

Care experienced children and young people

November 2018



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November 2018



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 22 June 2016 to carry out the functions set out in Standing Orders 18.2 and 18.3 and consider any other matter that relates to the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are employed in the discharge of public functions in Wales.

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The following Members were also members of the Committee during this inquiry:



Vikki Howells AM
Welsh Labour
Cynon Valley



Lee Waters AM
Welsh Labour
Llanelli

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Chair's foreword

Welsh local authorities have more children in their care than ever before. There are now twice as many children in care in 2017 compared with 1997, with current numbers in Wales at nearly 6,000. Over the last decade, applications for care orders have more than doubled in England and Wales.

When children are unable to live with their birth families for whatever reason, it is vital that the care provided to them by public services is high quality, joined-up and tailored to their individual needs. As we hope birth parents would, “corporate parents” must take seriously their responsibilities to meet the holistic needs of these children and use their resources in the child’s best interest. Care experienced children are often the most vulnerable children and public services must provide them with the specialist support they need.

It is our Committee’s role to consider the efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are employed in the discharge of public functions in Wales. As the first part of our focus on public resources spent on care experienced children, the Committee wanted to look at the long standing and serious concerns about outcomes for care experienced children. We believe this reflects on-going concerns about the way public money is being spent to support them. We believe there is an opportunity to better use “preventative spending” to secure better long-term outcomes for children.

By investing in high quality services now, we can reduce the potential need for expensive services in the future such as tackling poor adult mental health and offending behaviour. High quality services should also reduce the risk of care experienced children having their own children taken into care, at significant cost to the public purse as well as a devastating impact on families. A recent development of particular interest to us is the spending on “edge of care services” which are intended to help prevent children entering the care system. We believe there is an increasing case for retargeting funding towards such services.

We have sought to scrutinise the amounts spent by all those responsible for providing care to these children, not just social services. We found a significant challenge in identifying funding spent by education, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), police forces, Youth Offending Teams and housing compared to the social services spend on care experienced children. There is a lack of transparency and accountability for this spend. This is unacceptable and means that only social services are seen to be accountable for outcomes for care experienced children. We are clear that spending must be more transparent and

that there is genuine collective responsibility for “corporate parenting” across the full range of public bodies.

During this first phase of our inquiry we have listened to the views of professionals working for and with care experienced children. Importantly, we have also listened to the experiences of children who have been “cared for” by the system. Our conclusion is that a meaningful, wholesale change is needed. This is both in respect of the way services are resourced and the priority given to things that are important to care experienced children and young people.

We have kept at the forefront of our minds that this is about real children and real experiences. Whilst we are clear that many professionals are dedicated and provide high quality services under difficult circumstances it is also obvious that services for care experienced children are under significant pressure and face serious challenges. Whilst we welcome the work underway by the Welsh Government’s Ministerial Advisory Group, we are committed to further scrutiny of this issue.

The outcomes that public services deliver for care experienced children must be improved. Their individual experiences need to be better. It is not just about more money – but about using existing resources more strategically.

The price is too high for a system delivering such poor outcomes – both the financial cost and more importantly the cost being paid by the children and young people in Wales who most need our care.

It would be remiss of me, in a report looking at Care Experienced Children and Young People, not to pay tribute to my late colleague and friend Carl Sargeant who made important strides in this field during his time as Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children.

Recommendations

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..... Page 17

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..... Page 21

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.Page 23

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. . Page 30

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..... Page 34

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

strategy for commissioning and managing the full spectrum of placements for Looked After Children. Page 37

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 Service. This is essential to ensure a comprehensive picture of the money invested in supporting this group. Page 41

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. Page 43

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommend 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. Page 45

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. Page 55

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. Page 59

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. Page 64

1. Introduction

1. The Public Accounts Committee is responsible for looking at how the Welsh Government spends money and making suggestions for how this might be done better. We ask people to write to us and come and speak to us to share their views and experiences. After listening to everyone, we write a report to tell the Welsh Government what needs changing.

