-house", and IFPs recruiting foster carers without reference to whether any local authority has a need for the skills and placements they can offer. Because few foster carers are paid retainers between placements, it is of little cost for fostering services LA and IFP – to keep foster carers on their books even if they are not being used; we know that some foster carers have vacancies for long periods of time, and that they understandably find this very frustrating, particularly if their fostering service is still recruiting new foster carers.

In fact, fostering services often operate in competition with each other over access to new foster carers, with potential applicants being exposed to advertising from multiple fostering services in any one geographical area. This leads to duplicated costs of advertising, as well as potentially confusing people who just want to become foster carers but do not know which service to choose. In addition, we hear stories of fostering services encouraging existing foster carers to move services rather than recruiting people new to fostering, through financial incentives being offered to move existing carers from one service to another and placements being threatened unless the carer agrees to move. This in effect is just moving

existing pool of carers around the system rather than meeting individual children's needs – our State of the Nation 2016 report found that 14 per cent of foster carers had moved service, with a further 2 per cent in the process of moving.

We end up with a situation, in which there is constant recruitment, foster carers with vacancies and shortages of carers for some “types” of children such as teenagers. We believe that fostering services should work together to make best use of the existing foster carer workforce, and to recruit only where there is a need. Communicating with foster carers about why they have vacancies is also crucial.

### **Recommendations:**

- **All recruitment of new foster carers should be targeted to meet needs of the current care population, based on local authority's needs assessments.** No fostering services should be recruiting foster carers for whom there is no demand. Instead local authorities and IFPs should work together to make best use of the existing foster carer workforce and ensure they are recruiting the right foster families to meet the needs of the children in and coming into care i.e. target and match skills of carers with the needs of children. Fostering services should encourage any potential applicants whose skills they don't currently need to contact an alternative fostering service which does need these skills.
- **All fostering services must publish an annual statement of vacancies and usage of existing foster carers, as well as need going forward.** This will help prospective foster carers to make an informed choice between fostering services.
- **Closer joint working protocols should be encouraged between local authorities and independent fostering providers.**
- **An increase in regional consortia for needs-led and targeted recruitment should be explored,** to increase effectiveness and reduce duplication
- **Fostering services should pay their foster carers between placements.** While some foster carers may choose to hold a vacancy until a young person who matches the their skill set needs a placement, many foster carers offer a home to a broad range of children and expect to be working as a foster carer on a full-time basis.

- **If a fostering service thinks it is unlikely that they will place a child with a family, they should be clear about this.** For short term gaps, they should consider whether the foster carer can widen the range of children they take or use their skills more creatively between placements (as long as they are being paid a retainer) to support other foster carers, provide short break care, undertake or deliver training, or assist in recruiting foster carers. If a fostering service thinks it is unlikely that they will place a child with a family in the long run, they should tell the carers to allow them to make decisions about the future.

### **Monitoring and inspection of fostering services**

Fostering services should be commissioned on the basis of thorough assessments of the child's needs but rather based on costs. Placements should be measured on the likelihood of improving outcomes for looked after children, rather than being measured on cost.

In order to measure whether we are commissioning effective fostering services we have to be clear of the purpose of the care system and specifically the purpose and benefits of foster care. The Fostering Network believes the care system should protect children from further harm, offer an environment where the child can rehabilitate from past harm and neglect and improve the outcomes for the child so they can realise their potential. We have to ask if the current system is achieving this for all our looked after population.

Over the last 10 years, in Wales, the foster care sector has moved to a formal contracts commissioning framework. As well as the commissioning approach changing over the years the market split has changed. When the independent sector first began to operate in fostering it was to meet the local authority shortfall and to offer specialist placements; the independent sector in Wales now accounts for a significant market share.

However, even though more formalised approaches have been developed, the fundamental principle underlying most commissioning is still simply spot purchasing. Price has become a focus of commissioning foster care placements. Decisions are often being made based on short term affordability rather than what are in the long-term best interests of the child.



The fixing of local authority budgets annually does not lend itself to long-term care planning. There are clear tensions between local authority and independent fostering providers about the true costs of a foster placement, and the differing methods used to calculate costs make it almost impossible to assess value for money. There needs to be more work on how much a 'good' foster placement costs and how we quality assure placements – The Cost of Foster Care<sup>3</sup>, produced by The Fostering Network and BAAF in 2005 and updated in 2010 by the University of Loughborough, could provide a model here.

Local authorities have multiple roles in the fostering system – child protection, assessment of needs and care planning, corporate parent, placement matching, service delivery and commissioning of services. Local authorities often adopt a sequential approach to commissioning fostering services and look at the in-house services first where they have invested resources and then look externally based on a tiered contracts approach. There needs to be consideration of how we can move away from the competition being created between the two sectors (local authority and independent fostering services) and move towards a more collaborative approach whereby all potential foster carers are in the available pool for children referred.

Finally, commissioning teams within local authorities are sometimes split from practice teams and hold little detailed knowledge of fostering. Some independent providers have reported challenges in their ability to develop a relationship with individual local authorities and that relationships with the commissioning structures are price focused rather than child focused.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Foster care commissioning should always sit within local authority children's services and not the finance/business division of the local authority.** This move would re-focus commissioning on children rather than budgets and bring the decisions closer to practice and those who hold a detailed knowledge of fostering.
- **Commissioners need to understand and exercise their duty of care to looked after children as part of their corporate parenting role.**
- **The commissioning framework for fostering needs to link to outcomes for children and young people rather than cost.**

- **Long-term fostering and ‘When I’m Ready’ placements need to be embedded as part of the commissioning contract and be part of every local authority’s sufficiency duty.**
- **A comprehensive needs analysis of the local looked after children population must inform commissioning models.**
- **Placement of fostered children should not be ended unless a case review has been held and views of all concerned have been taken into account. This includes the child if they are of sufficient age and understanding, their parents, their foster carer and the fostering service as well as the placing authority. This will ensure placement decisions are being made purely in the best interests of the child and not for any financially motivated or other reasons.**

### **Long-term fostering**

As stated above fostering is not a single entity and therefore it is worth considering whether it can be best served by a single legal framework or whether a different approach for different types of fostering is required.

There has been a legal definition of long-term foster care in England since 2015, which is welcome, but we now need to consider how long-term foster care sits in the broader permanence framework. Other permanence options, such as special guardianship orders (SGOs) and adoption, are legal orders and can only be granted, or ended, by the courts. All decisions on long-term foster care sit within local authority children’s services department.

