

Agenda – Public Accounts Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 3 – Senedd

Meeting date: 13 January 2020

Meeting time: 13.00

For further information contact:

Fay Bowen

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

SeneddPAC@assembly.wales

(Private Pre-meeting)

(13.00 – 13.15)

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(13.15)

2 Paper(s) to note

(13.15)

2.1 Hospital Catering and Patient Nutrition: Letter from the Welsh Government (20 December 2019)

(Pages 1 – 8)

2.2 Scrutiny of Accounts 2018–19: Letter from the Welsh Government (20 December 2019)

(Pages 9 – 24)

3 Care experienced children and young people: Evidence session with the Welsh Government

(13.20 – 14.50)

(Pages 25 – 95)

Research Briefing

Research Service Statistical Briefing

PAC(5)–02–20 Paper 1 – Welsh Government

PAC(5)–02–20 Paper 2 – David Melding AM, Chair of Ministerial Advisory Group

PAC(5)–02–20 Paper 3 – WLGA

PAC(5)–02–20 Paper 4 – Children’s Commissioner for Wales



PAC(5)-02-20 Paper 5 - Children in Wales

PAC(5)-02-20 Paper 6 - NSPCC Wales

Albert Heaney – Director of Social Services and Integration, Welsh Government

Alistair Davey – Deputy Director, Enabling People, Welsh Government

Steve Davies – Director, Education Directorate, Welsh Government

Megan Colley – Head of Supporting Achievement & Safeguarding, Welsh Government

4 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public from the meeting for the following business:

(14.50)

Item 5

5 Care experienced children and young people: Consideration of evidence received

(14.50 – 15.15)

Health and Social Services Group
Y Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Prif Swyddog Nyrsio - Cyfarwyddwr Nyrs GIG Cymru
Chief Nursing Officer - Nurse Director NHS Wales

Agenda Item 2.1



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our ref: MA/VG/5964/19

Nick Ramsay, AM
Chair – Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

20 December 2019

Dear Mr Ramsay

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE REPORT PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE HOSPITAL CATERING AND PATIENT NUTRITION REPORT MARCH 2017

In March 2017 the Public Accounts Committee published its report '*Hospital Catering and Patient Nutrition*'. The report contained ten recommendations. Eight of these recommendations have previously been completed. Two recommendations were due for completion by November 2019.

The two outstanding recommendations due for completion by November 2019 are:

Recommendation 3 The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government develops a suite of questions to be included within both the standardised nursing documentation and in future all Wales patient surveys to monitor whether health boards are recording and meeting the cultural, religious and dietary needs of patients.

Response: Complete

At the time of the publication of the Public Accounts Committee's report in March 2017 the nursing documentation included assessment questions identifying dietary needs and specifying specific factors including religious and cultural influences. It was agreed to undertake further work on cultural and spiritual issues. A new set of spiritual care competencies have been developed and introduced into the pre-registration nursing curriculum which will enable newly registered nurses to competently assess and address individual's spiritual needs including those related to diet. A new all Wales adult inpatient assessment has been developed and a fundamental question is included

which asks each inpatient: - '**Do you have any special cultural or spiritual beliefs we need to consider?**'

The response to this question leads to the development of a patient specific care plan to address the cultural and religious needs identified by the patient.

Recommendation 4 The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government provide an update on the key stages for standardising the documentation identified in the Nurse Informaticist work plan and report to the Committee any slippages in the proposed timescale.

Response: Complete

In 2016, a high-level project plan that outlined a three year timeline for the digitalisation of nursing documentation related to patient nutrition produced. It was agreed that seven other areas of nursing assessment would be included in the project in addition to nutrition. This plan was based on an Efficiency Through Technology Fund (ETTF) bid that was submitted to the Welsh Government in November 2016. This nursing ETTF bid was initially unsuccessful, however an electronic forms (e-forms) ETTF bid was subsequently approved with nursing documentation being prioritised.

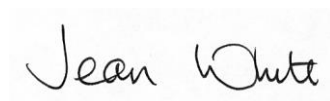
A standardised all Wales nutrition risk assessment has now been developed for use in adult inpatient settings across Wales. The assessment tool is the 'Weight, Appetite, Ability to Eat, Stress Fractures and Pressure Sores/Wounds (WAASP) and has been made available to all NHS health organisations for use from November 2019. The digital version of WAASP has been developed and is available and has been tested by nurses who have suggested new refinements. It has been agreed that these refinements will be developed and the electronic tool will be available for use from February 2020.

The paper version of WAASP is being used from November 2019 until the refinements to the electronic version are completed in February 2020.

The use of WAASP on an all Wales basis will aid in movement of patients across health board boundaries as information will follow the patient. It will also assist when staff move between and across health board boundaries.

Please also see attached Appendix 1 which describes in more detail the work undertaken to develop the electronic record.

Yours sincerely



Professor Jean White
Chief Nursing Officer
Nurse Director NHS Wales

Appendix 1

Recommendation 4 of Public Accounts Committee recommendations of Hospital Catering and Patient Nutrition report March 2017

Details of key stages in the development of all Wales documentation

The “*Digitalisation of Nursing Documents*” is a three year project that has produced the Welsh Nursing Care Record – Hospital (WNCR).

The project commenced in April 2017 with revenue funding totalling £1.18 million over three years. The funding has enabled the appointment of the project team consisting of a small number of project roles at a national level, technical resources (local and national) and seven senior CNIOs working in every health board and Velindre NHS Trust [NB one CNIO is shared between Velindre and Powys].

Table 1 below is the original high-level plan presented in October 2016. The project has delivered on the milestones in the plan.

Table 1: High level plan presented in October 2016.

Project task	Timeline		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Review of documentation			
Develop governance strategies			
Design clinical support system			
Review and test			
End user training			

Once the project team was established, the following objectives were defined:

- To standardise data definitions and information standards to adopt a common language and terminology for nursing documents in scope across secondary care in NHS Wales.
- To standardise and digitalise following key nursing documents:
 - 1) *Adult Inpatient Assessment (AIA) form*
 - 2) *Nutrition core risk assessment*
 - 3) *Falls core risk assessment*
 - 4) *Skin core risk assessment*
 - 5) *Pain core risk assessment*
 - 6) *Continence core risk assessment*
 - 7) *Manual handling core risk assessment*

8) Discharge Checklist

- To enable these digitalised nursing documents to be completed across a variety of devices.
- To integrate and store digitalised nursing documents in the national care record document repository for Wales, the Welsh Care Records Service (WCRS), to allow these documents to be viewed in the Welsh Clinical Portal (WCP) application wherever care is provided in secondary care in Wales.
- To implement a sustainable service management model to provide operational support for WNCR when phase one transitions to business as usual.
- To identify the second tranche of nursing documents to be standardised and digitalised as part of a second phase from April '20 (subject to Welsh Government funding).

The project has made significant inroads on the journey towards the digitalisation of nursing documentation delivering:

- A standardised and single Adult Inpatient Assessment (AIA) form for use across secondary care in Wales, transforming from a position of unwarranted variation and unnecessary duplication of data entry to a standard nursing language and equitable approach for patient assessment across NHS Wales.
- A paper version of the AIA form that has been designed and tested, which was well received and has helped identify changes to the digitalised form.
- A set of nationally agreed evidence-based core risk assessments to be standardised and used across NHS Wales. These include:
 - **Nutrition risk assessment:** The Weight Appetite Ability to Eat – Stress Fractures and Pressure Sores/Wounds (WASSP) for secondary care inpatients.
 - **Falls risk assessment:** All Wales Falls and Bone Health Multifactorial Assessment
 - **Skin risk assessment:** All Wales Purpose T Pressure Ulcer Risk Assessment
 - **Continence risk assessment:** All Wales Continence / Toileting Risk Assessment
 - **Manual Handling risk assessment:** All Wales Patient Handling Assessment and Safer Handling Plan
 - **Pain risk assessment:** Pain AD, Abbey Pain Assessment Tool, 0-10 and Categorical Rating Scale

Year 1 (April 2017-March 2018)

April 2017 – August 2017: Extensive engagement undertaken across key stakeholders from Health and Social Care, Academia, Royal College of Nursing (RCN), expert groups, a variety of care settings and front-line staff from across NHS Wales. In addition, a baseline assessment of existing nursing practices and documentation was completed including a gap analysis to identify variation across Wales. This intensive engagement culminated with a list of high-level end user requirements to support the design of a nursing solution.

April 2017– Nov 2017: Appointing project team and the Clinical Nursing Informatics Officers (CNIOs).

September 2017: High-level user requirements signed off and recommendation received from Executive Nurse Directors to proceed with an in-house NHS Wales solution.

October 2017: Following the Executive Nurse Directors meeting, project attended and presented an update to the Informatics Planning And Delivery (IPAD) Group.

Nov 2017: Developed the project's governance structure and first workshop held to commence the data standardisation workstream.

January 2018: Work commenced with clinical expert groups on the evidence-based best practice review of priority risk assessments.

Feb 2018: First project board held.

Year 2 (April 2018 -March 2019)

April - October '18: In addition to the directive from Executive Directors of Nursing, a further consensus was also required from each of the health boards/trusts informatics/technical leads to determine the most appropriate way forward within the project timescales and revenue funding constraints. Following a review of available in-house NHS Wales solutions, national consensus was reached at the national technical working group to build upon the existing Swansea Bay University Health Board's (SB UHB) nursing documentation application as the national application for Wales. This application was rebranded as the Welsh Nursing Care Record – Hospital (WNCR). This recommendation was endorsed by the project board.

January '19: Welsh Nursing Care Record (WNCR) development commenced with the software development team located in SB UHB. The project delivered a standardised Adult Inpatient Assessment form for use across secondary care settings supporting a consistent nursing language and assessment form in Wales.

Year 3 (April 2019 – March 2020)

July '19: A late and emerging user requirement was raised to enable agency nurses to use the WNCR. This has proven to be a complex development. Whilst a solution has been developed, it presented an additional development pressure resulting in a

number of trade-offs to ensure that the project remained on track to go live in September '19.

August '19: The first iteration of WNCR user acceptance testing started with health boards' CNIOs. User testing highlighted software bugs and a number of design refinements/new requirements. Based on this feedback, it was requested that the WNCR was refined to resolve these. As a result, the project team including the CNIOs, technical and project representatives, collectively agreed that the go live dates should be deferred.

16th September '19: An exception report was presented to the project board including two options for consideration. *Option A:* Proceed with the September '19 go live date with reduced features and without requested refinements and fixes. *Option B:* Extend the testing phases to allow enhancements and identified fixes to be delivered. Option B was recommended to the project board to defer go lives until changes requested from the first iteration of user testing had been delivered. This recommendation was accepted by the project board.

26 and 27 September '19: Two workshops were held with the CNIOs to review requested refinements to WNCR.

October '19: The development effort to deliver the minimal viable product was determined. An additional 6 weeks development effort plus 3 weeks systems testing is required before the product can be released for the second round of user testing, meaning that that live use could not start in November '19.

- The “Nationally Standardised Adult Inpatient Assessment and Core Risk Assessments” Welsh Health Circular (WHC), published on 20th August '19. This WHC outlined the agreed implementation schedule for these core risk assessments which have been standardised and agreed as national tools because of this project. The nutritional core risk assessment tools are to be implemented by 30th November '19 in paper format in readiness for transitioning to the digitalised form in WNCR. All other phase one core risk assessments are requested to be implemented by 1 May 2020.
- The successful appointment of Clinical Nursing Informatics Officers (CNIOs) in all health boards and Velindre NHS Trust by putting clinicians right at the heart of software and standards design.
- A standardised digitalised nursing discharge checklist to facilitate the effective and efficient discharge.
- A collaborative approach to technical design that has included representation from all health boards and Velindre NHS Trust providing advice, leading on the technical design and informing the recommendation to build upon the then ABMU Nursing solution.