2. Looking at services for care experienced children and young people, we considered whether money is being spent on the right things and they are getting the right help. We were interested in things like where care experienced children and young people lived when in care, how many times they had to move, whether they got the right help in school and support for their emotional and mental health in school.

3. The Committee has agreed to pursue this inquiry over the whole of this Assembly (2016- 2021), to make sure that the Government is considering the issues raised so that real change is achieved – rather than just writing one report and then it being forgotten about.

4. We are very grateful to those children and young people with experience of care that agreed to talk to us to help us understand the challenges they face.

5. Five young people came and spoke to us during one of our meetings at the Senedd. Other sessions were held across Wales in Anglesey, Carmarthenshire, Conwy, Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Swansea with young people between the ages of 6 and 25 from almost all local authorities in Wales. Participants included children and young people currently in care as well as those who have recently left the care system. In some of the sessions, the young people were supported by their social workers and a foster carer who also provided their views. In all 30 children and young people gave evidence.. A summary of this evidence can be found on our webpages.¹

6. We refer to “care experienced children and young people” rather than “looked after children” as we were told the label of “looked after child”, and particularly the shortened version of “LAC” which possibly gives the impression of children lacking in something is disliked by some children and young people. However, in some instances we have used the term “looked after children” when suggesting changes as this is the statutory term used by the Welsh Government.

¹ **Focus Group Summary** – October 2017

7. Following the agreement, but prior to the publication of this report, the Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care made a Plenary statement² relating to *Improving outcomes for children: Reducing the need for children to enter care and the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group* on 13 November 2018. The Minister's statement sets out some of the outcomes achieved by the Welsh Government and allocates £15 million funding for reducing the need for children to enter care. We will be monitoring these developments as part of this work.

8. This report sets out what we have found to date, it challenges the Welsh Government and everybody to do better and sets out what we want to see happen for the next three years.

² Welsh Government Oral Statement: **Improving Outcomes for Children: Reducing the Need for Children to Enter Care, and the Work of the Ministerial Advisory Group**, 13 November 2018

2. Outcomes

We considered whether the Welsh Government's desired outcomes for care experienced children and young people are being delivered by the current levels of public expenditure.

Why is this important?

9. The Rights of the Child and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 places a duty on Welsh Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers to have due regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) when making decisions. The Welsh Government must use the maximum extent of available resources to implement the rights recognised in the Convention, including Article 20.³

10. Children in care have worse long-term outcomes than the average population, for example:

- They are significantly over represented in the criminal justice system and in prison;
- 39% of care leavers aged 19 were not in education, training or employment in 2016 (the lowest percentage in the past 9 years); and
- only 7% of care leavers in Wales aged 19 were in Higher Education, a total of 24 students in 2011.

11. In terms of education, figures show that 21% of looked after children achieved the Level 2 threshold⁴ in 2017, compared with 67% of all pupils. Only 12% of looked after children achieved the Level 2 threshold inclusive, compared with 55% of all pupils.

12. There are significant challenges in accessing timely mental health services and therapeutic support for looked after children. The Wales Children in Need Census 2016 found that 7% of looked after children were diagnosed as having a

³ Article 20 says that children and young people have the right to special protection and assistance from the state if they can't live with their family

⁴ The Level 2 threshold measure equals 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C or the vocational equivalent. The Level 2 threshold inclusive means that these 5 or more GCSEs or the vocational equivalent must include English or Welsh and Mathematics.]

“mental health problem”, receiving Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or on a waiting list for services. This is likely to be a significant underestimate of the percentage who need emotional and mental health support.

13. The young people we spoke to provided forceful evidence that frequent changes in social workers had a significant negative effect on them. They also said that having to move placements was one of the worst experiences of being in care.