The implications of this can be placement drift rather than early decisions being made on which results in children staying with foster carers for years by accident rather than design. Also, feedback from our members through our State of the Nation survey shows placements can end when they feel it is not in the best interests of the child, but rather for financial reasons, or lack of support, or a difficult relationship between the carer and social worker, and other reasons that would likely not be accepted if a court were involved. This includes allegations, where child protection thresholds in place for all other children are not adhered to, and children are moved without a proper assessment. The State of the Nation report also found placements can end with little independent review and scrutiny of the decisions.

This lack of legal permanence leads to children in otherwise stable long-term relationships feel less secure and more vulnerable to disruption, in a way that those living in adoptive families or under SGOs do not.

The Fostering Network wants to see long-term foster care being given equal status and consideration in permanence options, and for long-term fostering relationships to be respected, valued and actually seen as permanent as adoptive and special guardianship placements are.

When making a decision about permanency for a child decision makers need to be clear why a child is being placed in long-term foster care as opposed to SGO or adoption. The key difference between long-term foster care and other permanency options is the child remains in the care system which offers a protective and nurturing environment, remains in a family setting, is able to remain in contact with their birth family and is afforded rights to therapeutic services, access to social work support for the child and foster carer and care leaver entitlements.

## Recommendations

- **Long-term foster care must be given equal status and protection as other permanence options and to ensure long term fostering relationships are respected and valued.** Our view is that children in long-term fostering placements should have a legal order ensuring stability and security of that placement.

## Part two: Foster care workforce

Foster carers' employment status is a confused picture. For example, for tax purposes they are considered to be self-employed, but at the same time they can only work for one fostering service at once, unlike other self-employed people. There is also a confusion over their role; while some fostering services insist that foster carers give up or cut down on their other paid work in order to foster, others are clear that foster carers must earn money outside of fostering, and indeed actively encourage "professionals" to bring their skills to fostering alongside their work.

The foster carer workforce holds a diverse range of opinion on the issue of employment status. This lies on a spectrum from expert volunteer on the one hand to fully professional child care expert on the other. The Fostering Network appreciates that this is complex area. We hear regularly from many foster carers,

and while we know many do think full employment by a fostering service might be a way to deal with the problems they are encountering, others – including long-term foster carers and family and friends carers – are less sure. For example they are concerned about the potential impact this could have on tax arrangements, combining fostering with other employment outside of the home, and being able to say no to a placement if it doesn't suit their family situation. This is an area that needs more focus and exploration.

Regardless of employment status, The Fostering Network's starting point is that all foster carers must have:

- Status and authority
- Equal respect as key member in the team around the child
- Payment for time and skills, as well as all expenses covered via allowances
- Support and training

Around 12 per cent of the foster care workforce leaves or retires each year and The Fostering Network currently estimates that a further 450 foster families are needed in the next year across Wales. There remains a significant shortage of placements in Wales for

- foster carers for teenagers;
- foster carers for sibling groups.
- Parent and child placements

#### **Recommendation:**

- **The recruitment and retention of foster carers should be driven by the needs of the existing care population, and be based on local authority needs analyses. See part one for more detail.**

#### **Part of the team**

Foster carers are a key part of the team working with fostered children. They must be treated as co-professionals and given all the information and authority they need to be able to look after these children to the best of their ability. However, according to the State of the Nation 2016 survey, 32 per cent of foster carers felt

that children's social workers do not treat them as equals. We have noted a rise in fostering being increasingly described as "therapeutic parenting" in some parts of the sector; while foster care of course provides children with a home and family and therefore involves parenting, the needs of most fostered children and the system within which foster carers work require them to be child care experts at the heart of the team.

As part of our State of the Nation survey of 2016, when asked "would you recommend fostering to others who may be considering it?", only half of foster carers said yes. This represented a marked decrease from our 2014 survey, when the corresponding result was two-thirds. We wanted to find out why a growing number of foster carers feel unable to recommend the role. Analysing the answers of those who answered 'no' to this question showed that foster carers felt increasingly unsupported and underpaid, and that they were not treated as equal members of the team. One example is what happens when foster carers face an allegation, which is unfortunately something that many will experience during their fostering career. Most foster carers accept that allegations are an occupational risk, and nearly all of them will be unsubstantiated or unfounded. However, once an allegation is made, carers are not treated as other professionals; they are too often left not knowing timescales, not being given access to independent support and having financial support removed. In contrast, their social work colleagues would be afforded HR, legal and emotional support should an allegation be made against them. Moreover, foster carers must be involved in decision making for a child's future, but many feel they are excluded.

Many foster carers also feel that they are still not given the authority to make day-to-day decisions about the children in their care. According to the State of the Nation survey, 33 per cent of short-term placement carers felt that they were only allowed to make appropriate decisions some of the time, rarely or never.

Another long-standing issue is that of information sharing: in our State of the Nation survey, 31 per cent of foster carers reported that they were rarely or never given all of the information about a fostered child prior to placement. This was often about the complexity of the child's needs and challenging behaviour. This is of real concern, because without full disclosure, it is extremely difficult for foster carers to make an informed decision about whether they can look after a child and meet their needs, as well as keeping everyone else in the household safe.

Foster carers need proper supervision and support from their supervising social worker. It is best practice that foster carer review meetings should be independently chaired, although we believe this does not happen routinely.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Foster carers must be given the authority to make everyday decisions on behalf of children in their care without unnecessary delays and restrictions.** Although this already exists in guidance, it is still not happening with sufficient regularity. Strengthened guidance needs to address the need for all professionals – social care, education, health, police and so on – to understand and respect the role and responsibility of foster carers.
- **Foster carers must be recognised and valued as the experts who best know the children they care for; their views must always be taken into consideration.**
- **Foster carers and fostering services must always be given all the available information they need to help children reach their potential and keep them and those around them safe.** As part of the team around the child, foster carers must be given access to children's files, particularly for long-term placements.
- **We recommend all foster care reviews are independently chaired.**
- **A transparent framework should be in place for dealing with allegations, and ensuring adherence to timescales.** Foster carers should be given the same HR, emotional and legal support that would be afforded their social work colleagues.
- **Foster carers must be made aware of their statutory entitlement to independent support and should have access to independent support when needed.**

#### **Support**

Fostering is an immensely rewarding role but it can often be challenging. Therefore the support foster carers receive from their fostering service and their peers is crucial and often makes a difference to the stability and success of placements.

Our 2016 State of the Nation survey found that foster carers, on the whole, reported a positive view of support from their supervising social worker, with 66 per cent declaring it to be *excellent* or *good* and 15 per cent saying it was *acceptable*. However, in our 2014 survey the result for the same question was 73

per cent, so there has been a slight drop in the overall rating of supervising social worker support.

We found that out of hours and respite support is currently poor for many foster carers. One third of foster carers describe out of hours support as could be better or poor, while only a quarter of foster carers described respite provision as excellent or good, down from one-third in our 2014 survey<sup>4</sup>.