- The establishment of a national information standards working group to review and standardise nursing terminology and language across Wales. This has delivered a national methodology to be used for standardising further nursing documentation.
- A new technical solution which allows agency nurses to access WNCR. This includes recording their name, PIN and shift details to support auditing and information governance purposes.
- A nationally agreed design for a technical business continuity solution should the WNCR become unavailable.
- The design, configuration and deployment of the WNCR hosting infrastructure to support the use of phase one documents.
- A partnership with academia through Swansea University's School of Nursing who are leading on the evaluation. This has resulted in the joint development of an evidence-based evaluation methodology.
- A digital vital signs recording e-form prototype based on the National Early Warning Scores (NEWS) form. The project is determining whether digital vital signs needs to meet Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) medical devices regulations.
- The first iteration of WNCR user acceptance testing completed. Whilst refinements have been identified, it has resulted in generating enthusiasm and excitement amongst the health boards' CNIOs and local nursing colleagues.
- Extensive clinical engagement that has generated eagerness and motivation amongst the nursing community to embark on this digital journey.
- A resource plan to Welsh Government, identifying the necessary funding to progress with phase two documents when ETTF concludes on 31 March 2020. The project has engaged with the nursing community to agree the next suite of nursing documents to be standardised. The information standards work is already underway.

As demonstrated above, firm foundations are in place as well as the mechanisms to implement the WNCR. The project team assessed the feasibility of entering a live use phase with the current version, but it was determined that this would result in a loss of enthusiasm and motivation for WNCR amongst nurses. Consequently, a revised go live plan has been produced which includes software fixes and refinements identified in the first round of user testing:

Table 1: Revised WNCR go live milestones

Phase	Date	Duration
Development	14 Oct – 22 Nov '19	6 weeks
Systems testing	25 Nov – 13 Dec '19	3 weeks
User testing: 2nd iteration	16 Dec '19 – 17 Jan '20	5 weeks
Ward training	20 – 31 Jan '20	2 weeks
Go live	3 Feb – 20 Mar '20	7 weeks
Evaluation	21 Mar – 17 Apr '20	4 weeks

The “*Digitalisation of Nursing Documents*” is a three year project. The new revised project timescales demonstrate that the project can deliver the All-Wales solution before its Welsh Government ETTF funding concludes on 31 March '20.

During the project, there have also been several key lessons learned. These include:

- Time taken to reach national agreement on a common technical solution. Project commenced in April '17. National agreement achieved on October '18 (18 months).
- Time taken to reach agreement between national multidisciplinary speciality groups on core risk assessments to be adopted nationally and health boards/trust to agree to use. Original deadline was August '18. This was completed in January '19. This delay reduced the available software development time.
- Late and new emerging requirements such as the agency nursing access model and technical business continuity solution meant that there was a need to reduce features to achieve the September '19 go live. However, the recommendation from the CNIOs to defer live use, allows key features to be developed in readiness for the second iteration of user testing planned to start in December '19.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Tracey Burke

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol / Director General

Y Grŵp Addysg a Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus
Education and Public Services Group

Nick Ramsay, AM

Chair, Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
SA99 1NA

20 December 2019

Dear Mr Ramsay

Update on the Welsh Government's Evaluation of Flexible Funding

I am writing with reference to the Permanent Secretary's letter of 7 November 2019, following her appearance at your Committee on the General Scrutiny of Accounts. One of the Permanent Secretary's actions was to send further information once the Evaluation Report of the Flexible Funding Programme was available.

Wavehill Ltd were commissioned to carry out evaluation research between November 2018 and October 2019, with the aim of providing robust and timely information on implementation, and to understand how the flexible funding approach may affect outcomes in the longer term. The final report was published on the Welsh Government website on 22 November 2019 <https://gov.wales/evaluation-flexible-funding-programme-final-report>.

I attach, for ease of the Committee Members' reference, the Executive Summary of the Final Report. This outlines the key findings in relation to local authorities, stakeholders and the Welsh Government. The report draws conclusions and recommendations for the Welsh Government, local authorities and stakeholders. Specifically for Welsh Government, the report recommends:

- Simplifying processes to facilitate greater consistency;
- Reviewing the vision and objectives of the flexible funding approach;
- Identifying mechanisms with which to provide ongoing support for the continued implementation of flexible funding approaches at a local authority level;



Parc Cathays • Cathays Park
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Ffôn • Tel 0300 0258047
tracey.burke@gov.wales
Gwefan • website:
www.wales.gov.uk

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.

- Extending engagement with external stakeholder bodies and national and regional Voluntary and Community Sector organisation; and
- Undertaking self–assessment reviews of progress against the *7 Lenses of Transformation*.

Next Steps

All recommendations made in the Final Evaluation Report will be taken forward through a series of stakeholder workshops with local authorities and relevant third sector organisations in the New Year. The main output from these workshops will be to co-produce an action plan for consideration by the Welsh Government Funding Alignment Implementation Board, which will monitor action being taken against the recommendations.

We have also been making progress on developing the single Housing Support Grant (HSG) in collaboration with stakeholders. The thread of homelessness that runs through the legacy grants has allowed us to develop a coherent purpose and scope for the grant, which has been translated into draft grant guidance. Formal consultation on the new guidance closed at the end of November and final guidance will be published in the New Year.

The draft Outcomes Framework, noted in the report, will be issued to local authorities in January 2020. Further engagement with stakeholders will be held between January and March, to jointly plan for the implementation of the Outcomes Framework from April 2020.

I hope this is sufficient by way of update. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for its time and interest in this area.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracey Burke." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tracey Burke



SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER:

54/2109

PUBLICATION DATE:

22ND NOVEMBER 2019

Evaluation of the Flexible Funding Programme: final report

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

Pack Page 11

Evaluation of the Flexible Funding Programme: Final Report
Simon Tanner, Oliver Allies, Louise Starks

Wavehill Ltd



Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

Sara Ahmad

Education and Public Services Group

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Email: SocialJusticeResearch@gov.wales

Executive Summary

Flexible Funding

This report provides findings of the final phase of an evaluation of the Flexible Funding approach, which was conducted between November 2018 and November 2019. It builds upon an interim report published in October 2018 (Welsh Government, 2018d) that identified early insights from the initial delivery of the Flexible Funding approach, which was led mainly by pathfinder local authorities (see below for details).

Flexible Funding is the current approach¹ developed by the Welsh Government that enables local authorities to adopt a more strategic way of delivering early intervention, prevention, and support. It seeks to provide local authorities with the opportunity to use different grants for early intervention, prevention, and support to collaborate with the aim of providing greater local authority autonomy in service delivery, particularly in respect of joint planning and commissioning, to better support outcomes for local residents.

Seven self-nominated pathfinder local authorities in Wales tested a new approach in the 2018/19 financial year: Conwy, Cardiff, Newport, Torfaen, Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf, and Merthyr Tydfil, as well as the Cwm Taf Public Services Board². These pathfinders possessed full (100% of the budget) flexibility across 10 programmes which were combined under one grant in a pilot approach. Furthermore, Flexible Funding provided the remaining 15 local authorities in Wales ('non-pathfinders') with an extended flexibility of 15% movement across five grants (Welsh Government, 2017) — see Table 1 for details of the split between pathfinders and non-pathfinders. In addition, the Welsh Government announced in October 2017 (Welsh Government, 2017) that funding levels for Supporting People would be maintained in line with the 2017/18 budget commitments.

¹ In the interim report, Flexible Funding was referred to as a programme. Flexible Funding is rather an approach utilising a range of funding mechanisms to facilitate change in the way in which local authorities across Wales fund EIPS. Therefore, throughout the report the text will refer to the Flexible Funding approach to encompass the multiple funding mechanisms that local authorities are reviewing and revising in order to fund this key support provision for their residents.

² Working jointly with Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Table 1: Grants included as part of the 2018/19 Flexible Funding approach

Pathfinders (100% funding flexibility)	Non-pathfinders (15% funding flexibility)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting People • Flying Start • Families First • Legacy Fund • Promoting Positive Engagement for Young People • Childcare and Play (formerly Out of School Childcare) • Homelessness Prevention • Rent Smart Wales Enforcement (formerly Independent Living) • St David's Day Fund • Communities for Work Plus (formerly the Employability Grant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting People • Flying Start • Families First • Legacy Fund • Communities for Work Plus (formerly the Employability Grant)

A Ministerial announcement on 3rd October 2018 confirmed that the Welsh Government would drive delivery forward through a two-grant Flexible Funding approach involving a Children and Communities Grant (CCG) and a Housing Support Grant (HSG), operating across all 22 local authorities in Wales from April 2019 — see Table 2 for how funding programmes are split between the CCG and the HSG.

Table 2: Grants included in CCG and HSG

CCG	HSG
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flying Start • Families First • Legacy Fund • Promoting Positive Engagement for Young People • Childcare and Play (formerly Out of School Childcare) • St David's Day Fund • Communities for Work Plus (formerly the Employability Grant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting People • Homelessness Prevention • Rent Smart Wales Enforcement (formerly Independent Living)

Evaluation aims and method

In April 2018, following a competitive tendering exercise, the Welsh Government commissioned Wavehill to undertake an independent evaluation of the Flexible Funding approach. The aim of the evaluation work is to provide robust and timely information on the implementation and understand how the Flexible Funding approach will affect the achievement of outcomes in the longer term.

A wealth of information has been collated from 58 interviews that were conducted with Funding Alignment team (formerly the Funding Transition team) representatives and grant leads in local authorities (pathfinders and non-pathfinders), as well as with the Welsh Government, partners, and stakeholders. This has been supplemented by literature and policy review work and workshops reviewing the options for an Outcomes Framework for the programme.

Key findings

Local authorities and stakeholders

- Progress in the delivery of the Flexible Funding approach continues to be variable, although progress has been made from the position noted by the interim report in October 2018, and there are examples across authorities of officers from the 10 original programmes meeting together in order to plan and co-commission/co-fund provision.
- These examples are much more likely to be observed in the development and implementation of infrastructure and frameworks with which to support the delivery of Early Intervention and Prevention Support (EIPS) than in developments in the services, wherein there are fewer examples. At present, there are limited examples of service users having yet experienced better services as a result of the changes being made under the auspices of the Flexible Funding approach, meaning that it is very early in developments with respect to seeing changes resulting.

- Flexing of funding in pathfinder authorities and the flexible use of these programme funds in 2018/19 have witnessed around 1–4% of total programme funds being moved between different programmes. This has been most noted in funding arrangements for the Supporting People, Families First, Flying Start, Homelessness Prevention, and Communities for Work Plus programmes.
- In local authorities the most notable examples of where progress has been made include:
 - greater knowledge and awareness of the aims, objectives and nature of delivery of each of the 10 grants covered by the CCG (7) and the HSG (3)
 - increasing examples of, and discussion surrounding the opportunities for, joint working or engagement across grants
 - development of back office functions, commissioning, procurement, IT and data systems
 - mapping of existing approaches to service delivery to identify potential duplication across grants and any gaps in availability
 - some recommissioning and new service development being undertaken, despite contractual and financial barriers to some recommissioning
 - benefits reported in supporting service users more quickly both in entry and in exit with a more joined-up service offer, although the expected impacts are most likely in the 2019-20 financial year, or even from April 2020.
- The single-grant approach for the HSG has also shown positive outcomes through the scheme's development and co-production of new single HSG guidance, agreed approaches for needs assessment, strategic planning and reviews of service delivery, joint working and collaborative working, and the identification of additional funding streams, which has resulted from a range of partnership and joint working between the Welsh Government, local authorities, the third sector, and Registered Social Landlords.