14. The Social Services National Outcomes Framework only has one indicator for care experienced children and young people. This is in relation to the educational attainment of looked after children at age 16. More recently additional outputs are being monitored in the Social Services Performance Measurement Framework.

15. The Welsh Government has established an Improving Outcomes Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG), but there are a lot of questions around how this works:

- What is its role in affecting change?
- How can it be held accountable for its 2017-2020 work programme given its status is as a government advisory group?

16. Lack of consistency was a key theme emerging from the focus groups. Most participants highlighted the disruptive number of both placements and social workers they had experienced. Most had been moved more often than they would like and had experienced a high turnover in social workers. The quality of social workers was also raised. One participant talked about “broken promises” in arranging to meet or communicate with their social worker and another that their social worker “seemed not to care”. From the group discussions, it was clear that many of the children and young people we spoke to felt they are seen only as a “casefile” by their social worker(s). This, along with the disruption of frequently moving to new placements and the high turnover of social workers, was detrimental to building trust in those supporting them.



What young people told us:

“Young people need a constant in their life. That constant could be one placement, or it could be one social worker. It could even be as little as staying in the same school even though they’ve moved.”

“I noted the number of (Social workers) how many I had. In the 12 years I was in care, I had about 40 maybe.”

“So, this young woman has lived at our project for the last four months, and in four months they’ve changed five workers for her, which is really difficult.”

“I had a text message last week saying that our time was up with her working with me. There’s no meeting for a goodbye, or ‘I’m leaving’”

“I was told, going through school and being in care, that I wouldn’t pass any of my GCSEs. So, for me to go to school that one day, on GCSE day, to find that I passed pretty much all of them”.

“Social services were quick enough to take me away from my family but didn’t given them the help they needed to keep me at home”



What did we find out?

Outcomes that matter to children and young people

17. Stability is vitally important to improve outcomes for care experienced children. This was particularly emphasised to us by children and young people in terms of having a consistent social worker and quality long term placements.

18. During a private evidence session, the Committee heard that the lack of stability and unsettlement caused by changes to social workers has a significant impact on children. The Children's Commissioner told us:

"If, as a child, one of the things you've learnt from your experience is, 'Well, I shouldn't trust adults, because adults never do anything nice for me; adults are the people that hurt me or don't look after me', we shouldn't be taking children away from those situations and then placing them back into a system that tells them the same thing: you shouldn't trust adults, you shouldn't rely on them; adults let you down."⁵

19. Sally Holland went on to say:

"...it's a real big indicator of a service to children. If they've had five social workers in the last year, it's been a very, very difficult experience for them and it's not something that we have data on at the moment."⁶

20. Social Care Wales echoed the importance of stability:

"A known contribution to children building resilience is having stable relationships with adults"⁷

21. The Committee welcomes the review being undertaken by Social Care Wales, as the regulatory body for social work training, to ensure that newly qualified social workers⁸ can meet the challenges and needs of those they care for. We were surprised by the evidence from Fabric, that at present there is no module in the Social Work course for providing support to teenagers, given the distinct set of needs they have compared to young children.

22. The National Outcomes Framework was established to fulfil a requirement in the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014 to describe and provide a

⁵ Public Accounts Committee, Private session, 12 February 2018

⁶ National Assembly for Wales, Record of Proceedings (RoP), 29 January 2018, Paragraph 295

⁷ Social Care Wales, February 2018.

⁸ Social Care Wales, February 2018

consistent approach to measuring well-being for people who need care and support and for carers who need support. This framework only contains one indicator in relation to looked after children. It relates to the average external qualifications point score for 16-year-old looked after children in any local authority maintained learning setting.