## Recommendations

- **Support for foster carers should be tailored to the individual needs of the child** they are caring for and should be matched to the developmental stages of the child.
- **All fostering services should provide a dedicated full-time support service** for foster carers and **ensure access to respite provision** for all foster carers.
- **Peer support opportunities** should be enabled and promoted at a local level.

## Status and portability

We often hear that foster carers feel insufficiently supported by their fostering services. Foster carer charters are an important first step in setting out what this support should entail. They can help to get foster carers get the recognition they deserve and need to provide children with the best possible care, and represent a strong step, along with fees, improved status and authority, and better training, towards a professional foster care workforce.

While we know a number of fostering services have a charter in place, and we have recently sent our updated charter to all fostering services in Wales and will shortly be distributing a tool kit to further embed the principals of the charter. However, much more can be done to encourage more fostering services to take them up, to embed those that currently exist into practice, and to ensure that all charters remain relevant and respected by the whole team around the child.

Increasing the status of foster carers is also about legitimising the occupation as something owned by the foster carer rather than their service. However the process of transferring to another fostering service often requires repeating the assessment process for the new fostering service, a key factor which hampers portability of the workforce. Foster carers responding to the State of the Nation

2016 survey stated that it was not just the bureaucratic hindrances of repeating the assessment process that deterred them from transferring agencies, but also the lack of placements and income during the transition period. With such periods usually lasting several months, this immediately discourages all foster carers who rely on fostering to provide an income for the household. There are also implications for currently fostered children when a foster carer moves services, who are likely to face being moved out of their home during the reassessment process.

We believe that an immediate improvement to the portability of foster carers could be made by the introduction of a register, a centrally held list of approved foster carers in England. A central list would serve a number of purposes in addition to improving portability, as follows:

- improving safeguarding of children and young people, as currently there is no way of knowing that an applicant previously fostered elsewhere if the carer chooses to withhold the information;
- increasing portability of the workforce, enabling them to transfer providers more easily, which as a result could drive up standards in training and support for foster carers;
- supporting the creation of a standardised pre- and post-approval training framework linked to the register; and
- improving the formal status of foster carers to allow the role to be more recognised and valued within the sector and by the general public.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **There should be a national register of foster carers in Wales.**
- **It must become a duty for all fostering services to have a charter in place that is reviewed every three years, with a clear and transparent process that allows foster carers and fostering service staff to provide challenge if it is absent or not being adhered to.**
- **When transferring service, the original fostering service should pass on all assessment and review paperwork for the past three years – currently this is in the regulations but it does not happen in practice.**



- **All fostering services should be required to give a reference to the new fostering service.**

## **Training**

Children and young people coming into the care system have an increasingly complex set of needs, due to their diverse experiences, for example child sexual exploitation, trafficking, gangs or arriving as unaccompanied asylum seeking children. There is a corresponding increased demand for foster carers to meet these needs, and yet there is no nationally defined learning and development framework for foster carers that could address this.

A standardised and accredited framework with standardised learning objectives for training for foster care would set out the areas in which foster carers must demonstrate or develop knowledge and skills, and would provide the framework for services to develop their foster carer training programme. However, standardisation does not need to lead to a lack of flexibility in training. There will always be a need for foster carers to undertake specialised training relating to the demands of their specific situation and the needs of the children they are caring for. Personal development plans should be able to address both the standard and the specialised training.

However, it is not just about training for foster carers: other professionals should have knowledge of foster care woven into their own training and development processes. This is because, as already argued, foster carers are part of the team around the child but are often not treated in that way. They are viewed as the junior partner, and unduly pressurised to take placements that don't correspond to their skills, knowledge and experience.

Children's social workers (CSWs) need to understand fostering and foster carers much better, so that they can develop realistic expectations and the skills to support them, as well as being a voice and advocate for the child. Supervising social workers (SSWs) have a split role – support and supervision and there is no reason why CSWs cannot have one as well. The best children's services already do this. CSW need to build relationships with foster carers and view them as a tool through which to meet the needs of the child. This allows for intervention before a crisis, and not at too late a stage. There is also a need to ensure that all stakeholders in the team around the child understand fostering and the role of

foster carers, including education and health professionals, police and commissioners.

### **Recommendations:**

- **A learning and development framework for foster carers should be implemented in Wales, covering accredited and standardised pre- and post-approval training.** Within this national framework there must be flexibility for training to be tailored to allow foster carers to meet the individual needs of children and promote their own personal development.
- **It is essential that knowledge of fostering is included in training for social workers to enable them to work more effectively with the primary carers of the vast majority of looked after children.** Other professionals working with looked after children should also be given training to understand the role of foster carers.

### **Finance – allowances and fees**

#### **Allowances**

Our State of the Nation 2016 survey asked foster carers about allowances. We asked them if they felt their allowance, and the expenses they could claim, met the full costs of looking after fostered children.

Over half of all foster carers said that their allowances did not meet the full costs of looking after fostered children. When we asked this question two years ago 80 per cent of respondents felt their allowances did cover the costs of fostering. In 2016 this figure has fallen sharply to only 42 per cent.

Foster carers told us that allowances have been frozen, while additional payments such as mileage have been cut and that teenagers are especially expensive and the costs far exceed the allowances foster carers receive.

Foster carers and fostering services rightly have high expectations of what children in care should experience, but in many cases, the level of allowances do not allow for those expectations to be met. Caring for a teenager can be especially expensive with the cost of, for example, driving lessons, mobiles and holidays.

## Fees

While there are national minimum rates specified by Welsh Government – the money to be spent on looking after the child – the payment of foster carers' fees for their time and skills is determined locally and in Wales there is a significant variance across local authorities.

We believe that all foster carers should be paid for their time, skills and experience, at a level equivalent to that of a residential care worker.

There are a number of issues to consider when exploring fee payments to foster carers:

- While we support retainers, there are foster carers who perform respite care only, or who don't take a placement for a long time by choice. Alternatives to retainers would be required in these situations.
- Moreover, some foster carers are more specialist and would command a higher fee, which could then lead to the issue of perverse incentives: we would not want to see a foster carer penalised for turning a young person's life around from being a "challenging" to a "less challenging" placement and thereby receiving a reduction in pay.
- Some family and friends and long-term foster carers may not want to be paid – we have no firm evidence for this, but hear it anecdotally and would like to see a system that has the flexibility to reflect these.
- Some foster carers have full-time jobs outside the home – should they also be paid as foster carers for these hours, while other foster carers are with children or carrying out other fostering tasks all day?
- In some households both people in a couple would consider themselves primary foster carers and therefore deserving of pay.

Despite the complex issues involved in considering fees, we believe we will only get the high quality service we need if central and local governments are prepared to invest in it.

