



Consultation Response to the Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly's Inquiry into Care-Experienced Children and Young People.

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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.

Fabric was developed by Harri Coleman who is a qualified and registered social worker with experience in Child Protection, Looked After Children, Fostering, Adoption and Children's Services staff training.

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 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 needs 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 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 (28th 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 10th 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 31st 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 ¼ 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.

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