- For the majority of local authorities (18) it remains too soon to state whether or not the Flexible Funding approach is having an impact on working practice, or the services that local residents receive. For the majority of local authorities (pathfinders and non-pathfinders) there is a recognition that there remains much more to do, including exploring the (further) development of joint commissioning arrangements and workforce development.
- The strongest examples of progress are characterised by Flexible Funding approaches that are underpinned by a clear vision and detailed design and planning activities in order to establish a local delivery model that is centred on transformational leadership and accountability.
- Five local authorities have made, or are at least beginning to make, good progress. In this sense, good progress identifies local authorities that have established a clear vision and strategic plan to underpin their Flexible Funding approach, supplemented by emerging collaborative working, clear accountability structures, and some early signs that service users may be more readily able to access services that are relevant to their particular needs.
- A further group (of 12 authorities) are beginning to establish reviews and identify ways in which they can drive Flexible Funding delivery forward through the two grants (CCG and HSG). It is likely that they may begin to see some efficiency gains arise from this, perhaps through removal of the duplication of service delivery, or more integrated support provision through single delivery routes.
- However, three authorities³ have made very little progress due to staff shortages and wider resource pressures and it may be that these authorities need additional support from the Funding Alignment team in the Welsh Government to help them to move forward in 2019-20.

³ Interviews were not possible with two local authorities; because of the lack of interview data, we have been unable to allocate them to a particular group, though it is unlikely that progress is likely to have been good.

Welsh Government

- Welsh Government officials (including members of the Funding Alignment team) admit that they are 'on a journey' with respect to Flexible Funding and that a firm vision for the approach has yet to crystallise fully.
- Welsh Government programme leads are, in the majority, supportive of the concept of the Flexible Funding approach, but greater clarity is sought as to its meaning within the Welsh Government, the roles performed by individual programme teams and how this is communicated externally.
- Members of the Funding Alignment team are keen for the ultimate vision for the Flexible Funding approach to be revisited and, where appropriate, recast so as to better align with the recently restructured policy teams.
- Welsh Government officials (including those in the Funding Alignment team) identify challenges with the coordination and communication of consistent messages regarding how each programme should operate within the CCG and the HSG, which has rendered their tasks in respect of work more complicated, although the HSG has made some positive progress in the development of its guidance documentation co-produced with a range of external stakeholders including local authorities, the third sector, and Registered Social Landlords.
- Several Welsh Government programme leads identify that many local authorities still seek significant amounts of guidance from them with regard to what programmes should be doing within the Flexible Funding approach, as well as alignment with the CCG and the HSG. There have been occasions on which conflicting advice on a Flexible Funding approach and its alignment with programme guidance has needed to be resolved.
- For the Welsh Government there have remained challenges. The Funding Alignment team have faced delivery pressures due to staff turnover, which has rendered the management of relationships with 22 local authorities difficult; despite this, however, relationships have remained positive.

- There is still work to be undertaken within the Welsh Government to enable programme leads to collaborate more closely and adopt more consistent approaches to working with local authority leads (Flexible Funding and programmes) in order to deliver the Flexible Funding approach.

Conclusions

- Progress since late 2018 has mainly involved non-pathfinders establishing reviews of services, assessing their governance and management options and establishing forums, if not already in place, in which the 10 grants covered by the programme can be reviewed. This mirrors approaches that the pathfinders adopted in their delivery from the inception of the programme.
- Progress is not only demonstrated by the more widespread examples across authorities of officers from the 10 original programmes convening in order to plan and co-commission/co-fund provision, as noted in HSG delivery in particular, but also observed in some CCG examples in authorities demonstrating the most advanced development of their Flexible Funding approaches.
- The work undertaken by the non-pathfinders has facilitated the review of local delivery practice for EIPS and the development of understanding other approaches, and helps to begin the process of identifying the options for joint working and the potential for service integration.
- Five local authorities (three pathfinders and two non-pathfinders) have made particularly good progress, as evidenced by formalised structures with respect to vision, design and plan development, structured processes for leadership and accountability, and operational approaches for collaborative working.
- Furthermore, there are already examples in 2018/19 of funding being utilised flexibly by six of the seven original pathfinders and in three non-pathfinders (see Table 4.1). It is in these authorities that the strongest evidence is found of the pooling of budgets to support the ongoing delivery of some services in specialist need areas including domestic violence, mental health, and vulnerable family support.

- Limited examples of joint commissioning have been identified, although the majority (13) of local authorities are actively investigating the options for this across existing Early Intervention, Prevention, and Support (EIPS), with examples being found for domestic violence support, parenting, and training delivery.
- Collaborative working (involving joint meetings) and service reviews by combined programme teams across the 10 programmes encompassed by the Flexible Funding approach are in evidence, though there remains some continued separation of the CCG and HSG structures in some local authorities (4) which has yet to be overcome. Two local authorities identify that collaborative working has been the most notable area of impact instigated by their local Flexible Funding approach, as observed through our analysis of the interview findings.
- More work remains to be undertaken across a range of local authorities and the Welsh Government in order to reduce the variability in progress being made in the delivery of local Flexible Funding approaches, as evident in the evaluation findings. This is best tackled through ensuring that authorities have undertaken clear vision development, design and planning linkage to cover strategic and business plans, as well as using these to influence the ultimate design of EIPS at a local level. In addition, it should involve effectively communicating any changes more widely to staff across authorities so that the levels of understanding of the change ethos and objectives are known more widely.
- Further development is also required to formalise the leadership and accountability structures in local authorities to underpin the transformation needed to support local Flexible Funding approaches in all authorities.
- These areas are critical because literary evidence (DCLG, 2013a) strongly suggests that a clear vision and ethos, as well as strong senior leadership support, are key ingredients for success in the delivery of a transformation like that underpinning the most successful local approaches to Flexible Funding. These are areas that could be emphasised specifically in future monitoring reports requested by the Welsh Government.

- In addition, in all authorities, irrespective of the progress made in the delivery of the local Flexible Funding approach, they will also need to possess a concentrated focus on workforce development and on support for staff to respond to new working practices and roles arising from the approach.
- In the Welsh Government there is a specific need to undertake further work with regard to reviewing and, where appropriate, resetting the strategic aim of Flexible Funding, articulating this to all local authorities. Indeed, there is scope to collaborate with local authorities to co-produce this in order to support the engagement of local authorities in the future work surrounding the Flexible Funding approach.
- There continues to be an underlying sense of suspicion that the ultimate narrative being pursued by the changes is one of reducing the total amount of funding overall for vulnerable groups, or the unintended consequence that grant alignment might mean that the focus of funding moves away from less 'politically popular' groups. Alongside this remain 'pockets' of 'silo working' in which programme teams (in local authorities in the main) isolate themselves from changes being instigated through local Flexible Funding approaches.
- Delivery of the Flexible Funding approach during the remainder of 2019-20 needs to be given time by the Welsh Government across all local authorities to be further developed through support from more advanced authorities. This will enable approaches to become more embedded, helping to support the continued rollout from April 2020. It is important for local authorities that their efforts thus far not be seen to go to waste through any further changes, or revisions, to the policy, and that the commitments made in the October 2018 Ministerial announcement to maintain work on the approach until the end of this Assembly term be met.
- Those authorities that have made less/least progress would warrant being offered further support and insight from the Welsh Government and other local authorities with a more advanced delivery. Indeed, all authorities are keen to learn even more from the pathfinders and mechanisms with which to provide such insight and information would be especially welcomed.

Recommendations

The recommendations identify key areas in which insights provide some useful perspectives on influencing the ongoing implementation and delivery of the Flexible Funding approach, as well as the next steps for any future evaluation work.

Welsh Government

- 1) To investigate the streamlining and simplification of processes in order to facilitate greater consistency across the 10 programmes included in the Flexible Funding approach, all the while recognising the diverse nature and programme fidelity needed across the 10 programmes.
- 2) To review the vision and ultimate objectives of the Flexible Funding approach in order to enable the recasting of its vision for the short, medium and long term, facilitated by a co-production approach of working with local authorities and external stakeholders.
- 3) To identify mechanisms with which to provide ongoing support for the continued implementation of Flexible Funding approaches at the local authority level, drawing upon lessons learnt from practice and evaluation work. This should be undertaken through a consistent programme of updates and of information that highlights how success might best be achieved, while emphasising the importance of a strong vision, design and planning, a formalised leadership and accountability approach, and a specific focus upon identifying structures that facilitate collaborative working, supported by a targeted programme of workforce development.
- 4) To extend engagement with external stakeholders (including representative bodies and national and regional Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations), particularly those directly involved in CCG and HSG delivery, to facilitate further collaborative working opportunities.
- 5) Self-assessment reviews of progress against the 7 Lenses of Transformation should be taken forward by Welsh Government teams linked to the Flexible Funding approach in order to identify key further actions to take, and as a mechanism with which to monitor their ongoing progress.

Local authorities and stakeholders

- 1) Local authorities should review and revise, where appropriate, the vision, plan and design of their local Flexible Funding approach in order to ensure that its local relevance is maintained, as well as consulting with local stakeholders as part of this work.
- 2) Models of collaborative working should be formalised and reviewed regularly in order to identify opportunities for enhancement and extension of the range of partners and stakeholders (internal and external) that they involve.
- 3) Local authorities should actively review ways of adopting a formal and consistent approach to pooling budgets, as well as engaging local stakeholders in such work.
- 4) Local authorities should actively seek opportunities to collaborate with pathfinders and neighbouring authorities so as to share insight and good practice.
- 5) Local self-assessment reviews of progress against the 7 Lenses of Transformation should be taken forward by local authorities and local stakeholders in order to identify key further actions to take, and as a mechanism with which to monitor their ongoing progress.

Conduct of future evaluation work that:

- 1) Assesses the impact that alternative approaches to the delivery of EIPS may be having on the medium- and long-term outcomes in local authorities
- 2) Reviews the further impacts and outcomes of the delivery of the Flexible Funding approach, as well as the mechanisms, processes, and roles played by regional stakeholder structures including Public Services Boards (PSBs), Regional Collaborative Committees, and Regional Programme Boards within them
- 3) Identifies whether or not service users have experienced impacts in service delivery and what delivery components are most likely to generate positive outcomes
- 4) Tests the efficacy of the Outcomes Framework for the Flexible Funding approach and identifies further revisions where appropriate.

Document is Restricted

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted

November 2019 - Evidence Paper to the Public Accounts Committee

Inquiry into Care Experienced Children and Young People

Purpose

This paper provides additional evidence at November 2019 to the Public Accounts Committee of the expenditure and value for money of public services for care experienced children and young people and the action being taken across Welsh Government to improve outcomes for looked after children.

Introduction

The Welsh Government welcomes the opportunity to provide further evidence to the Public Accounts Committee's Inquiry into Care Experienced Children and Young People. This evidence paper updates the 17 January 2019 response to the November 2018 report by the Committee and the 5 March 2019 letter to the Committee clarifying the Government's responses to its recommendations. It also updates on the Welsh Government's November 2016 letter to the Committee.

Context

Taking Wales Forward commits the Welsh Government to "examine ways of ensuring looked after children enjoy the same life chances as other children and if necessary reform the way they are looked after". This is reinforced in *Prosperity for All*, with social care as one of the five priority areas. There are actions to:

- raise the educational attainment and improve the life chances of children in care, adopting a child centred approach, through the collaboration of education, social services and others.
- strengthen edge of care services to provide families with timely support to reduce the numbers needing care provision and provide assistance in the key transitional phase post 16 to access further education, jobs and housing for all those leaving care.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets the framework within which public bodies in Wales must work together to improve the well-being of Wales, working in an integrated and collaborative way, engaging with people and communities to take account of the long-term and to help prevent problems occurring or getting worse. We know that outcomes for looked after children do not compare favourably with their peers. They are less likely to achieve good educational qualifications, have greater health and housing needs, are more likely to become involved in substance misuse and come into contact with the criminal justice system.

The First Minister has highlighted his concerns about the increasing numbers of looked after children in Wales. He is clear that too many children are removed from their families and placed in the care system as has set the following priorities to:

- reduce the numbers of children removed from their families,
- reduce numbers of children placed out of county,
- reduce numbers of children placed out of Wales; and,
- reduce the number of children removed from parents with a learning disability.