## **Recommendations:**

- **The Government should review the level of national minimum fostering allowances**
- **All fostering services should be required to pay an allowance at a level that meets or Welsh Government's national minimum allowance, and the Government must fund all local authorities to allow them to achieve this. Consideration should be given to implementing standardised fees and allowance across Wales ensuring fairness and transparency.**
- **All foster carers should be paid for their time and skills, preferably via a tiered payment scheme which includes retainer fees between placements.**
- **The administration of fee and allowance payments should be transparent, and clearly distinguish between the two, so that all foster carers are clear about their entitlement to allowances and fees.**

## **Foster Carer Approval**

Once they have been approved as a foster carer, the foster carer's terms of approval will be determined by the fostering service. This is commonly based on the age range of children. If a foster carer is deemed suitable only to offer certain types of placements, this should be made clear not only in their terms of approval, but also the foster care agreement. Foster carers should not be asked to provide types of placement for which they are not approved.

## **Recommendation:**

- **Foster carers should always be advised in writing of their terms of approval. This will make clear the type of fostering placement they will provide, and this clarity should also be in their foster carer agreement.**
- **Foster carers must not be asked to provide types of placement outside of their approval range.**

## **DBS checks**

Current practice regarding DBS checks is variable across the UK particularly in respect of the "timeliness" of DBS checks being completed for rising 18 year olds

living in fostering households<sup>5</sup> i.e. foster carers own children and looked after young people transitioning to adulthood.

In the current provision there is no mechanism to allow for checks in respect of children's services and adults services to be run simultaneously e.g. if a former foster carer moves to work in adults services details held on an enhanced DBS check do not automatically "flag" across and vice versa.

Furthermore children's services are not permitted to request the adults barred list nor are adults services permitted to request the children's barred list.

### **Recommendations**

- **The DBS, and the Home Office should undertake a thorough review of the regulations which govern DBS checks for prospective foster carers and all adult members of a foster care household, including a review of the Update Service.** This would serve to both address the current problems/difficulties in practice across DBS offices in processing checks on young adults and would serve to ensure that children and young people in foster care are afforded consistent practice in respect of safeguarding.
- **All fostering and adoption enhanced DBS checks need also to include information about whether someone is unsuitable to work with vulnerable adults as well as children.** This information is relevant to safeguarding children in the care system.

### **Part three: Outcomes for children and young people**

#### **Relationships**

It is well evidenced that those children who lack stability while in care have poorer outcomes<sup>6</sup>. An essential way to achieve stability is to focus on the relationship and attachment the child has with their foster carer(s).

Attachments impact on social and emotional development, educational achievements and mental health. The Care Inquiry in England found that the 'golden thread' running through the care system was relationships. The Inquiry recommended that there should be a renewed focus on using the powers and resources from all sectors in nurturing positive and meaningful relationships for children who cannot stay with, or return to, their birth parents.

Foster carers not only have a vital role to play while the child is living in their home but also in supporting the child as they move on, whether this is a move home or a move to another placement. Children and young people in care and care leavers told us that being able to stay in touch with their former carer was very important to them. However, surveys that The Fostering Networks carried out in 20157 showed one third of foster carers and one third of children and young people had been prevented from having contact and over half of the children and young people surveyed said they were not supported at all to keep in contact with former foster carers. The practice of cutting off the relationship between the child and their former foster carer is damaging and social work practice in this area needs to change.

Another key relationship for children in care is that they have with the independent reviewing officer (IRO). IROs play a crucial role in ensuring children's relationships are recognised, supported and sustained. IROs currently work within local authority structures which many feel can affect their impartiality in representing the best interests of children. We would like to see IROs becoming independent of local authorities and having more authority, in order to be independent and effective, and to be able to truly ensure decisions are in the best interests of the child.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **IROs should work for a body outside of the local authority structure, and given more authority to make independent, effective decisions in the interests of the child.**
- **The Government should ensure that guidance and regulations require that children and young people in care are enabled to remain in contact with their former foster carers and that foster carers are enabled to support their former fostered children as they move home, move to a permanent placement, or move into and through the leaving care process.**
- **How children in care's relationships are being built and supported should be considered as part of CSSIW inspections.**

#### **Improving outcomes through innovation**

In recent years The Fostering Network has run a number of innovative programmes and projects across the UK which seek to improve outcomes for fostered children and young people, including Mockingbird and Inspiring Voices in England. The

learning from these programmes supports the organisation's objectives to innovate so that our members are able to respond to the changing world of fostering and allow us to improve outcomes for children and young people in foster care and leaving care.

The Fostering Network will continue to deliver the Mockingbird programme over the next three years and beyond in England but we would urge local authorities to consider introducing the programme across Wales. This an alternative method of delivering foster care with the potential to improve placement stability, safety and permanency for children and young people in care and to improve support for, and retention of, foster carers. The Mockingbird Family Model, upon which the Mockingbird programme is based, increases the protective factors around children through the provision of an extended network of family support. It uses the concept of a 'constellation' which is where six to 10 'satellite' families of foster and kinship carers live in close proximity to a dedicated hub home of specially recruited and trained carers offering respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and social activities.

Relationships are central to the Mockingbird programme, with hub carers and foster carers providing frontline care and with social workers able to concentrate on successful relationship building. The hub empowers families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate, and offers children a more positive experience of care. The hub also builds links with other families important to the children's care plans and to resources in the wider community which can provide them with enhanced opportunities to learn, develop and succeed.

Through delivering these programmes clear themes have emerged which we believe can be used to improve local arrangements in the delivery of foster care services:

- **Peer support:** The programmes are based on the central principle of peer support. Peer support can increase the knowledge and confidence of foster carers and prevent problems from escalating which offers children a more positive and stable care experience. Peer support can also be a cost-effective intervention.
- **Foster carers valued as equal members of the team around the child:** We believe it is essential that foster carers are respected and treated as skilled co-professionals, and are recognised as part of the team working with the child.

Often the foster carer is the person who knows the child best. In order for foster carers to be respected as a professional child care expert they need to be given all the information on each child, be fully involved in decision making and empowered to make appropriate day-to-day decisions concerning the children in their care, as explored in part two.

- **Involvement in decisions:** Children and young people should be involved in all decisions made about them, particularly when it involves placement moves or contact arrangements.

#### **Recommendation:**

- **Good practice models that offer intensive peer support and aim to prevent placement breakdown, such as the Mockingbird Family Model, should be further explored and invested in across Wales.**

#### **Involvement of young people in their care**

At the heart of improving outcomes for children and young people is ensuring they have a strong voice in all decisions which affect their care. Too often, despite good intentions, children and young people's voices are absent from the system, decision making and reviews. We believe that this absence is a contributory factor to a range of the perceived issues within the system.

