

## CYPE(6)-04-22 - Paper to note 14

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### Support for children leaving care

17 January 2022

Dear Jayne,

Thank you for your letter of 17 December about the areas of you are considering as part of your policy inquiries, and the support provided to children and young people who have left, or are leaving care. I will address the points raised in your letter in turn:

#### 1. Information about support provided to children and young people leaving care

Our Social Services and Well-Being Wales) Act 2014 and accompanying Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children), sets out the statutory duties placed on local authorities to support and promote the well-being of young people leaving their care. This includes the support and services they must provide to young people to help them make a successful transition to adulthood and move towards independent living.

When a looked after child is about to turn 16, local authorities must prepare a pathway plan to assist that young person with the transition to adulthood and leaving care. This will address the young person's physical, emotional, mental health and development needs and the arrangements in place to support their accommodation, education, training or employment.

We collect annual statistics about children looked after by Welsh local authorities and care leavers. Latest figures for 2020-21 were published in November 2021 and can be found at the following link - [Experimental Statistics: Children looked after by local authorities, 2020-21 \(gov.wales\)](#) . Further detail about accommodation, activity (education, training and employment) and educational qualifications of care leavers can be found at [Children looked after \(gov.wales\)](#).

#### 2. Update on the Programme for Government commitments

The Programme for Government contains a number of commitments relevant to children's social services, which implemented together will support the transformation of children's social care in Wales. These commitments build on existing work and action taken to reduce

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

the number of children in care, help children remain in the care of their families and provide care for children who require it closer to home.

#### Radical reform of services for looked after children and care leavers

Our White Paper on Social Care Futures touched on opportunities for reform of children's services as part of wholesale reform of social services. We want to deliver a new vision and ambition for children's services, based on more consistent practice, less risk adverse practices and more restorative approaches being prescribed and adopted across Wales. The development of a National Framework for Social Care and the establishment of a National Office provides an opportunity to drive transformation and reform of children's services at a national level.

To inform our approach I have established an Oversight Board, chaired by Anthony Douglas which includes representation from senior leaders across local government and the third sector. The Board will seek to drive improvements in children's services, working collaboratively with the sector on peer learning and professional development and in supporting a systems-wide approach to improving quality and services. The first meeting of the Oversight Board is due to take place on 19 January.

#### Strengthen public bodies in their role as 'corporate parent'

Whilst corporate parenting is taken seriously by local authorities, our aim is to strengthen corporate parenting across all departments within the local authority, to enable better partnership working and improved transitions between services provided for care experienced children. We also intend to widen the concept of corporate parenting across all public services that provide services to care experienced children, to help ensure care experienced children are provided with the best response and support from these services.

An Implementation Group has been established to take forward our corporate parenting commitment and has met several times. The work of the group has been concentrated on the development of a Corporate Parenting Charter in collaboration with care experienced children and partners, for public sector organisations to sign up to. Once complete, engagement sessions and events across the public sector will be held to strengthen corporate parenting within local authorities and widen responsibilities across the public sector. A particular focus will be on health, education and housing partners. This engagement alongside the Charter will then inform the development of statutory guidance setting out the roles and responsibilities of the range of partners across the public sector who have responsibilities and interactions with care experienced young people.

### **3. An update on Welsh Government responses to the Children Commissioner for Wales' 2020-21 Annual Report:**

With regards to the package of support we are taking forward for care leavers highlighted in the Children's Commissioner's annual report:

- We have committed to introduce legislation in this Senedd Term to deliver on our commitment to provide care leavers with a statutory entitlement to access a personal adviser up to age 25. We anticipate this will be taken forward in 2023.
- In relation to the use of unregulated placements, officials are in regular contact with officials from the Department for Education concerning the ban on unregulated placements for children under 16. The ban came in to force in September 2021 and work is underway with Ofsted regarding its registration and related processes to support the sector in its compliance with the duties. Our dialogue and learning will continue.

- Welsh Government officials are continuing to work closely with partners including local authorities and the third sector to develop a range of good quality accommodation options for care leavers.
- The St David's Day Fund for care leavers continues to be made available via the Children and Communities Grant. This is a flexible funding stream provided recurrently, which enables local authorities to spend according to a range of locally identified needs.

**4. An update on the development of an alternative approach to the 'When I am Ready' scheme to support young people in children's residential care.**

Whilst the When I'm Ready scheme applies to children in foster care, the same model cannot be translated to residential care. The reasons are around the appropriateness of adults living with younger children and cost of providing suitable arrangements. We are considering alternative models, for instance young people from residential care maintaining links and support with professionals from their previous residential care home. We are working with partners to take forward this work including the third sector, local authorities and the Office of the Children's Commissioner. This will form part of our multi-sector work to improve the range and quality of accommodation for young people leaving care.

**5. Clarification on the future role of the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group which focussed on care experienced children and those leaving care during the Fifth Senedd**

The Improving Outcomes for Children programme and its Ministerial Advisory Group was stood down at the end of the last Senedd Term. Its outcomes and achievements are set out in its Legacy Report - <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-06/improving-outcomes-for-children-programme-legacy-report.pdf>

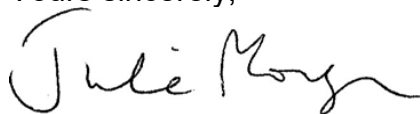
New arrangements have been put in place to oversee and take forward our challenging reform agenda for children's social care for this Senedd Term, building on the action taken in the to improve outcomes for care experienced children and care leavers.

To bring coherence to all our policy activity for children across the Welsh Government, a Children and Young People's Plan for Wales has been developed, building on our commitment to children's rights and specifically to help deliver relevant commitments in our Programme for Government. A Director's Board of senior Welsh Government officials will focus on delivery of and monitor progress against the plan across Ministerial portfolios to ensure all children in Wales can thrive.

Our Oversight Board, referred to earlier in this letter, will focus on the delivery of relevant Programme for Government commitments for children's services. As part of its role the Oversight Board will maintain a focus on our activity to support care leavers and young people in the process of leaving care.

I hope you have found my reply helpful.

Yours sincerely,



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