Across the UK, recognition continues of the pressures that are being placed on the child welfare and family justice systems. Over the last decade we have seen a steady increase in the numbers of looked after children in Wales and across the UK.

As at 31 March 2019, 6,846 children were looked after, an increase of 439 (7%) on the previous year. This is at a rate of 109 per 10,000 population aged under 18, 7 percentage points higher than in 2017-18. Of these, 4435 were placed away from their birth family or relatives. There was a 2% decrease in the number of children started to be looked after during the past year. This is the second year that the number of children starting to be looked after has decreased; last year there was a 3% decrease, reflecting Welsh Government investment in prevention and early intervention.

Conversely, during the same period, 3% fewer children left care than in the previous year (n 1,678). . A total of 1,063 looked after children were placed with parents or those with parental responsibility. The rates of looked after children vary across local authorities in Wales and whilst they generally correlate to levels of deprivation there are some authorities with significant levels of deprivation that have relatively lower looked after children rates and the local authority with the highest rate is around the Welsh average for deprivation¹.

The Committee will be aware of the range of reports which highlight issues around the increasing numbers of looked after children and the increasing use of care orders which cause pressure within the social services and court systems. The Cordis Bright research², the Child Welfare Inequalities Project³, the Care Crisis Review⁴, the Wales Centre for Public Policy research⁵, the Born into Care research⁶, the Targeted Family Justice Review⁷ and the Commission on Justice in Wales⁸ all set out analysis into the factors contributing to the high rates of care in Wales.

¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-10/children-looked-after-local-authorities-april-2018-march-2019-964.pdf>

² <https://www.cordisbright.co.uk/admin/resources/all-wales-heads-of-childrens-services-research-on-differences-in-lac.pdf>

³ <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/globalassets/media/global/08-new-research-section/16469-17-cwip---briefing-2-final.pdf>

⁴ https://www.frg.org.uk/images/Care_Crisis/CCR-FINAL.pdf

⁵ <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/publication/analysis-of-the-factors-contributing-to-the-high-rates-of-care-in-wales/>

⁶ <https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/resource/born-into-care-wales>

⁷ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-08/supplementary-evidence-welsh-government-commission-justice-in-wales-family-justice.pdf>

⁸ <https://gov.wales/commission-justice-wales-report>

Welsh Government recognises that providing safe, appropriate care for children places a significant cost pressure on local authorities. Over 16,000 children were receiving support from children's services on 31 March 2018. At 31 March 2019, 71% of looked after children were accommodated in foster care placements, and approximately 7% of looked after children were placed in residential settings. The remaining children will have other arrangements such as placements with parents or adoption.

In total in 2018-19, £659m was spent on all children's and families' services. Of this, almost half (£311m) was spent by local authorities on care experienced children, £127m was spent on foster placements and £95m on residential care placements (excluding secure placements) A secure accommodation placement in Hillside costs approximately £980 per night.

The Committee's recommendations are set out below and beneath each, progress updates are provided where appropriate.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government develop a set of indicators to assess the outcomes for care experienced children and make sure they reflect those things that matter to young people. The views of young people must be integral to shaping, informing and evaluating these, and it should be directly informed by the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group and any evaluation of the Bright Spots survey.

We recognise that we need better data to understand the experiences and outcomes of care experienced children and this has been a key priority in shaping our work on the new Performance and Improvement Framework for local authorities. This new framework will be launched on 1 April 2020 and will change the way that local authorities collect and use data and evidence so that it drives forward improvement across social services and improves well-being outcomes.

For care experienced children, the framework will include a suite of new metric data which will focus on the volume and movement of children through the social care system and the introduction of a new approach to the Citizen Survey will be commissioned ready for launch in April 2021. The new survey will gather a range of views from children on their experiences of care and support and will ensure that children's views are actively sought and used by local authorities to inform improvement and change as part of the new approach to data and evidence.

The Children Looked After Census and the Children Receiving Care and Support Census will both remain in place and will not be changed at this stage.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should ensure educational outcomes for Care Experienced Children are measured by “distance travelled” alongside attainment measures, and evaluate the effectiveness of the Pupil Development Grant in obtaining these results.

New arrangements for the Pupil Development Grant for looked after children (PDG-LAC), developed through co-construction with the Consortia and Local Authorities, came into effect in April 2019. This was in response to a number of factors including, the disappointing 2017 GCSE results for looked after children, emergent findings from the now published independent evaluation of the PDG-LAC and the recommendations in the Children Young People and Education Committee’s report *On the money*⁹. The new arrangements are intended to enable greater national consistency to deliver the best educational outcomes for these children.

As with all elements of the Pupil Development Grant, systems are in place to monitor the operation and impact of PDG-LAC. This includes six-weekly meetings between officials in the Education Directorate, the Welsh Government’s Raising Attainment Advocate and the relevant leads in the four regional education consortia, often including a visit to a school/s to see the effect of the PDG in practice. These meetings form part of the ongoing monitoring of the implementation and operation of the new PDG-LAC arrangements.

Moving forward, we want to ensure the education of looked after children continues to be high priority for education and social services departments alike. Welsh Government officials have engaged with a range of stakeholders including representatives from education, social services and care experienced young people to consider and develop education priorities. A working group was established and it considered the potential of integrated approaches to improving outcomes for looked after children in education, namely Virtual Schools and the pioneering work in Carmarthenshire. The working group identified a set of proposed future education priorities for looked after children as:

- Relationships and compassionate leadership
- Holistic care and education
- Culture and practice

Reflecting on the priorities identified by the working group, the Minister for Education and Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services agreed to take a proactive approach with a single piece of work encompassing all priorities. This year, we are commissioning work around integrated models such as Virtual Schools and whole system approach and will use the outcome of this work to deliver a Welsh approach.

⁹ <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11615/cr-ld11615-e.pdf>

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the public information on the Ministerial Advisory Group is improved on the Welsh Government's website to increase accountability and allow for scrutiny. We recommend, as a minimum, the following is published:

- **Membership:**
- **Minutes of meetings, and**
- **Performance against indicators**

Since our March 2019 response, significant progress has been made. Social Care Wales has developed a specific learning and development portal on its website about the Improving Outcomes for Children programme. The website¹⁰ which was launched on 9 October at our national peer learning event, sets out in details the programme's wide ranging activities, including documents produced and published and emerging good practice to help shape the continuing professional development of those working with care experienced children. The website continues to develop and new material will be added to it as it progresses. The Ministerial Advisory Group membership is on the website as is a highlight report from the September's Ministerial Advisory Group meeting. Future Ministerial Advisory Group meeting highlight reports will be added

An Annual Report about the Improving Outcomes for Children programme and the role and work of the Ministerial Advisory Group has been produced and published to Welsh Government and Social Care Wales websites. The Report set outs the work programme's priorities, achievements and next steps. It was subject to a full debate in Plenary on 26 November.

Key highlights from the Annual Report include:

- the establishment of edge of care services in every local authority in Wales;
- the roll out of the Reflect programme across Wales
- the introduction of legislation to exempt all care leavers from paying council tax
- the establishment of the St David's Day Fund
- a range of research to address gaps in the evidence. For example in December we will be publishing an important piece of research about the number of children placed into care from parents with a learning disability
- a programme of work around Corporate Parenting which has been discussed at a recent cabinet meeting

¹⁰ <https://socialcare.wales/service-improvement/improving-outcomes-for-children-programme>

Performance indicators work as been described in Recommendation 1 above.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government commission an analysis of independent agency placement costs examining the different outcomes across the life of a child that are delivered for the additional cost to create an informed evidence base for future decisions in this area.

Research into the cost of placements and the link with outcomes for children will form part of a wider research study to inform the development of a national strategic approach to placement commissioning. Progress on this is reported under Recommendation 6 below.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government undertake an evaluation into the frequency and effectiveness of end of placement reviews with a particular focus on the impact of such reviews on the child concerned.

Where there is a change in placement for example a placement move or breakdown of a placement, a review of the child's care and support plan should be instigated as routine practice.

When carrying out inspections of local authorities in relation to care and support for children who are looked after, Care Inspectorate Wales (CiW) will always consider end of placement reviews. CiW's inspection programme for 2019-20 is focussing on disabled children. However, in following up the actions in its *National overview report in relation to care experienced children and young people in Wales*, published in June 2019, CiW will also consider arrangements for end of placement review."

By way of context, the Committee will wish to note that CiW alternates its local authority inspection activity between adult and children's services with the latter part of 2018/19 and early part of 2019/20 focusing on older adults. In a four year cycle, each local authority in Wales will have one children's services and one adult services inspection. CiW takes a thematic approach to all inspections, with different themes being considered each year.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government sets out a timeline for the analysis of the delivery of placements. We would not expect this work to take longer than three months to commence and for it to be delivered within twelve months. Following this analysis, the Welsh Government should set out how services should be delivered in line with the ambitions of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. This could then inform a national care experienced children and young people strategy for commissioning and managing the full spectrum of placements for looked after children.

A project to develop a national strategic approach to commissioning placements for looked after children commenced in July. It is overseen by a project board, and a project working group of key stakeholders has been established. The Group has developed a specification for research and a subsequent scoping study. Officials are

now working with colleagues in Welsh Government Knowledge and Analytical Services around the detailed particulars of the specification to ensure accuracy, as this is a complex, multi-faceted piece of work.

The timetable has been revised due to Welsh Government restrictions on procurement activity during the Brexit period, with the intention the research can be commissioned early in 2020. Officials will be providing progress updates to the Ministerial Advisory Group as this is a key element of work stream 2.

The project working group will consider the research, scoping study and any recommendations, in order to develop a common vision for a national strategic approach. This also allows the work to be informed by the Wales Centre for Public Policy's research into *Re-imagining the Placement Landscape in Wales* and by other work into re-balancing public services towards public sector and not-for-profit provision. As stated previously, the timescales for the implementation phase of the national strategic approach will depend on the recommendations of the scoping study, the extent to which the new approach uses the existing mechanisms or develops new ones, and whether it is appropriate to adopt a phased approach or aim for a definite implementation date.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government commission a review of spending on looked after children across the range of services areas involved in their care for example Education, Housing and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services. This is essential to ensure a comprehensive picture of the money invested in supporting this group.

In the summer of this year, social services officials led and coordinated work across health including mental health and substance misuse, housing, education, children and families policy and youth justice to identify cross-government policy areas and budgets which impact on services for care experienced children and young people. The purpose of the exercise was to take a whole system approach to all areas of policy and spend which has the potential for delivering positive action and outcomes for care experienced children. We considered spend in relation to how much funding is used for care experienced children; the success and effectiveness of delivery of the spending areas; how much is used for prevention and early intervention work; and what can be identified as therapeutic work. The exercise also entailed an analysis of the provision of therapeutic services for children as a means of helping reducing the number becoming looked-after or improving outcomes for at-risk children. The aim was to identify whether there are gaps in provision which could be filled by redirecting existing budgets to a more effective approach and to serve as a bid for any new funding based on a cross-government and cross-sector way of working.

Social care funding will be an important consideration as part of the preparations for the draft Budget 2020-21, particularly as part of and in relation to the local government settlement. Based on the exercise outlined here, a bid was made to the Budget planning exercise which sets out a proposal for additional funding. It recognises that, as a consequence of the UK Government's approach to austerity, support services for young people have declined as local authorities have been faced with reducing budgets. Therefore, if additional funding is available, there may be scope to address

gaps in provision, for example, the development of a pilot for multi-disciplinary therapeutic hubs to deliver preventative services. These would be based on a social model which supports and sustains good emotional, behavioural and mental health, wellbeing and resilience with expertise provided from across the public services. Services could be support for care experienced children and their families and carers, as well as children at risk of coming into care, providing tailored interventions to reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences on mental wellbeing and to build personal resilience.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommend that the Welsh Government undertake a comparative analysis on the variance of spend per looked after child between local authorities to build an information base around variance of cost to drive best practice. This should also reflect the outcomes within each authority and be published once completed. This should be a regular information gathering exercise and having completed this for the 2018-19 period, the Welsh Government should evaluate the information obtained, and set out a timetable for future information gathering.