Last year The Fostering Network completed a project in England, Inspiring Voices, designed to raise young people's and foster carers' awareness of, and engagement with, children in care councils in England. Through this project we ran regional consultation events for young people across the country. The project exposed a great variability in provision. There is a direct link between well-resourced structures and young people being able to influence the design and delivery of services.

The Fostering Network believes that all fostered young people should have their voices heard and be given the opportunity to shape and co-produce children's services in partnership with local authorities and decision makers.



### **Recommendation:**

- **Local authorities should ensure that they have in place mechanisms for listening to the voices of their fostered children, whether they live with in-house carers or are placed with an IFP, e.g. through children in care councils.**

### **Access to therapeutic support**

The Fostering Network firmly believe that there should be the availability of prompt and robust assessment of looked after children's mental health needs, clear pathways for accessing mental health support and sufficient provision.

- **Foster carers and the children in their care should have access to mental health support and therapeutic services when needed, without delay.**

### **Life-long care**

Children living with their own families are rarely expected to move out and stand on their own two feet at the age of 18, and in fact many rely on family support for many years into adulthood. We would like to see this same "life-long" approach to young people who have grown up in care with the state as corporate parents. When I'm Ready and other 18+ living options are a good first step, but we believe that local authorities should continue their commitment as corporate parents in the longer term. This would have long-term benefits for the individual and both benefits and savings for society as a whole.

### **Recommendation:**

- **Local authorities must be proactive in offering long-term support for care experienced young people, and must outline this in the local offer for care leavers.**
- **Local authorities should ensure all fostering service providers, foster carers and eligible young people are aware of their local 'When I'm Ready' policy.**
- **'When I'm Ready' should be introduced as an option as early as possible in the care planning process and children and young people should be involved in all the decisions which impact on their care.**

## **Finance**

Feedback from foster carers clearly shows that financial reasons are a key factor preventing foster carers from agreeing to When I'm Ready arrangements. Many carers have reported that their income diminishes once the young person reaches 18. For some foster carers this will be too little to allow them to continue to provide a home for the young person, and will therefore cause strong relationships to be severed.

Foster carer fees are often stopped once a young person in their care reaches the age of 18. The fee is a foster carer's income in recognition of their skills, knowledge and experience. We believe that foster carers should not be financially disadvantaged if taking on a staying put arrangement.

### **Recommendations:**

- **Following the success of the national minimum fostering**

**allowance, there should also be a national minimum 'When I'm Ready' allowance and an expectation of no financial detriment for foster carers who offer 'When I'm Ready' placements.**

- **There should be a reallocation of housing benefit between public authorities and payment must be made directly by the relevant authority to the foster carer.**

### **Independent Fostering Providers**

Commissioning for 'When I'm Ready' is not a contract requirement for Independent Fostering Providers (IFPs) and they often will not receive a fee from the local authority in respect of the staying put arrangement.

### **Recommendation:**

- **We would like to see a principle in place that a young person should not be disadvantaged because of the contractual arrangement between their (former) foster carer's agency and the local authority.**

1 State of the Nation's Foster Care 2016, The Fostering Network (2017)  
[https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stateofthenationsfos\\_tercare2016.pdf](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stateofthenationsfos_tercare2016.pdf)

2 For example, Sinclair, I., Wilson, K., and Gibbs, I. (2005) Foster Placements: Why They Succeed and Why They Fail, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London; Schofield, G., Beek, M., Sargent, k., Thoburn, J., (2004) Growing up in foster care, BAAF

3 The Cost of Foster Care, The Fostering Network and BAAF (2005); Update to The Cost of Foster Care, Loughborough University (2010),  
<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/update-cost-foster-care.pdf>

4 State of the Nation's Foster Care 2016, The Fostering Network (2017)  
[https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stateofthenationsfos\\_tercare2016.pdf](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stateofthenationsfos_tercare2016.pdf)

5 The requirements for a DBS enhanced check on prospective foster carers and members of their household aged 18 or over is determined under The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013; Regulation 26(1A) and (2) Schedule 3.

6 Data Pack Improving Permanence for Looked after Children, Department for Education (2013)

7 Keep Connected: Maintaining Relationships When Moving On. The Fostering Network (2016).

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

The most important and powerful influence on looked after children is their placement and the carer's ability to meet their holistic needs.

There has been no increase in the amount of funding for care leavers year on year, despite increasing costs (e.g. due to inflation). Projection of numbers for post 18 yrs care leavers shows growth nevertheless.

Whilst we fully acknowledge that many care leavers make great successes in terms of their personal, social and educational achievements, the needs of the more complex young people within the cohort are great; there is no specific long-term funding allocation for this complex group to fund the right type of accommodation to meet their needs. The same applies to educational/training provision for those who are not receiving their entitlement.

Corporate Parenting is sometimes required to pay for accommodation/education provision to meet the needs of the individual. This comes out of core funding.

We acknowledge that recently Supporting People monies (to be spent in 2017/18) has recently been made available to Children's Services. Other funding has been allocated from Welsh Government to address NEET to 2019/20.

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

At times the desired outcomes, regardless of costs, are undermined by the urgency to find a placement and there is a lack of choice to allow the placement to be truly based on need. Matching children to appropriate placements can be very challenging in the current climate and this naturally can have a negative impact on the child at the time and also on their future development as grounded adults.

At times, placing authorities can find themselves in difficulty when a child or young person with challenging behaviour is being refused placements. Numbers of children and young people entering the secure estate under criminal orders are

reducing year on year this needs to be sustained; lack of appropriate “welfare” placements could have a negative impact on this progress

Placement in the secure estate is not a long term plan – these children and young people need to be prioritized for release. These are not new messages, they are repeated time and again, for example, they are contained in “Tell them not to forget about us” 2006.

There is need for a wrap-around holistic response to deal with the most complex young people. A bespoke model allowing for young people to ‘fail’ and get another number of chances to succeed is critical.

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

Whilst LA colleagues are transparent in relation to spend it is difficult to express confidence that the services delivered are as transparent.

There is no budget allocation per care leaver across services such as housing; leisure; education and health. There needs to be more of a multi-agency response and approach to care experience children and young people.

In Carmarthenshire PDG LAC money is held centrally and is used to train schools (attachment aware schools); provide for problem solving and support as well as upskilling of staff.

Children who have been removed from families can very often fall behind in their educational achievement due to the circumstances of the home life. Multiple moves can result in multiple schools or no school at all. The quality of education delivered in house by providers does not always meet minimum requirements or the child’s entitlement?

All looked after children are not currently, but should be prioritised for CAMHS consultation, assessment and therapy if required. CAMHS should receive additional funding for Looked After Children specifically as currently they are unable to prioritise this group due to overstretched resources. The children with unresolved psychological issues, whilst not presenting with mental illness, are quite likely to present these problems as adults therefore this should be considered as an important preventative approach to practice. This is supported by

Adverse Childhood Experiences research. Whilst pockets of good practice may exist, it does not appear to be consistent across Wales.