23. Councillor Geraint Hopkins, from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) told us:

“One of the key things is how many times does a child move placement, for example, now that we know that that has an impact on the child? So, they need the fewest moves possible—everybody agrees with that. The fewest moves possible gives a better outcome for children. If it continues to break down and a child has 10 foster carers, then, clearly, the outcome isn’t going to be good.”⁹

24. Sally Jenkins, Head of Children and Family Services, Newport City Council, said that outcomes are difficult to directly attribute to spend:

“... in terms of just equating, say, a percentage of the spend with outcome is difficult and there’s also this real challenge in terms of recognising constantly that the cohort of children that we are working with are the most vulnerable and the most disadvantaged. They, quite simply, have to go through every hurdle in the world to get that point score of GCSE, to get into higher education.”¹⁰

25. There was some disagreement about whether there was a consistent data set being collected by local authorities. Sally Jenkins stressed that despite there only being one indicator on the outcome frameworks, it “is not representative of all the work that’s going on”. Local Authorities:

“... capture enormous amounts of data. ..., for the performance indicators, for parenting assessment manuals, for internal measures for the inspectorate—. And, actually, because we need it for our own analysis of the system—whatever else we’re being asked for, I need to understand my children. I need to understand my population of looked-after children, and I need to do that in order to fulfil my job as a good head of service.”¹¹

⁹ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 172

¹⁰ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 375

¹¹ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 400

26. Others called for more data to be collected or made available. Fabric stated in its written evidence:

“More data is needed to assess the value for money in [care] services.”¹²

27. Rachel Thomas, representing the Office of the Children Commissioner’s suggested that the National Outcomes Framework did not capture children and young people’s experiences. She said

“...children generally don’t feature that highly in it; there’s a lot of reliance on the national survey, which is 16 plus, so that direct voice of children generally is missing. And that’s something that we’ve fed back, but hasn’t changed. So, certainly, when we raised the concept of doing the Bright Spots survey, it was against the background of the lack of data from young people directly.”¹³

28. The Bright Spots Programme is a partnership between Coram Voice and the University of Bristol which surveys the views of care experienced children. The Programme is being expanded across Wales and has already been delivered in 22 local authorities in England.¹⁴ It is described on the project website as follows:

“Although little is known about children’s well-being, even less is known about the well-being of vulnerable groups such as looked after children. There are statistics and literature on looked after children’s outcomes, but outcomes are only a part of well-being. Rarely have children been asked what they think matters to their well-being.”¹⁵

29. The programme aims to identify and promote policy and practice which have a positive influence on children and young people’s well-being from their own perspective. The Committee welcomed the evidence from the Fostering Network that the Bright Spots pilot was now being funded in six Local Authorities by the Welsh Government.

30. The Committee believes that there is a wide range of information which needs to be captured and compared to effectively build a picture of care

¹² Written Evidence, **CECYP 02**

¹³ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 194

¹⁴ **University of Bristol, school for Policy Studies, Bright Spots - “Your Life, Your Care” surveys of looked after children and young people [Accessed 27 September 2018]**

¹⁵ *ibid*

experienced children and young people and the impacts that publicly funded services are having on them.

31. Given the challenges facing care experienced children and young people, consideration should be given to developing a specific outcomes framework for care experienced children based around the whole life of the child and beyond (to address the likelihood of those in care subsequently having their own children taken into care). This could contain a number of indicators including the number of placement moves, number of children placed out of county and the number of social worker changes, but must capture and reflect the views of children and young people. It is this qualitative context which is vital to ensure the best outcomes are being achieved.

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.

What we know about educational outcomes

32. The Auditor General for Wales' 2012 report, **The educational attainment of looked after children and young people**¹⁶ concluded that initiatives by the Welsh Government and local authorities had contributed to some modest progress but many looked after children were still not achieving their full potential. It also said progress was hindered by a lack of clearly defined objectives and weaknesses in planning, performance management and corporate parenting. Subsequent reports have not suggested any significant improvement from the position in 2012.¹⁷

33. In January 2017 the Welsh Government set out its **Strategy for raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales..** This document identified the need for “monitoring of outcomes for

¹⁶ **Auditor General for Wales Report The educational attainment of looked after children and young people** (August 2012)

¹⁷ Welsh Government 2015: **Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment and aspirations of looked after children in Wales**; Welsh Government 2016: **Strategy for raising the attainment of children who are looked after**; Cardiff University 2016: **Exploring the educational experiences and aspirations of LAC in Wales**; Estyn 2016, **Raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after - a best practice report**.

funding available to support children” and the need to strengthen funding arrangements.