As stated previously, arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the national approach to placement commissioning will form part of the development and implementation of the new strategic approach.

During the reduction expectation visits conversations took place about how local authorities managed their businesses; this covered average spend per looked after child and proportion of local authority spend on children's and families' services. Discussions took place about where money was directed in terms of services and priorities to meet the needs of looked after children and those children, families on the edge of care and families in need of early help and support. All local authority submitted reduction expectation plans following the visits and progress reports are being submitted quarterly and annually. We will be able to see how the reduction expectation work is impacting on spend using future published annual statistics on spend per looked after child.

For more detail, please see section below on reduction expectations.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that at the end of the current financial year, the Welsh Government should review the impact of transferring ring fenced funding for edge of care services into the Revenue Support Grant from April 2018 to assess the impact for care experienced children and edge of care services.

We know that as a consequence of this funding all local authorities in Wales have edge of care service provision. The funding continues to be used for this purpose and local authorities have welcomed Welsh Government's investment.

To provide additional assurance to the Committee, officials sought information about edge of care and wider prevention services during their visits to each local authority in April and May this year, as part of the Reduction Expectations work. To ensure

discussions had rigour and consistency, a conversation framework was developed which placed significant emphasis on each organisation's prevention services and strategies. The framework was shared in advance with local authorities in advance of the visits. Each organisation responded by preparing detailed presentations to demonstrate their business approach including prevention and early intervention strategies covering edge of care services, working practices and outcomes to illustrate the impact of services on children and families.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government should target ring-fenced funding at edge of care services which, where safe to do so, have the potential to avoid children coming into care. This funding should explore the value of elements such as kinship care. It could also support local authorities to continually monitor outcomes for these individual children and value for money of this preventative spending.

The 2019-20 ICF programme included a ring-fenced annual allocation of £15 million for projects that would support children at the edge of care and prevent them becoming looked after as well as projects to provide support for children who are care experienced and/or adopted.

The funding has a focus on preventative and early intervention services for children in the edge of care. This will help provide support for families and avoid crisis situations developing. We expect the funding to be used to safely reduce the need for children to enter care. It will include work relating to family reunification and providing therapeutic support for children in care or who have been adopted, reducing the need for more intensive forms of support.

Two year investment plans were submitted by Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) between March and June 2019. RPB's report on spend activity quarterly and outcomes activity every six months. The Quarter 2 reports which will include outcome and impact data are scheduled to be received from RPBs by 15 November.

There are 40 ICF projects currently being taken forward across Wales to specifically support children on the edge of care. Examples include family group conferencing, children's community connectors, training and awareness for perinatal mental health and projects to support children's emotional well-being.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends, that the Welsh Government updates its response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee "Mind over Matter" report by March 2019, providing detailed information about how it intends to address the concerns in that Report in respect of care experienced children as requested by the Chair of that Committee.

The Children, Young People and Education Committee were updated on 19 July 2019 about progress in delivering the commitments. In terms of recent activity, the Early Help and Enhanced Support event which took place in June included workshops on the mental health and wellbeing of looked after children. This was the third in a series of workshops which will inform the development of proposals for best practice and

service development to enable targeted support and interventions to those most at risk of developing emotional and mental health problems or showing early signs of mental disorders.

The Together for Children and Young People Programme is being extended and the next phase is expected to continue to focus on early help and enhanced support. Further details on the extension of the programme and the work it will deliver will be available over the coming weeks.

This work is linking with the Ministerial Advisory Group on Improving Outcomes for Children and the Whole School Approach programme.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends all care-experienced children are routinely made aware of their right to an advocate and provided with clear information about how to access the range of available advocacy services. This should be monitored by the Welsh Government and incorporated into the indicators for the Ministerial Advisory Group

The National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA) is a standardised approach to statutory advocacy services being delivered by the six Regional Social Services Collaboratives. It has been in place since June 2017, with Welsh Government providing up to £550k each year to support the implementation of this approach. The implementation of NASA is monitored by a Task and Finish Group established under the Ministerial Advisory Group.

The NASA sets out shared national expectations on access and availability of independent professional advocacy. Underpinned by the National Standards and Outcomes Framework, common components of a service specification and reporting template, the NASA reinforces and secures a consistent offer and experience for children and practitioners. The NASA further evidences and informs future delivery and improvement through quantitative and qualitative reporting at local, regional and national levels.

An active offer of advocacy forms part of the NASA and is provided in the circumstances set out here: *‘Children and young people are entitled to an active offer of advocacy from a statutory Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) when they become looked after or become subject of child protection enquiries leading to an Initial Child Protection Conference.’* An ‘Active Offer’ is a sharing of information about the statutory right and entitlement of a child or young person in particular circumstances to access support from an independent professional advocacy service. An Independent Professional Advocate makes the ‘Active Offer’ directly to the child or young person.

The information shared includes an explanation about the role of the independent professional advocacy service, what it can and cannot do, how it operates based on a child or young person’s views, wishes and feelings, its independence and how it works solely for the child/young person, its policy on confidentiality and significant harm – it explains the statutory right of children and young people to be supported to express

their views, wishes and feelings as well as their right to make a representation or complaint.

The Task and Finish Group has reviewed the National Reporting Template developed as part of the National Approach and produced a revised template this has been piloted for a period of six months.

The pilot phase has enabled both advocacy providers and commissioners to review and comment on the revised template. During this time advocacy service providers have continued to produce local reports for each local authority area as well as regional reports for each of the six commissioning regions.

The reporting template has been generally well received. The data from this national reporting template will feed into and inform the Performance and Improvement Framework for local authorities being launched on 1 April 2020.

Looked After Children Reduction Expectations

The First Minister has highlighted the increasing numbers of looked after children in Wales as a priority area for action, set within the context of prevention and systems-wide change. The First Minister set the following priority areas for reduction:

- The number of children in care.
- The number of children placed out of county.
- The number of children placed out of Wales.
- The number of children removed from parents with a Learning Disability.

To deliver this work, officials established a Looked After Children Technical Group, to work co-productively with local authorities to agree how best to take forward this work. The Group included representatives from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSSC).

During April and May 2019, a Looked After Children Engagement Team, led by its Independent Chair, Phil Hodgson, visited every local authority in Wales. Bespoke three hour conversations took place based on an agreed conversation framework and informed by a detailed analysis of each organisation's data. Each local authority responded by providing detailed information on how each local authority is responding to the reduction expectation challenge.

Local authority discussions highlighted the importance of a whole system approach which included the importance of relationships and services provided by the Judiciary, CAF/CASS Cymru and Health Boards in particular. The Chair drafted a report of the work undertaken and this was shared with the First Minister and Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services.

Following the Spring visits, templates were sent to local authorities asking for reduction expectation figures and accompanying plans of how they would achieve their reductions. All local authorities returned plans with 18 out of 22 offering numerical reductions.

18 out of 22 local authorities have now made numerical commitments to reduce their looked after children population whilst four authorities stated they were unable to commit to numerical reductions.

On 4 September 2019, the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services and the First Minister wrote to local authority Leaders and Portfolio Holders, Directors of Social Services and their Heads of Children's Services. The letter commended authorities for their work to date. In respect of the four authorities which have not submitted numerical reductions the importance of this work in terms of improving outcomes for and the working in the best interests of looked after children, was re-stated. The Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services and officials are also visiting these local authorities to progress discussions and reach a resolution.

Summary of Local Authority Reduction Expectation Plans

Local authorities' reduction expectation plans have so far set out a cumulative reduction over the next three years as follows:

For the number of children in care reductions of:

- 198 children in 2019/20
- 215 children in 2020/21
- 178 children in 2021/22

This means a reduction of 591 children in the care system (9%) over three years

For children placed out of county reductions of:

- 94 children in 2019/20
- 96 children in 2020/21
- 92 children in 2021/22

A reduction of children placed out of county of 16% over three years

For children placed out of Wales reductions of:

- 36 children in 2019/20
- 28 children in 2020/21
- 6 children in 2021/22

A reduction of children placed out of Wales of 20% over three years

For children removed from parents with a learning disability, reductions of

- 6 children in 2019/20
- 5 children in 2020/21
- 5 children in 2021/22

Only a small number of authorities offered reduction in the numbers of children removed from parents with a learning disability. Local authorities have found this

priority challenging as they have various different approaches to collecting the information which has made it difficult to quantify numbers.

Further work will continue to try and better define this priority. This work will be informed by research commissioned by Welsh Government to explore the number of children placed into care from parents with a learning disability and the reasons behind their removal. This report is due to be published on 17 December and will be placed on the Social Care Wales, Improving Outcomes for Children webpages.

National Learning and Peer Support Event

As a result of the reduction expectations work, officials organised a national learning and peer support event to (i) share the findings and learning from the visits (ii) for local authorities to hear from colleagues in Scotland about their work to reduce numbers of children in care (iii) for local authorities to have the opportunity to showcase good practice (iv) to discuss next steps.

The event took place on 9 October 2019 and was well attended by Directors of Social Services and Heads of Children's Services.

Reduction Expectations - Next steps

The recommendations from the Independent Chair's report will be used to inform ongoing activity and engagement with local authorities and partners in respect of reduction expectations and the continuing activity of the Improving Outcomes for Children programme. An action plan to address these recommendations has been prepared and shared with local authorities in November.

Progress updates against reduction expectation plans commenced in November and will continue on a quarterly and annual basis. A Learning, Support and Monitoring Group of key partners will have oversight of this work.

The Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services and officials are engaged in a range of meetings with stakeholders to discuss this work and the roles and responsibilities and the contributions they provide. So far, meetings have taken place with CAFCASS Cymru, Justice Francis, the Family Division Liaison Judge for Wales and health colleagues. Further discussions are planned.

Following the success of the national event, there is ongoing work with partners particularly, ADSSC, to establish a Peer Learning and Support network, which will involve local authorities being linked with each other to share good practice.

6th November 2019

Nick Ramsay AM
Chair, Public Accounts Committee

Dear Nick,

Re: Care Experienced Children and Young People

Thank you for your letter of 21st October requesting an update from the Ministerial Advisory Group with regards to the progress made against the identified work streams.

To improve accountability and opportunities for scrutiny, the Improving Outcomes for Children's website has just been launched which details the role of the Ministerial Advisory Group and the work of the Improving Outcomes for Children programme. The Annual Report will be published on the website in November. The Ministerial Advisory Group has worked closely with Welsh Government in advising on Phase 3 of the Improving Outcomes for Children programme (2018-21). The Group continues to provide advice and direction to the Improving Outcomes for Children work programme so that it maintains its focus and continues to progress at pace the three key areas for action.

WORKSTREAM 1 – SAFELY REDUCING THE NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN NEED OF CARE

Strand 1 - Supporting local, regional and national approaches to reducing safely the need for care.

1. Members of our Group undertook an Appreciative Inquiry in six local authorities to help identify effective approaches to family support and strategies for managing risk, including edge of care services. The findings from the Inquiry and subsequent recommendations have been useful in determining how Welsh Government invests in strengthening support for vulnerable families in the community, including services that assist family reunification and exit from care. To help reduce the need for care and more intensive therapeutic services, Welsh Government has invested £15 million over two years via the Integrated Care Fund. Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) are publishing their plans for making best use of this grant, including additional capacity for family conferences and reunification of children with birth families. The Reflect project has been rolled out across Wales to reduce the number of children being taken into care by breaking the cycle of repeat pregnancies and recurrent care proceedings.

Strand 2 - Strengthen arrangements for Kinship Carers and Special Guardianship Order

2. The arrangements for supporting kinship carers have been strengthened through co-production of a kinship care guide. The Ministerial Advisory Group has supported this development and the work being done by AFA Cymru to develop a national framework for special guardianship support services.