Being in the looked after system coupled with a criminal record are barriers to this group of young people with enhanced support and allowances to maintain work placements could be overcome. There should be increased opportunities for them not to have to compete with peers.

Carmarthenshire offers apprenticeships and traineeship to Care Leavers. This requires considerable investments of time, support.

**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**

We support the emphasis on early access to services and early intervention for those families who need additional support building resilience and the vision of Wales having self-sufficient confident future generations. This over time should reduce the number of children needing to be looked after.

The growth in the need for prevention and early intervention is not reflected in budgets for care experienced children. To be effective, it is felt that expertise need to be 'front loaded' so provide the right level of support and guidance.

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales  
Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee  
Ymchwiliad i blant a phobl ifanc sydd wedi bod mewn gofal / Inquiry into care  
experienced children and young people  
PAC(5) CECYP - 09  
Ymateb gan Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru / Evidence  
from Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

CSSIW will be inspecting five local authority children services departments in 2017/18. The focus is on children with complex needs who are placed out of area; placement decision making, commissioning arrangements and multi agency working. The remaining local authorities will be completing a self assessment which will contribute to a national report on these issues. This will be published around July 2018.

In 2018/19, CSSIW will undertake a thematic review of children's homes across Wales. This will look at outcomes for children and young people.

In late 2018/19 or early the following year, we will be in a position to review information from both pieces of work and the messages and recommendations arising. We anticipate this work will be of direct relevance to your inquiry.

We are aware from our dialogue with directors that monies spent on out of area placements are frequently in excess of any amount budgeted; the spend being viewed as unavoidable due to the needs of individual children. However, this money is not available to spend on increasing the resource for preventative work to try to reduce the need for high cost residential placements. While local authorities are investing more in prevention and early intervention services, this has not generally been partnered with reduced numbers of children looked after. This is a complex area where strict cause and effect interpretation is not appropriate.

CSSIW are represented on the Ministerial Advisory Group on improving outcomes for children looked after and the sub groups relating to residential care, secure accommodation, physical interventions/restraint and missing children.

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experienced children and young people  
PAC(5) CECYP - 10  
Ymateb gan Y grŵp polisi iechyd meddwl plant a phobl ifanc / Evidence from  
Children and young people's mental health policy group

A number of organisations in Wales have recently come together to form a children and young people's mental health policy group to press for better prevention measures and early intervention for children and young people who have, or are at risk of developing poor mental health. We recognise the potential of working collaboratively on common goals, rather than pursuing individual pathways on shared concerns.<sup>1</sup>

We welcome the Committee's inquiry into Children in Care because this is an area of significant financial investment but little improvement in outcomes for these children and young people. We are pleased that this inquiry constitutes a series of inquiries to take place during the course of the 5th Assembly.

The group was formed in the summer 2017, after the Committee's original announcement regarding its plans to look into children in care. This submission is a response to the Committee's overall plans and highlights a collection of our views regarding looked after children and the need for early intervention and prevention to tackle the growing demand on services.

British Association of Social Workers

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

NSPCC

Royal College of General Practitioners Wales

Royal College of Psychiatrists in Wales

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Welsh NHS Confederation

Looked after children are more likely to be disadvantaged in most aspects of life. Although for many, being taken into care is the best possible outcome and can be a positive experience, the care system is overstretched and cannot guarantee

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<sup>1</sup> Children and Young People Mental Health Policy Network Position Statement, August 2017.



consistency and stability. Many children will be cared for by a number of foster carers, moving schools frequently. Of those children who do return home, 30% are taken back into care.<sup>2</sup> Figures obtained by the NSPCC in 2014 show that 27% of children who had left care in 2008–9 had returned into care by 2014. In some Local Authorities, this was as high as 47%. Looked after children are more likely to under achieve in schools, struggle with addiction, develop mental health and/or physical conditions, and end up in the criminal justice system.

Research suggests that many looked after children have unidentified and/or unmet communication needs. A study published in 2011 in the *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* found high levels of communication impairment amongst children and young people in residential care; much of which was severe, pervasive and largely unidentified<sup>3</sup>. The recent Prison Reform Trust report 'In Care, Out of Trouble' also highlights how young people, with a range of conditions and needs, including communication difficulties are overrepresented in the care and criminal justice system<sup>4</sup>.

Safeguarding needs are the main reasons for a child to be placed into care with over 60% of children in care.<sup>5</sup> Children can also be placed into care if their parents are unable to cope due to illness or disability, if a family is in acute stress, or if the family is "dysfunctional".<sup>6</sup> In Wales in 2016 this accounted for 24% of all looked after children.<sup>7</sup> Twenty two per cent of looked after children in Wales were taken into care because they had a disability or illness.<sup>8</sup>

Our Network of health and social care organisations believes that early intervention and preventative approaches are crucial in keeping families together, saving the trauma associated with breakup and removal. Placing children in care should be the last resort, with careful consideration regarding safeguarding, risk, human rights and wellbeing of the child and of its family. We know that looked after

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<sup>2</sup> Department for Education (DfE) (2013) [Data pack: improving permanence for looked after children \(PDF\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> McCool S and Stevens I,C (2011). Identifying Speech, Language and Communication Needs among children and young people in residential care. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*. 46 (6). pp.665–74

<sup>4</sup> 'In Care, Out of Trouble'. Prison Reform trust (2016)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-protection-system/children-in-care/statistics/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://statswales.gov.wales/v/CF98>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

children are five times more likely to develop a childhood mental disorder<sup>9</sup> and four to five times more likely to attempt suicide as an adult<sup>10</sup>.

In Wales there are 50% more children in care per population than England. This is a significant difference that we would like the Committee to investigate. The consequences impact on a higher percentage of families and children in Wales than across the border, and there are greater pressures on the services that care for them. Charities have called the situation a 'crisis' and have been asking the Welsh public to take up fostering to meet current demand.