34. From 2013-14, the Welsh Government has invested in the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) to improve the educational outcomes of care experienced children. Our concerns about the transparency of PDG funding is detailed in Chapter four.

35. The Welsh Government’s 2016 strategy states:

“The Welsh Government will work closely with regional education consortia to ensure the funding is utilised as intended and is making a real impact in driving up the educational performance of these children which is consistent with the objectives of this strategy and the associated action plan.”

36. In 2017, the Welsh Government commissioned ICF Consulting to evaluate the PDG. The Report was expected to be published during summer 2018. However at the time of publishing our Report (November 2018), it still had not been published.

37. The data below shows that there was some progress in narrowing the gap between Looked After Children’s achievement of the Level 2 threshold and other pupils’, which coincided with the introduction of the PDG. This is less so with the Level 2 threshold inclusive.

Looked After Children’s (LAC) achievement rates of Level 2 threshold - All Wales

Percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 Threshold						
	LAC	All Pupils	% point gap	LAC	eFSM	% point gap
2011/12	29	73	44	29	51	22
2012/13	40	78	38	40	58	18
2013/14	48	82	34	48	65	17
2014/15	47	84	37	47	69	22
2015/16	56	84	28	56	72	16
2016/17	21	67	46	21	41	20

Looked After Children's (LAC) achievement rates of Level 2 threshold inclusive – All Wales

Percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 threshold						
	LAC	All Pupils	% point gap	LAC	eSFM	% point gap
2011/12	13	51	38	13	23	10
2012/13	12	53	41	12	26	14
2013/14	17	55	38	17	28	11
2014/15	18	58	40	18	32	14
2015/16	23	60	37	23	36	13
2016/17	12	55	43	12	29	17

38. Despite the outcomes linked to this PDG investment, the educational outcomes for care experienced children and young people remain significantly lower than other pupils. The data above shows:

- Only 21% of looked after children achieved the Level 2 threshold in 2017, compared with 67% of all pupils and 41% of pupils eligible for free school meals; and
- Only 12% of looked after children achieved the Level 2 threshold inclusive in 2017, compared with 55% of all pupils and 29% of pupils eligible for free school meals.¹⁸

39. In terms of qualitative evidence, a 2016 Welsh study¹⁹ found that:

“Older young people and care leavers in our study often felt that their education had not been prioritised and that their potential was not recognised by carers, teachers and social care professionals.”

40. It also found that care experienced children missed out on education, stating:

¹⁸ [The Level 2 threshold measure equals 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C or the vocational equivalent. The Level 2 threshold inclusive means that these 5 or more GCSEs or the vocational equivalent must include English or Welsh and Mathematics.]

¹⁹ **Cascade briefing: Exploring the educational experiences and aspirations of Looked After Children and young people (LACY) in Wales, March 2016**

“Placement and school moves resulting in delays to starting at a new school, appointments and meetings occurring in school time were all identified by participants as making educational achievement difficult.”

41. In oral evidence, we heard there were several reasons for this. Councillor Huw David, representing the WLGA said in terms of educational outcomes:

“[...]if they got to school, half the time, it was a victory and, quite often, they experience quite significant developmental delay because they’re not receiving any proper parenting or proper care and support, and it’s very, very difficult then to close the gap, isn’t it, when they’ve fallen so far behind, and quite often in their early years?”