Strand 3 - Undertake research identifying the number of children who have parents with a learning disability and who no longer live at home and the reasons behind this changed status.

3. As part of the Improving Outcomes for Children programme, Welsh Government commissioned the Institute of Public Care (IPC) to carry out pioneering research to: establish the extent to which parents with a learning disability in Wales are involved with Children's Social Services; understand the factors driving patterns of involvement; determine practice changes needed to support an improvement agenda in this area of public services. Research findings are due to be published in December 2019.

Strand 4 - Identifying approaches which help to avoid use of court proceedings, encourage the use of measures rather than care orders and promote consistent judicial practice.

4. Welsh Government is working in a number of ways to explore how we can support a whole system approach to reducing the numbers of children entering care. The Family Justice Network and Local Family Justice Boards have key roles in taking forward work with partners including the judiciary, local authorities, Cafcass Cymru and others to explore ways to address the variation between local authorities in terms of the numbers of children in care, how to improve consistency in working practices and share best practice. This work complements the Ministry of Justice's Targeted Family Justice Review.

WORKSTREAM 2 – HAVING SUFFICIENT HIGH-QUALITY PLACEMENTS FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER

Strand 1 Enabling local authorities to source suitable and timely placements for the children and young people they look after, ensuring that more of them can be placed closer to home.

5. Welsh Government is developing a national strategic approach to the commissioning of placements for looked after children in order to improve sufficiency, choice and quality of placements through better commissioning and regional working. The Ministerial Advisory Group has helped to define the priority areas to be tackled and it will continue to be actively involved. The National Commissioning Board and RPBs have been asked to focus on children's services, including placements for children who are looked after.

Strand 2 Helping local and central government to work on national, regional and local initiatives that will improve placement choice and quality.

Fostering

6. The National Fostering Framework has developed a strategy for local authority fostering services. There have been considerable efforts to improve:

- the number of enquiries to foster that become approved carers (this includes moves towards a regional approach for dealing with initial enquiries);
- the quality of the service that applicants receive throughout the foster care assessment process;
- the learning and development opportunities for approved foster carers (with introduction of a national learning and development framework scheduled for November); and
- the 'overall 'offer' foster carers receive by being a local authority foster carer (including reductions in Council Tax; online access to the foster care handbook and to foster care payslips; free town centre parking; free access to leisure facilities for the whole foster family).

Adoption

7. Welsh Government has provided local authorities with £2.3 million funding in 2019/20 to help strengthen adoption provision to prevent children re-entering care and to reduce the time they spend waiting to exit care through adoption. The Regional Collaboratives are working with voluntary adoption agency partners on specialist adopter recruitment schemes to meet the placement needs of sibling groups, older children and children with additional complex needs. A new Adoption Register has been launched.

Residential Care

8. Reporting to the Ministerial Advisory Group, a Task and Finish Group has been meeting to oversee the work programme needed to deal with a wide range of issues. It commissioned research to increase understanding about the characteristics of Welsh children and young people placed in residential settings. Wales Data Cymru was commissioned to build a profile of children's residential care across local authority and private sector provision. Most regions have sufficient residential care capacity but some of the largest local authorities in Wales do find this a challenge. There was also concern about the lack of emergency or crisis provision, including remand. Regions are being asked to consider commissioning together so that these shortfalls are addressed. RPBs can bid for capital and revenue funding from the Integrated Care Fund to support these developments.

WORKSTREAM 3 – SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER TO HAVE THE BEST POSSIBLE JOURNEYS THROUGH CARE AND INTO ADULTHOOD

Strand 1 Strengthening corporate parenting responsibilities across public services.

9. A Corporate Parenting Task and Finish Group has been re-established to consider what corporate parenting means for other public sector organisations in Wales. It is looking at recent developments in local authorities which are intent on improving the 'offer' or 'pledge' which they make to care experienced children and young people. The new offer can cover areas such as advice and assistance; well-being; learning, training and employment; safeguarding from harm; growing up; having a say and inclusion. Voices From Care Cymru has been working to benchmark good practice in corporate parenting and to explore whether young people can develop a kite mark to quality assure the corporate parenting strategies adopted by a local authority. Officials have been holding conversations with lawyers to identify legislative options for extending duties across public services using the existing legislative powers available.

Strand 2 Raising the educational attainment, skills and ambition of care experienced children and young people

10. This year, the Welsh Government has been working with key partners to co-produce a strategic plan to improve the educational attainment and experience of looked after children. The Ministerial Advisory Group is working to ensure that future programme development is based on a clear model that sets out an explicit theory of change, taking into account the range of risk and protective factors associated with child development. The Fostering Wellbeing (social pedagogy) approach, which focuses on the education and the upbringing of children in a foster care environment, has been piloted in one local authority and it is being rolled out on a phased basis.

Strand 3 Tackling emotional and mental health issues that may affect care experienced children

11. The Welsh Government has made significant investment to improve mental health services for children and young people. This includes £15m new investment for RPBs which can be used to develop therapeutic support services. Work is being done to ensure that the statutory health assessments for looked after children properly cover emotional and mental health. On behalf of our Group, NSPCC and Voices From Care Cymru published *Listen. Act. Thrive*, a report based on consultation with care experienced young people about support for their emotional and mental health.

Strand 4 Providing appropriate support and guidance to a young person early in their journey towards independence and helping to maximise life chances.

12. £625,000 has been allocated to local authorities so that they can establish/enhance schemes which operate on the basis that care leavers should be seen as part of the 'family business' and offered training and job opportunities within the council's own workforce. To support them with making the transition, entitlement to a personal adviser has been extended to those aged 21-25, at a cost of £1 million p.a. Since April 2016, young people in Wales have the right to stay with their foster families beyond the age of 18 under the *When I am Ready* scheme. Welsh Government is looking at the viability of extending the scheme to young people in residential care. It has also worked with local authorities to exempt care leavers from paying Council Tax; this became law from April 2019.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Melding". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

David Melding AM

Chair, Ministerial Advisory Group on Care Experienced Children and Young People

Dyddiad /Date:
Gofynnwch am/Please ask for:
Llinell uniongyrchol/Direct line:
Ebost/Email:

8th November 2019
Naomi Alleyne
029 2046 8660
naomi.alleyne@wlga.gov.uk

Mr Nick Ramsay AM
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA



By e-mail only

Dear Nick,

Thank you for your letter in relation to care experienced children and young people and the work to develop 'bespoke reduction expectation plans' for each local authority in Wales to reduce the number of looked after children in its care. The response below is based on on-going discussions with local authorities, including WLGA Spokespeople, Cabinet Members and Leaders and with Welsh Government officials and the Deputy Minister.

Like many others, including Welsh Government, local government is concerned at the significant rise in the number of looked after children in the care of local authorities. While there are many factors that have led to this rise and increased numbers of looked after children are reflected across all parts of the UK, the recent report from Care Inspectorate Wales reflected that those children who are in care are there appropriately. This finding provides some assurance that authorities are making the right decisions about the children who need to be looked after, although we also fully appreciate the current situation is unsustainable and appropriate focus and serious efforts need to be made to reduce the number of children that need to be looked after by a local authority.

The submission of a reduction expectation plan by each local authority demonstrates local governments' commitment to tackle this issue and increase our efforts on preventative work with families, and other programmes of work with the aim of reducing the number of children who need to be taken into care. While reducing the number of children in care may reduce some costs for local authorities over time, in order to achieve this ambition we need to recognise the need for additional investment from Welsh Government to support the development and provision of appropriate preventative and early intervention services, for example, increased access to therapeutic support and trauma-informed models of care, as well as increased family support services. The support and involvement of other public services, such as health and education, is also required to ensure a holistic approach to supporting children and young people and their families is provided.

Dr Chris Llewelyn
Prif Weithredwr
Chief Executive

Cymdeithas Llywodraeth
Leol Cymru
Tŷ Llywodraeth Leol
Rhodfa Drake
CAERDYDD CF10 4LG
Ffôn: 029 2046 8600

Welsh Local Government
Association
Local Government House
Drake Walk
CARDIFF CF10 4LG
Tel: 029 2046 8600

wlga.cymru
wlga.wales

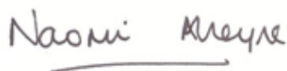
@WelshLGA

Throughout the discussions about this approach with Welsh Government you will be aware that there has been a strength of feeling about setting 'reduction expectation' numbers and concern that this approach could inadvertently negatively impact on operational decisions about whether a child should be brought into the care system or not. We have welcomed and support the 'safety first' approach that has been clearly set out by the Deputy Minister and all are clear that the safety and best interest of the child should override any other consideration. The WLGA and local authorities continue to have regular discussions with both the Deputy Minister and Welsh Government Officials, working closely with them, to help shape the approach being taken and ensure a collaborative approach is adopted that will provide a useful new frame for authorities to think about their services around vulnerable children and families in the most holistic way. Local authorities are also considering what peer support and peer challenge can be provided to help authorities improve their work in this area.

Welsh Government will monitor progress being made by authorities in reducing the number of children in care and those coming into care in the first place, and this will help ensure the necessary focus on working towards this ambition and provides an opportunity to review performance on a regular basis. We believe that a collaborative approach with the shared aim of working towards the reduction of children in the care system, safely, rather than a punitive one, is the most appropriate approach on this issue as there are many factors, some of which are outside of local authority control, that can impact on whether children and young people need to be in the care of local authorities.

The WLGA and local authorities will continue to work with Welsh Government and other partners in aiming to reduce the number of children in the looked after system and it is hoped that over the coming years progress can be made in reducing the number of children coming into care, whilst ensuring that the priority remains on keeping children and young people safe from harm, abuse and neglect.

Yours sincerely



Naomi Alleyne
Director, Social Services and Housing

To: Nick Ramsay
Chair of the Public
Accounts Committee

Via email only

14 November 2019

Dear Nick Ramsay AM,

Many thanks for your letter seeking my views on the current work for Local Authorities to develop bespoke 'reduction expectation plans' to safely reduce the number of looked after children in care. Your letter seeks my views specifically on the monitoring and enforcement of this policy, which I shall outline below. I also want to reiterate the need for careful consideration of children's rights in the context of this work and for all to understand the balance of rights that are at play in this policy decision. The safety of children must be paramount, but we must recognise the weight and gravity of a decision to remove a child on a statutory basis from their families.

It is vital that we place children's rights at the centre of this policy decision.

Children's Rights:

Children have the right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) for their best interests to be a priority when making any decision that affects them (Article 3). Whilst this Article states that consideration must be given to the "*rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible*", the child's best interest must be a primary consideration. This right sets out how those responsible for making such decisions in regards to a child must consider "*legislative and administrative*" measures to support a child's best interest. Alongside this, Article 19 recognises a child's right to be safe, and for Governments to take appropriate "*legislative, administrative, social and educational measures*" to protect children from all forms of abuse, neglect and violence. I believe these rights should be kept firmly at the forefront of decision making when considering this policy context and reiterate the importance of services being able to offer a broad range of support for children and their families, as well as statutory intervention and separation when appropriate.

The UNCRC also outlines the rights of children in regards to their family environment, and to an extent, the rights and duties of parents and legal guardians to support a child's evolving capacities and to provide guidance and direction to the child (Article 5). Article 8 recognises a child's right to family relationships as a protection and preservation of their identity, whilst Article 9 recognises that a child must not be separated from their parents unless it is in their best interest to do so.



Tŷ Ystumllwynarth/Oystermouth House
Llys Siarter/Charter Court, Phoenix Way
Abertawe/Swansea SA7 9FS
01792 765600

comisiynyddplant.cymru
childrenscommissioner.wales

post@comisiynyddplant.cymru
post@childrenscommissioner.wales

Back Page 80

The UNCRC also sets out duties on Governments to put in place measures to support families to ensure every child has an adequate standard of living to promote their healthy development (Article 27) and for governments to provide social security and financial support to families in need of assistance (Article 26). These rights set out Governments' duties to provide a spectrum of support to families to support their children and ensure where issues such as deprivation or vulnerabilities exist in family networks, Governments support families with this.