Not only is this figure significant it is also growing. More and more children are being taken into care in Wales and this trend must also be investigated. What has become clear is that women who have their children taken into care will often continue to have babies to replace those that have been taken away, only to have them taken into care.<sup>11</sup> Infants can be subject to interim care orders and removed from their mothers from birth. This is not healthy for the child or the mother.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists called on the Government to invest in parenting programmes, in order to improve the life chances of children and the well-being of families.<sup>12</sup> Becoming a parent can be a daunting experience, but may be a further challenge to those who suffer with poor mental health.<sup>13</sup> Up to 15 out of 100 new mothers will experience anxiety or depression. They are more likely to worry that they cannot cope with being a good parent, particularly if they struggle with everyday life.<sup>14</sup> The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists have called for an increase in parenting support with a focus on early language development

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<sup>9</sup> Meltzer, H., Corbin, T., Gatward, R., Goodman, R., Ford, T. (2003). The mental health of young people looked after by local authorities in England. London: Office for National Statistics

<sup>10</sup> Vinnerljung, B., Hjern, A., Lindblad, F. (2006). Suicide attempts and severe psychiatric morbidity among former child welfare clients: a national cohort study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 47(7), pp. 723–733.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/25/are-we-failing-parents-whose-children-are-taken-into-care>

<sup>12</sup> RCPsych (2014) *Making Parity a Reality – six asks for the next Government to improve the nation's mental health*, London: RCPsych

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/postnataldepression.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Mind, How might my mental health problem affect me? <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/parenting-with-a-mental-health-problem/#.WJRWg6Z4iUk>

and attachment. Over 50% of children in socially deprived areas may start school with impoverished speech, language and communication skills.<sup>15</sup>

Figures from the Early Intervention Foundation<sup>16</sup> show that in Wales, the cost of late intervention is £1.1bn per year, which equates to £343 per person. This money is spent on the problems that affect children and young people such as domestic violence and abuse, child neglect and maltreatment, mental health problems, youth crime and exclusion from education and the labour market. While this figure is substantial, it is only the immediate fiscal so does not capture any lasting effects into adult life and sometimes into the next generation, nor the wider social and economic costs. Early intervention is key to reducing the prevalence of these experiences.

As part of a project carried out in 2015 on the emotional wellbeing of LAC, the NSPCC asked the University of Loughborough to carry out cost modelling using their cost calculator for children's services and it concluded that child's unstable and unsupported experience of care costs £22,415 more per year than another child's stable and well-supported care.<sup>17</sup> This costing exercise was carried out in an English context but it can be helpful in illustrating the need to ensure support is put in place at an early stage to avoid problems escalating and leading to placement breakdown and multiple moves.

Results from the Public Health Wales NHS Trust "Welsh Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)" study show that suffering four or more harmful experiences in childhood increases the chances of high-risk drinking in adulthood by four times, being a smoker by six times and being involved in violence in the last year by around 14 times. The survey revealed around one in every seven adults aged 18–69 years in Wales had experienced four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences during their childhood and just under half had experienced at least one. The report also estimates the burden of health-harming behaviours on the NHS that could have been avoided if Adverse Childhood Experiences were prevented across Wales.

Linking in with looked after children, this evidence shows that children who experience stressful and poor quality childhoods are more likely to develop health-harming and anti-social behaviours, more likely to perform poorly in school, more

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<sup>15</sup> Locke A, Ginsborg J, Peers I. (2002) *Development and disadvantage: Implications for the early years and beyond*, International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders, 37(1), pp. 3–15

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/ccfr/research/exploring/project---the-cost-calculator-for-childrens-services.html>

likely to be involved in crime and ultimately less likely to be a productive member of society.

We are pleased that the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on future outcomes is clearly recognized as a priority for action. Public bodies across Wales, including Health Boards and NHS Trusts, are committed to addressing ACEs and their impact in Wales by responding effectively to prevent and mitigate the harms from ACEs, and by building protective factors and resilience in the population to cope with ACEs that cannot be prevented.

We are also delighted to see that the recent Population Needs Assessments and Wellbeing Assessments clearly acknowledge the vulnerability of LAC and the heightened risk of poor mental health outcomes. However, the Population Needs Assessments and Wellbeing Assessments vary in their format: Some just list local issues, others offer more in the way of analysis about what the future direction of service development should be. It will be important for the Committee to monitor the development of Regional Plans and Wellbeing Plans to ensure that an appropriate service response is put into place to address the needs of LAC.

We were also pleased to see the guidance on part 6 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 recognise the importance of emotional wellbeing and reiterate the need for initial health assessments to include an assessment of looked after children's mental and emotional health. However, there is no prescription on who should carry out those assessments: without a specialist health professionals carrying out assessments, there is a risk that some issues could be missed and subsequent care and support plans developed that do not address all of a young person's needs.

The last eight years of austerity and the retrenchment of local authority budgets has greatly impacted on early intervention and preventative programmes. The increase in the number of those deemed eligible for support has placed huge pressures and restrictions on local services, impacting the level of care that can be afforded. It is important that this is acknowledged whilst conducting the Committee's inquiries related to children in care.

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Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee  
Ymchwiliad i blant a phobl ifanc sydd wedi bod mewn gofal / Inquiry into care  
experienced children and young people  
PAC(5) CECYP - 11  
Ymateb gan Unigolyn / Evidence from Individual

Just read your article on the BBC.

I am so pleased you are looking to review the role of the corporate parent in securing the outcomes for children in care.

These are the areas I hope you and your team will look at –

Public perception of social services is that they take children away from families. This is not true. They try to do their utmost to keep families together as they know the outcome for children in the care system can be so poor. As a result families in crisis do not approach social services for help, instead child concern referrals are received which means planning is crisis led. Prevention and education is always the right approach. Parenting and relationship building are something we all get wrong sometimes yet it is expected that everyone can do it!

Too often when children come into care, the work with parents ends. Often these parents have unresolved trauma themselves. What I have found is that often when children eventually leave care they gravitate back to their birth families. Unfortunately nothing has changed for these families and the cycle continues. If parents/birth family were able to benefit from ongoing learning this may break the cycle and even in some circumstances lead to their children being returned even after an order has been granted.

Case load of Social workers – makes the role impossible – burns out good people trying to make a difference – leads to children having numerous social workers – no relationship formed/ further rejection for child. Hardly any intense direct work can be done with families and children by social workers due to time restraints.

CAMHS (therapeutic) support for every child in care from the start – Each child that enters the care system is traumatised to the point I would compare it to Soldiers returning from a war zone. The impact of neglect on the child's emotional development is massive. Children who have suffered neglect are often much younger in their emotional development than their chronological age. Without the right support this impacts directly on their ability to achieve in education and most importantly their social interaction and ability to achieve their potential. They live with guilt, blame and unresolved loss which is often seen in behaviours. As a

society we have to learn what is behind these behaviours which are often linked to their experiences in their past.

Funding of Independent Reviewing Officers. How can it be independent when they are funded by the Local Authority. My feeling is that all IRO's should come under the lead advocate for children in Wales; the Children's Commissioner. They would be able to collate information gathered from children's 6 monthly reviews, look for common issues and challenge the Corporate Parent to better meet a child's needs.

Therapeutic Training and support for foster parents to keep them attuned to the child's needs. Confidence in Care is being rolled out but this is only scratching the surface of the training and support required. Foster parents are often left unsupported and inadequately prepared to deal with traumatised children with complex needs.