“[...] Any teacher and any social worker will bust a gut to try and close that gap, but it is a big gap to narrow, and sometimes when they’ve got additional learning needs, it’s not realistic to expect them to be getting A-levels. [...] when you’ve been passed from pillar to post and you don’t know which school you’re in or which home you’re in, it’s difficult for them to focus on education and to have a real chance.”²⁰

42. Naomi Alleyne from the WLGA said more qualitative research was needed as each child’s experience of the education system was different.

“[...]it’s what experiences they’ve had and at what point they’ve come into the education system with appropriate support to do that.

Because you can say, ‘This is the experience of a group’, but that hides so many individual experiences or outcomes or the journey that an individual child has had.”²¹

43. The Committee believes that educational outcomes for care experienced children and young people need to be aspirational. It is apparent from the available figures that there is a significant gap between looked after children and other pupils. The Committee believes there is little value in purely quantitative measures, given the number of various factors involved. We would like to see qualitative research undertaken to establish successful approaches to supporting care experienced children and ensure that their educational achievements can be recognised.

²⁰ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraphs 210 - 211

²¹ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 179

44. See Chapter four for our views about how the PDG funding should be more transparent and better used.

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

The Improving Outcomes Ministerial Advisory Group

45. The **Ministerial Advisory Group**²² is the Welsh Government’s successor to the Improving Outcomes for Children Strategic Steering Group, which oversaw the first phase of development towards a national approach for looked after children in Wales.

46. The group was established after the Assembly elections in 2016. It is chaired by David Melding AM and reports to the Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care.

47. The Group focuses on:

- identifying early and preventative action to help reduce the numbers of children taken into care;
- improving outcomes for children already in care; and
- improving outcomes for care leavers.

48. The Group has a membership of over 30 key stakeholders, and we had positive feedback that it brings together key players and has a comprehensive work programme.

49. Colin Turner from the Fostering Network said:

“...everybody’s there because I think we recognise that there is a crisis in Wales, that we are struggling with diminished—. It’s not our fault, but that’s the situation we’re in. So it’s creative, it’s innovative [...].”²³

²² Welsh Government, **Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group**. [last updated March 2018]

²³ RoP, 12 February 2018, Paragraph 97

50. However, the Committee has several concerns about the pace of the work and the structure of the group. These were echoed by witnesses. Naomi Alleyne, from WLGA, said:

“In terms of the impact, it’s difficult to say how effective it’s been because it’s delivering a number of different things and a lot of things are in train in terms of its development. So, I think it’s certainly useful to bring all those partners together and to have those discussions, and have a detailed action plan that is there and is being delivered by the many partners moving forward. So, I would still say give it time to achieve what it has set out to achieve, but probably a little bit more speed in some aspects of it.”²⁴

51. Sally Holland was supportive of the broad range of the group, and particularly its inclusion of children and young people, but had some concerns:

“... in terms of where it’s got to, it still probably needs to work more towards really identifying what outcomes will be success, how it will identify what success is. It’s very easy, I think, to start working on processes rather than outcomes, but I do think that, as a group, it has improved over the last year, becoming more outcome orientated and less process orientated. The proof will be in the pudding.”²⁵

52. The Committee was concerned by the following section of the Welsh Government’s written evidence:

“The Group has recently established a Task and Finish Group with responsibility for develop a suite of sentinel indicators which can evidence the outcomes and impact of the MAG work programme. These indicators will align with the social services outcomes framework and the goals set out in The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.”²⁶

53. Given that the group was established after the Assembly elections in 2016, it is concerning that it appears to have taken over a year to set up a task and finish group and to establish “sentinel” indicators. This timescale seems to be indicative of a large group given a substantial, potentially insurmountable, task.

²⁴ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 219

²⁵ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 165

²⁶ Written Evidence, PAC(5)-12-18 Paper 1, 30 April 2018

54. Furthermore, the MAG is effectively a sub-group working to the Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care and Welsh Government officials. The MAG task and finish groups are in truth more sub-groups below the MAG. This complex structure along with dividing the work into 3 work streams consisting of 27 work strands appears to the Committee to inhibit agile, transparent, good governance.