In some cases, separating a child from their family will be a proportionate response to serious, evidenced concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing. Where this is the case, children have the right to keep in contact with their family if separated and it is in their best interest (Article 10). For children who are separated from their families, they have a right to have special protection and support (Article 20) and for their care to be reviewed regular reviewed (Article 25).

In light of this, it is important that we recognise the delicate balance that exists between children's rights to safety, family life and the responsibility of services to support children and their families.

The development of expectation plans

In Wales, we have a sophisticated and robust safeguarding framework which enables us to inform decisions about child safety, risk management and the need to remove and accommodate a child or young person, away from their family. However, there is a growing body of evidence, along with the rising numbers of children becoming exposed to care proceedings, which demonstrates variance in practice — within both local authorities and the judiciary. This should give rise to reflection about the consistency of approach by those involved in decisions to remove a child from their family. For example, in Torfaen for every 10,000 children, 216 are looked after by the local authority. This is the highest rate in Wales and England, by some margin, and can be compared to 96 in Wrexham, and 49 in Carmarthenshire.¹ We are seeing an increasing number of new born babies removed from birth mothers, with 83 infants per 10,000 births being removed in Wales, of which 52% are under two weeks old.² Again, there are regional variations in these figures. We are also seeing a significant rise in the number of children who are being placed with their families at the conclusion of care proceedings, but under a care order. In

¹ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/childrenlookedafterat31marchper10000population-localauthority-year>

² https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/app/nuffield/files-module/local/documents/Born%20into%20care%20Wales%20-%20main%20report_English_final_web.pdf

2014, 545 children were living under these arrangements, but this has risen to 1,065 in 2019.³

Whilst I recognise the demographic differences and challenges that can be at play, leading to variation in need for support and intervention, there are other factors at play that are attributable to different approaches and which require further consideration. Whilst placement with a parent under a care order might be the best outcome to care proceedings, to ensure the child's rights to be safe and to live with their family can be promoted, this should not be seen as a long term solution for the child. A care order allows the Local Authority to share parental responsibility with the parent/carer; this is particularly important when pursuing a previously untested placement or where a change in parental circumstances such as drug rehabilitation or the ending of a violent relationship may be relatively recent and could be vulnerable to change in the near future. It should rarely be the long term option for the child however; if such untested circumstances can be successfully navigated, the Local Authority should be actively considering whether that care order is still required or whether it should be discharged. I am aware that the use of placements of this type vary between different local authorities and can be dependent on the views of the local judiciary and children's guardians too.

In light of this increasing variation in approach I support measures for Local Authorities and others involved in supporting families to reflect on practices and to consider collectively how families can be better supported to remain safely together through managed interventions and accessible community support, prior to statutory intervention and removal. Therefore, the development of expectation plans, or strategies in each Local Authority, can go some way in shining a spotlight on current service accessibility and effectiveness. They can raise questions about family engagement, what works well and where services can support differently to help families remain together. They may encourage local authorities to explore how other local authorities are tackling the issue, either within Wales or in other parts of the UK. The Welsh Government has provided funding to Local Authorities to develop their prevention and early intervention family services and has provided recommendations to Local Authorities on how to develop a whole-sector approach to service design to better support vulnerable families. This is how I believe expectation plans can be valuable as they will encourage public services, particularly health and social services to work more effectively for families and potentially increase the provision of early intervention support. I set out my thoughts on this issue in a letter to the Children, Young People and Education Committee in July 2019.⁴

³ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/childrenlookedafterat31march-by-localauthority-placementtype>

⁴ <http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s91156/CYPE5-23-19%20-%20Paper%20to%20note%205.pdf>



The requirement of these expectation plans should accelerate the necessary culture change required in public services, to move towards earlier interventions and preventative service provision to support families before they reach a point of crisis. This should also contribute to the aim of rebalancing the spend of public funds towards preventative services and can result in savings for public bodies if these preventative measures are successful. This is entirely consistent with the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and with children's rights under the UNCRC.

Monitoring and "enforcement" of plans

In the conversations I have had with elected representatives and those working within local authorities, I recognise the very real concern that at times, the reasons and decisions surrounding why children may need to come into care are due to factors that are beyond their control. This can include the impact of poverty on families as well as variation in responses from the judiciary in different regions. This can be a particular 'pressure' for smaller local authorities, whose figures may be disproportionately affected by the entry of a large sibling group into local authority care, for example. This is why local authorities must be supported to develop whole sector approaches to reducing the need for children entering care. I also recognise the current financial and workload pressures that exist with Wales' children's services. It is my understanding that the Welsh Government are committed to developing a monitoring group, which shall bring Local Authorities and other agencies together to oversee the delivery of individual plans. I believe this will support Local Authorities to share experience and approaches. My policy officer has attended the workshops with Local Authorities where these arrangements have been discussed, and I will continue to take an active interest in this work.

The Welsh Government Children's Rights Impact Assessment of the Reduction Expectation Plans recognised how some have raised concerns that "*the Reduction Expectation Plans work may present perverse incentives to local authorities: where their focus is switched to reducing numbers without giving full consideration to whether it is safe for a child to remain at home.*" Whilst I understand why some may hold these reservations, it is vital that the Welsh Government and Local Authorities further reiterate that this policy intention is driven by a safety first principle, and decisions are made in regards to a child's best interest, rights and wellbeing, with risks positively managed. It may be beneficial for further measures to be put in place to mitigate any concerns regarding financial decisions or focus on "targets" having any influence on decisions made in a child's best interests. For example, I am aware that the Welsh Government has in the past utilised financial penalties on health boards who have not met their service delivery targets, and it is absolutely vital that the Welsh Government rule out the use of any such measures in this regard. Targets established by each Local Authority must only be advisory and support a strategic vision — they must not be used to penalise local authorities, neither should they be used as comparable measures of success. This does not mean that these expectation plans are not a priority; simply put the protection

of children will always need to come first and financial penalties would not be conducive to achieving the culture change that I believe is needed in this area, where budgets are already tightly stretched.

The Government's language appears to have 'softened' in this regard over the last few months as the policy has evolved. Some local authorities may, however, still require reassurance that they are not being asked to make decisions that undermine the safety of children in pursuit of targets.

Once again, many thanks for inviting me to share my views on this topical issue. I welcome the Committee's decision to revisit this important area of public service and look forward to the Committee's findings in this area. I am aware that Phase 2 of the inquiry will continue to explore the issue of early intervention and prevention work, as well as developing services that are good value for money and deliver good outcomes for the young people they support. It may be of interest to the Committee, that in my most recent Annual Report, I strengthened calls in relation to removing the element of profit from children's care services. In my report, I have called for the Welsh Government to commit to taking concrete actions within the next year towards reducing and ultimately ending profit making in children's care services, without detriment to children and young people's current care arrangements.⁵ I believe taking this step is a key way to releasing money and supporting local authorities to invest in their own services or those in the third sector. I am aware that some local authorities are taking this action and bringing elements of their provision in house, but this is taking place individually in the absence of a national directive.

As always, my team and I are happy to support with evidence where necessary. I have copied this letter to the Chair of the CYPE Committee too, as this was an issue of intense interest during my recent annual report scrutiny session with members on 6th November.

Yours sincerely,



Sally

Sally Holland
Comisiynydd Plant Cymru
Children's Commissioner for Wales

cc. Lynne Neagle Am, Chair of the CYPE Committee

⁵ <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Annual-Report-2018-19.pdf>



Nick Ramsay AM
Chair
Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

November 2019

Dear Nick Ramsay AM

Thank you for your letter requesting our views to help inform the Public Accounts Committee long-term inquiry into the issues impacting on Care Experienced Children and Young People in Wales. We were delighted to provide written evidence to inform the initial phase of your inquiry and to support the young people who met with Committee members with our member organisation Voices from Care Cymru in 2017.

We welcome the First Minister's continued commitment to safely reduce the number of children who come into the care system, and to prioritise the principle of prevention as resources over time are more effectively redistributed towards supporting children to stay with their families, where it is safe to do so. Whilst safety is of paramount importance, it is also a children's rights issue as many care experienced children and young people lose contact with their siblings and wider family as well as losing friendships through moving school and this causes them extra emotional stress.

In our submission to the Committee, we called for there to be a greater emphasis on early intervention and prevention services for children and parents in need of support to help prevent escalation of need and recourse to more costly acute services, including the initiation of care proceedings. Further work is required to ensure that preventative and edge of care services are routinely accessible for all families who could benefit from additional support, and that commissioning arrangements ensure that third sector organisations in particular receive the appropriate level of funds to deliver quality services which meet expectations and demand. We are aware that such arrangements have been successful in other areas of the

UK such as North West, Glasgow City where the Health and Social Care Partnership have focussed on commissioning such services and have invested heavily in third sector services.

There is also the issue of what happens to children whilst they are in the care system to enable them to return home if at all possible. There needs to be sufficient resources to ensure that whilst in care, the child and their family receives sufficient professional help. Trauma is part of their experience and so trauma informed practice by all professionals involved is essential and this involves a sufficiently trained workforce to make the best use of the time that the child is in care. Children and young people are good judges of the care experience and should be involved. Many care leavers return to their birth family on leaving care which indicates an area for more focus.

We note that the Welsh Government has called on all local authorities in Wales to develop 'bespoke reduction expectation plans' to manage the reduction in the number of children in their care. With the number of children in care expected to rise again when the latest set of annual statistics are released later this month – anticipated to be around 7,000 children - there is a consensus of opinion that the upward trend and pressure on existing services and finances is unsustainable. Doing nothing is not an option for these reasons, as well as the perpetual unease concerning the poorer outcomes for care experienced children when compared to some of their peers.

It is within this context that we support in principle the Welsh Government approach and expectations, alongside their commitment to work in partnership with local authorities, ADSS, the Third Sector and the WLGA to develop and deliver ambitious yet realistic and achievable bespoke plans with reduction targets. Such plans must be developed by placing the rights of the child firmly at the centre, and we would expect local authorities to ensure there are effective and appropriate ways of engaging care experienced children within their area as their plans are being developed. Children and young people have considerable knowledge about what constitutes a good experience in care and also what might have been helpful to prevent them being removed from the families in the first place.

We would like to stress that the issue has to be addressed as that of a 'whole system' which includes the courts, the judiciary, Cafcass Cymru, Local Health Boards etc. as well as local government and third sector. As well as there being an overall increase in numbers, regional variation may be due to specific practices in local areas, not only of the social services departments but also of the courts. Careful analysis of local patterns is welcomed. Safely reducing the number of children in care has to be a shared responsibility. All strategic partners as part of their local corporate parenting responsibilities, should ensure that they actively contribute to identifying and financing solutions; deliver interventions and monitoring the impact of their actions which contribute to reduction expectation.

We would welcome the Welsh Government providing national leadership in supporting local authorities to share practice by arranging learning exchange events, and Children in Wales was pleased to be represented at the workshop held last month. As well as performance monitoring arrangements with each individual local authority, collective reporting should be delivered through the Ministerial Advisory Group on Outcomes for Children (MAG) with regular updates provided to Assembly Members and your Committee as progress is achieved, alongside annual scrutiny in Plenary.

Performance measures should not solely be numerical and should be nationally set. We do not wish to be in a situation where a local authority's predetermined target becomes the driver for determining whether or not care proceedings are initiated. If it is determined that an individual child is at risk and it is in their best interest for them to be placed in care for their safety and protection, then this should govern the course of action which follows, never any target. The statutory duty on local authorities to keep children safe must eclipse any other considerations.

We do hope that this information proves helpful in informing your deliberations, as we continue to strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for all care experienced children and young people in Wales.