Matching children with foster parents – too many children are placed inappropriately i.e. The children's needs are not matched with carers who have the skills to meet these needs. Sadly due to the crisis in Local Authority fostering recruitment, matching does not happen; the child will be placed with whoever has a bed. This along with other unmet needs will lead to children having numerous breakdowns.

We have worked with a number of schools trying to support them to support children in care. Attachment theory training helps education professionals to understand what is behind a child's behaviours.

Ken Skates worked tremendously hard to help change the support for children leaving care with 'when I'm ready'. We worked with Ken to get this through the Assembly. As with all changes to policies it takes time to bed in and there remains inconsistency across the Local Authorities to when I am ready, to the detriment of care leavers. Sadly children in care still lose the support they need when they are most vulnerable i.e. at 18. From my experience children start being told they must start learning to be independent from the age of 15/16 just at the time they have enough stress with their GCSE's. Promises of flats and white goods when really the therapeutic message should be this is your home until you are ready, just as we would do with our own children. They might be chronologically 18 but emotionally they are much younger. This often leads to their outcomes being so poor and why care leavers are disproportionately represented in prison.

I really hope you are successful in making Wales the shining example of how we parent and support every child to reach their potential.

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales  
Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee  
Ymchwiliad i blant a phobl ifanc sydd wedi bod mewn gofal / Inquiry into care  
experienced children and young people  
PAC(5) CECYP - 12  
Ymateb gan Unigolyn / Evidence from Individual

All levels of government and all public funded organisations need to demonstrate  
good management

I suggest they use ISO 9001 to achieve this



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experienced children and young people  
PAC(5) CECYP - 13  
Ymateb gan Unigolyn / Evidence from Individual

I would like to give information regarding the high numbers of children in care who simply shouldn't be there. I successfully fought against the substandard process adopted by Social Services and triumphed. I can understand why people give up.

There is a long overdue and urgent need for change.

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales  
Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee  
Ymchwiliad i blant a phobl ifanc sydd wedi bod mewn gofal / Inquiry into care  
experienced children and young people  
PAC(5) CECYP - 14  
Ymateb gan Y Grŵp Trawsbleidiol ar Blant sy'n Derbyn Gofal / Evidence from Cross  
Party Group on Looked After Children

I write as Chair of the All Party Group on Looked After Children and to welcome your Committee's decision to undertake an inquiry looking at public services for care experienced children and young people.

The All Party Group was formed after the publication of the Waterhouse Report: *Lost in Care* which was published in 2000. Since then the Group has served as a forum to discuss issues relating to Looked After Children and Care Leavers and to put pressure on the Welsh Government and public agencies to achieve the sort of transformation that was set out in *Lost in Care* and other reports and initiatives since. We remain frustrated by the slow progress that has been achieved but welcome recent improvements in educational attainment figures for Looked After Children. Nevertheless, even here it must be noted that the attainment level remains well below that of the peer group.

In addition to poor educational attainment the All Party Group has looked at the following matters as areas of concern and needing considerable improvement:

- High premature death rates among care leavers
- High level of referrals to the criminal justice system among Looked After Children (note the report of Lord Laming: *In Care, Out of Trouble*)
- The lack of a national model for advocacy services and the inconsistencies of local provision in advocacy services
- The stability of care placements
- The role of corporate parenting in driving up standards
- The poverty of ambition in target setting for desired improvements and outcomes
- High numbers of care leavers in prison
- High propensity of early parenthood among care leavers
- Tenancy support for care leavers setting up home

One of the concerns we hear most frequently is the lack of effective joint working between relevant agencies. While good practice does exist it is not generally common practice. For example, to reduce the number of children who go missing from care it is necessary for work to be co-ordinated between the police, social services, foster carers and schools. The recent work of South Wales Police in Bridgend to reduce MISPERs is to be commended as a way to improve joint working.

Despite some recent improvements, educational attainment remains far too low and leads to a very real reduction in life chances for Looked After Children and care leavers. Here the role of the senior management team in schools needs to be improved. They need to track the progress of Looked After Children, act quickly to improve poor performance, ensure effective pastoral support, and so on. Local authorities must do their utmost to ensure a school placement is not jeopardised by a change in a care placement.

The All Party Group particularly welcomes the inclusion of “the effectiveness of local authority corporate parenting arrangements” in the committee’s terms of reference. In fact the corporate parenting obligation should extend across public services embracing health, housing, education and as the example above shows even the police. If we want to achieve a transformation this is the sort of radical thinking that is required. Corporate parenting cannot start and end in Children’s Services departments of local authorities. There are a number of ways the political side of corporate parenting could be improved:

- CPD for Local Authority cabinet members and the members of scrutiny committees
- A network for cabinet members with responsibility for children’s services to share best practice, discuss challenges and trends, and feed in advice to the Welsh Government and National Assembly
- A similar network for the chairs of scrutiny committees responsible for Looked After Children

You will recall that the Welsh Government has established a Ministerial Advisory Group on Improving Outcomes for Children and that I was appointed as the Chair of the Group in summer 2016. The All Party Group has welcomed the establishment of the MAG and I give the APG regular updates on its work. The MAG

is due to meet on 29<sup>th</sup> September to consider a framework for action (2017–2020). It will then exercise oversight on the implementation of the plan, produce regular reports on progress and a comprehensive annual overview. A limited number of sentinel indicators will be developed. To date the work has been progressed under three workstreams:

1. Preventing children entering care and early intervention
2. Improving outcomes for children already in care
3. Supporting care leavers to successful futures and independent living

The APG would welcome the application of the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act to help maximise the benefits of public expenditure in this field. Local authorities face many challenges and there is a need to plan more effectively to develop specialist provision, often on a regional basis. There are a wide range of providers offering services for Looked After Children including those from the independent and private sectors. Local authorities would benefit from shaping their commissioning work to develop greater co-ordination over local care economies. It is also the case that there has not been a consistent approach to investment in LAC services despite the demand and complexity of cases increasing. Greater transparency in local authorities children's budgeting would increase accountability and allow for a more accurate assessment of total spend on LAC services, and this in turn could be measured against outcomes.

The All Party Group regularly expresses concern about the level of investment in CAMHS services as many LAC need access to high quality mental health services. It should also be noted here that Care Leavers are liable to be overlooked in the planning of mental health services. Concerns have also been expressed about the impact of cuts in youth services which are often a key area of support for LAC.

Finally, it should be remembered that LAC rely on the dedication and professionalism of social workers, foster carers and teachers. It is important that investment in the workforce matches our ambition for improved and more ambitious outcomes.

I hope this response will prove useful to the work of the Public Accounts Committee in carrying out this important inquiry.