55. In addition to concerns about the MAG, we question the ability of Government for joint-working at a strategic level across the range of policy areas directly relevant to care experienced children. For example, when asked about the Pupil Development Grant, Welsh Government official Albert Heaney explained he was unable to comment as:

“...we’re not the officials responsible for the pupil development grant. So, it’s not that I’m trying to be evasive, but we don’t lead on that policy side.”²⁷

56. The Committee is concerned that executive functions have been placed on the MAG. While we appreciate this has been established to tackle several challenging issues, the ownership and accountability of the work programme is unclear, as is the extent of engagement from the Welsh Government in its work.

57. We believe that the Welsh Government has put too much emphasis on the MAG to be a delivery body – when in fact its primary role should be around challenge and advice. This group has no direct accountability, and it is unclear how it reports to the Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care.

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

²⁷ RoP, 30 April 2018, Paragraph 143

3. Spending on placements

We took an initial look at the overall cost to and value for money of the placements available for care experienced children and young people, specifically the suitability, cost and availability of placements.

Why is this important?

58. This is a critical area because of the significant spend on placements as a percentage of the expenditure on care experienced children and young people.

- Data on Social Services revenue expenditure on looked after children services shows that between 2011-12 to 2016-17 expenditure has increased by 19.1% to £256 million in 2016-17;
- In 2016-17, the largest portion was spent on fostering services (45.6%), followed by residential care (25.5%) and leaving care support services (8.1%);
- In the last five years seven local authorities have decreased their expenditure on looked after children services whereas the other 15 have increased their expenditure;
- The Committee found the information on expenditure was difficult to compare. For example, looking at the data over a five year period Monmouthshire had the largest increase (105.9%) whereas Wrexham appeared to have the largest decrease (-30.3%) in the last five years. However, the supplementary written evidence from WLGA in April 2018 suggested the Wrexham figures were not accurate because of “some classification changes in the service” which “distorts the data time series and does not reflect the true picture”;
- The WLGA evidence did not specify the actual change in spending on looked after children’s services, and this level of confusion is not helpful to understanding the challenges; and
- The Welsh Government’s written evidence states the average cost of a local authority placement is £23,327 compared to Independent Agency placement at £43,378 per year.

59. Most local authority expenditure is on placements and we heard compelling evidence from the young people we spoke to about the impact of frequent placement moves. The Committee is concerned that this money is not being targeted in a way which is delivering good outcomes for children and young people. It is unclear to what extent the outcomes for children are improved by more expensive placements.

60. These are large sums of money, and the pattern of spend suggests some significant variations in practice between local authorities. As a Committee we are unconvinced that money is being spent in the best way to ensure that care experienced children are supported to achieve their full potential.



What young people told us:

“I think that is the most important thing for young people, to feel as if they belong to a family.”

“Self-esteem, self-worth, feeling included and just having someone that you can rely on and someone who will support you and will look after you.”

“I have had 14 different placements in a year.”

“Last year I moved 20 times alone.”

“I had been at the placement for four, five years, and then all of a sudden my social worker turned up on the Friday and was like, ‘You’re being moved on Monday’.”



What did we find out?

Placements

61. Young people told us about the detrimental effect that placement moves have on them, and that the need for stability is vital for children who have already experienced significant disruption and change. The Committee heard that there was a significant shortage of local authority placements. This has led to local authorities desperately searching for placements essentially taking whatever is available, rather than what is most appropriate to meet the child's needs. The result is placements that do not meet the needs of the child and are potentially at higher risk of breaking down.