Yours Sincerely

Children in Wales



Diane Engelhardt House, (Unit 2) Treglown Court, Dowlais Road, Cardiff, CF24 5LQ
Tŷ Diane Engelhardt, (Uned 2) Cwrt Treglown, Ffordd Dowlais, Caerdydd, CF24 5LQ
02920 108081 | nspcc.org.uk

Public Account Committee,
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

December 2019

Dear Chair,

RE: Care experienced children and young people

NSPCC Cymru/Wales is pleased to have an opportunity to give our views in contribution to the Public Accounts Committee scrutiny session in January. Our contribution focuses on the progress made against the recommendations found in the **'Care experienced children and young people'** report, published in November 2018; specifically, chapters 2 (**outcomes**) and 5 (**Prevention and intervention**).

We welcome Welsh Government's commitment to improving the outcome of care experienced children, and we are pleased to see that progress has been made towards some of the recommendations in the 'Care experienced children and young people' report. However, recent evidence illustrates that significant improvements are still needed in Wales to best support care experienced children and young people and provide the best possible outcomes.

Care Experienced Children - Outcomes

Recent statistics demonstrate a steady rise in the numbers of children looked after in Wales. Welsh Government's last statistical release shows that in March 2019, there were over 6,800 children looked after, a rise of 7% on the previous year¹. The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory report, **'Born into Care: newborns and infants in care proceedings in Wales'**, highlighted the sharp increase in the proportion of newborns who became the subject of care proceedings in Wales; the rate has doubled between 2015 and 2018 and infants less than 1 year old comprised around 30% of all Section 31 cases in Wales.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales believes that safely reducing numbers of children in care relies on local authorities focusing their decision making on what is in the child's best interest, and robust, evidence based decisions must be made on children entering care, considering options for permanency or being

¹ <https://gov.wales/children-looked-after-local-authorities-april-2018-march-2019>

MAE POB PLENTYNDOD WERTH BRWYDRO DROSTO
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reunited with their birth families. As Justice James Munby, former President of the Family Division Court of England and Wales, argued at a recent Coram event, the state is justified in removing a child from the care of their family only when the state can provide better quality of care. This is particularly important given that, in Wales, the proportion of children in care due to abuse and neglect has remained between 65 and 68 per cent for the past five years (Bentley H. et al., 2018). These experiences can leave children with complex emotional and mental health needs, which can increase their vulnerability to abuse (Bazalgette, Rahilly, and Trevelyan, 2015; Luke et al., 2014). When the state decides to look after these children, they must robustly consider their ability to provide appropriate care, support and treatment to meet these complex needs, thus keeping in line with article 39 of UNCRC which states that children who are neglected or abused should receive special support to recover. Our concern, however, is that public sector spending does not meet the significant increase in demand for children’s social services. In NSPCC’s 2014 annual report ‘How Safe are our Children’, we noted that spending in 2012/3 had contracted back to 2006/7 levels. This delivers incredible pressure on the relationship between spending and numbers of care experienced children. This is demonstrated in the table below (fig 1):

Fig 1

Year	Annual Spending on Children’s Social Services (£ thousand) ²	Total Spend on LAC services ³	Number of LAC in Wales
2015	553,950	248,201 (44.8 percent)	5,610
2016	554,430	243,970 (44 percent)	5,660
2017	577,248	256,408 (44.4 percent)	5,960
2018	613,135	284,016 (46.3 percent)	6,405
2019	659,074	310,578 (47.1 percent)	6,845

² Sourced 1.12.19 from: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Local-Government/Finance/Revenue/Social-Services/social-services-socialservicesrevenueexpenditure-by-clientgroup>

³ Sourced 1.12.19 from: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/childrenlookedafterat31march-by-localauthority-gender-age>

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Between 2015 and 2019 there has been a 22% increase in the number of children looked after in Wales, while the Children's Social Service budget has risen by 19%. Yet over the same period, spending on children looked after has increased by 25%, which leaves less for the services for children on the edge of care - children and young people who require support but do not meet the threshold for care proceedings to begin.

To improve the outcomes of care experienced children, we recommend that **Welsh Government:**

- **Invests in children:** Invest in children's services to enable local authorities to provide children and families with the right support at the right time where they need it.
- **Support children who've experienced abuse:** Help children recover from abuse by ensuring they can access high quality mental health and therapeutic services.

Emotional and mental health of care experienced children and young people

We welcome the emphasis on outcomes and on mental health services and therapeutic support in the Committee's 2018 report. Research has repeatedly found that care experienced children and young people have higher rates of mental health problems than the general population. (Bazalgette, Rahilly, and Trevelyan, 2015; Luke et al, 2014). Providing a secure, caring environment can help care experienced children overcome their early life experiences. If emotional wellbeing was embedded throughout the system and all care experienced children and young people had access to the right mental health and emotional support when they needed it, both their health and educational outcomes would dramatically improve.

Wales is the first UK Government to include an assessment of mental health as well as physical health on entry into care as part of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014. NSPCC Cymru/Wales worked with Voices from Care Cymru to explore how care experienced children and young people's emotional and mental health needs are being assessed and supported and launched the briefing '**Listen. Act. Thrive: The emotional and mental health of care experienced children and young people**' earlier in 2019⁴.

This consultation identified that care experienced children were not receiving the emotional and mental health support they need to recover from abuse and neglect. Key issues identified during the consultation include: inadequacy of mental health assessments on entry into care, access to services, training and multi-agency working.

⁴ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/policy/listenactthrive.pdf>

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We were pleased that Welsh Government responded to the recommendations in the consultation (see Appendix 2) by pledging to review how entry into care mental health assessments complied with legislation, and by providing funding to Regional Partnership Boards to improve mental health support to care experienced children and young people. However, these recommendations are still not fully implemented and need urgent attention if we are to improve the outcomes of care experienced children and young people in Wales. As such, we recommend that:

- **Emotional wellbeing is embedded throughout the system**
- **That care experienced children and young people have access to the right mental health and emotional support when they need it**
- **The Listen. Act. Thrive. recommendations are fully implemented.**

Prevention and early intervention services

The recent Nuffield Family Justice Observatory report '**Born into Care: newborns and infants in care proceedings in Wales**' highlighted the sharp increase in the proportion of newborns who became the subject of care proceedings in Wales. In 2015, 43 per 10,000 newborns were subject to care proceedings. By 2018 this had almost doubled to 83 per 10,000. The report also highlighted that infants less than one year comprised around 30% of all Section 31 cases in Wales. At present and in the future, there should be a renewed emphasis on evidence based prevention and early intervention services. Professionals working with a family entering into care proceedings must ensure that parents are prepared for care proceedings at birth and have time to seek legal advice to ensure the right infants are drawn into the care system.

We welcome the Reflect Service, which focuses on working with women who have had one or more children removed. However, there needs to be more evidence based prevention and early intervention services provided to at risk groups and closer working between health and social services. We are pleased that Newport Council are delivering the NSPCC's evidence based **Baby Steps** service (<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/services-children-families/baby-steps/>) to vulnerable parents both before and after birth. The evaluation of Baby Steps showed an improvement in relationships with babies, lower caesarean rates and higher birthweights.⁵

It's important for professionals to support the child's birth family, to address the problems which resulted in the child entering care. In time, children may return home to their family but even if this is

⁵ (See Appendix 1)

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Diane Engelhardt House, (Unit 2) Treglown Court, Dowlais Road, Cardiff, CF24 5LQ
Tŷ Diane Engelhardt, (Uned 2) Cwrt Treglown, Ffordd Dowlais, Caerdydd, CF24 5LQ
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not possible their birth family are still likely to be a central part of their lives. Since 2011, the NSPCC service centre in Glasgow has delivered a cohesive set of services which are all underpinned by an understanding of infant mental health and which seek to support the parent-child relationship. The highest profile of these is the Glasgow Infant and Family Team (GIFT); a specialist infant mental health service for young children in foster care in Glasgow. This is also being trialled in London, under the name of London Infant and Family Team (LIFT).

The IFT model uses an infant mental health approach to improve the quality of permanent placement decisions for young children in foster care as a result of maltreatment. IFT constitutes a multi-disciplinary team, made up of psychiatry, psychology, social work and others, delivering assessment and support on multiple levels for:

- Children, providing therapeutic support to help them recover;
- Birth parents, providing therapeutic support to prevent abuse and neglect;
- Foster parents, delivering support to ensure stable placements;
- Family Court in England / Children’s Hearings System in Scotland, providing expert evidence to ensure robust and timely decision-making about safe permanence for children.

The model has been delivered in Glasgow since 2011 (GIFT), with a second site in London established in 2016 (LIFT).

We are currently testing the effectiveness of IFT against mainstream services in Glasgow and London through a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) being conducted by the University of Glasgow and funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR). The BeST? Services trial aims to ascertain whether IFT or social work services as usual is most effective at improving the mental health and placement stability of children aged 0-5 who have come into foster care because of abuse or neglect. Recruitment to the trial will end in 2020, with the trial reporting in 2022.

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Considering this evidence, we recommend that:

- **Welsh Government and local authorities increase investment in evidence based prevention and early intervention services, focussing on infant mental health.**

Returning home from care

We welcome Welsh Government's greater focus on reunification of children with birth parents, including better support for parents following the removal of a child to provide opportunities for family reunification and the additional funding that has been provided to local authorities to facilitate this. For some children, returning home from care is the best possible outcome. But research shows that for many others this can result in further abuse and neglect, with many children ending up back in care (Department for Education, 2013; Farmer, 2011; Wade, 2011). NSPCC's reunification practice framework, was created in partnership with University of Bristol, and supports practitioners and managers to apply structured professional judgement to decisions about whether and how a child should return home from care. It supports families and workers to understand what needs to change, to set goals, access support and services and review progress. We are pleased to be supporting a number of local authorities in Wales to implement this reunification practice framework.

I hope this evidence is useful in contributing to the Public Accounts Committee scrutiny session, and we look forward to hearing the outcomes of this meeting. Should you wish to discuss any elements further please do not hesitate to contact Vivienne Laing on vivienne.laing@nspcc.org.uk

Yours sincerely,



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National Head of Service NSPCC Cymru/ Wales

Appendix 1: Baby Steps Evaluation Findings

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/services-children-families/baby-steps/>

The quantitative evaluation found that parents who had attended Baby Steps:

- showed an improvement in the quality of their relationship with their babies
- showed a decrease in symptoms of anxiety and depression Helping social workers make decisions on returning children home from care
- showed increased levels of self-esteem
- had a lower caesarean rate (see the [World Health Organisation's report \(PDF\)](#) on the importance of this measure)
- had babies with a higher birth weight.

(Coster, Brookes and Sanger, 2015)

The qualitative evaluations of parents' experiences of Baby Steps found:

- parents were very satisfied with the programme and enjoyed it
- parents felt they had acquired new knowledge, which had prepared them for pregnancy and parenthood
- parents felt the programme had a positive effect on their relationship with their partner
- parents felt that the programme had made them feel secure and supported
- groups of parents who had less access to other forms of information and support, including parents in prison and those from minority ethnic groups, particularly benefited from Baby Steps.

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(Brookes and Coster, 2014; Brookes and Coster, 2014; Brookes and Coster, 2015)

Appendix 2: Listen. Act. Thrive

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/policy/listenactthrive.pdf>

The recommendations in this included:

- An expert panel from the Together for Children and Young People, Early Intervention and Resilience Workstream should work with the Welsh Government to:
 - Review how emotional and mental health of care experienced children and young people is currently being assessed.
 - Develop a comprehensive emotional and mental health assessment framework which will include an evidence based assessment of need.
- Regional Partnership Boards should fund dedicated CAMHS resources for care experienced children and young people.
- Care experienced children and young people must be involved in the planning of improved mental health services.
- Local authorities as corporate parents, health, social services, and education, should work together to provide a joined-up approach to emotional and mental health services and support to care experienced children and young people. Training should be provided to adults working with care experienced children and young people so that they have the skills and confidence to respond to emotional and mental health needs. Care experienced children and young people should also be offered access to emotional wellbeing services like yoga, outdoor activities, mindfulness, and painting.

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