62. The evidence from Children in Wales highlighted that not only do multiple placements have a detrimental and disruptive impact on the children, they are also costly for local authorities:

“To illustrate this point, research by Demos (2010)²⁸ has shown that a child experiencing multiple placements over 4½ years (Child A) can cost a local authority 12% more than a child in a stable placement over 14 year (Child B)

Child A

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

Child B

- Total cost (3 periods in care in 10 placements) = £393,579 for 4.5 years (£56,226 per year).²⁹

63. The Committee notes the Welsh Government's evidence that:

“Although we collect data nationally on the number of placement moves a child experiences, we do not collect information on the suitability of placement for each child or whether a placement fully meets a child's needs. This is detailed information which will form part of the care planning and review process for each child, and will be held at local authority level. Care Inspectorate Wales is currently undertaking

²⁸ Demos, ***In Loco Parentis***, To deliver the best for looked after children, the state must be a confident parent. [Accessed 27 September 2018]

²⁹ Written Evidence, ***CECYP.06***

a thematic review of looked after children's services across Wales, which will focus upon children and young people's outcomes, including placement suitability. It is due to report in March 2019."³⁰

64. It is apparent to the Committee that the current placements system is poor value for money. There are insufficient placements leading to some children being placed inappropriately where there is a vacancy rather than in the right place to provide the care and support they need. This is not in their best interests, will not secure the right outcomes for them and is not an effective use of public money. We will consider the findings of the Care Inspectorate Wales work when it is published as part of our long-term inquiry.

Local Authority versus Independent Agency placements

65. The Welsh Government's written evidence states the average cost of a local authority placement is £23,327 compared to Independent Agency placement at £43,378 per year.

66. Sally Holland, The Children's Commissioner for Wales told us that numerically local authority placements make up two thirds of placements and independent agency placements one third "[...] but the two third placements in-house cost a third of what the independent ones do".³¹

67. Sally Holland told the Committee:

"We had children saying to us things like, 'I feel a bit like a commodity because I know that people are actually bidding to offer me a placement.' So there's that principle point that children felt uncomfortable knowing that profit could be made out of their distress and need for care."³²

68. She made a further point about value for money, stating:

"I'm concerned, as I think we all should be, about the very, very high costs of private placements and the fact that the supply is so low that it's not so much a marketplace as local authorities trying to find a placement that will meet this child's needs, almost whatever the cost. I feel sure that, with better commissioning and better planning, we

³⁰ Written Evidence, **PAC(5)-16-18 PTN2**, 11 June 2018.

³¹ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 43

³² RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 23

could provide not-for-profit—it doesn't always have to be by the state—services that can meet these children's needs."³³

69. Irfan Alam, Assistant Director Children's Services, Cardiff City Council, explained the challenges faced by the local authorities to find placements giving the following example:

"...52 searches for one young person between Monday and Wednesday. There were no placements for this young person at all. We finally found a placement in Essex at £11,500 a week. By the time I rang the provider to understand why it was £11,500, that placement had already been snapped up within 15 minutes by another local authority. So, it is routine. Some of our most complex young people, on average, cost around £6,500 a week, and these are bespoke-type placements, so single placements, for example. These are children who are probably just below the cusp of secure orders."³⁴

70. The Committee heard many examples of the variation in the costs of independent placements. Gareth Jenkins Assistant Director for Children's Services, Caerphilly County Borough Council explained that average cost is anything between £3,000 and £5,000 per week for a residential placement but some of those costs will be much higher than that.

71. At the time of taking evidence (February 2018) Caerphilly had the highest cost placement, at £16,500 a week. We were told that there is no way of adjusting or compensating for those extreme circumstances and therefore this funding comes out of the overall social services budget. Consequentially, Caerphilly County Council had an overspend of £860,000 for the year and was in the process of establishing a new facility within Caerphilly because of this one placement.³⁵

72. The Committee understands that the use of independent agencies often occurs where children have additional needs or need to be placed out of county, and therefore a direct comparison such as stating they cost twice as much would not be accurate or appropriate. Nevertheless, there is still a stark difference in cost and we have been unable to establish what the profit levels are in these instances. We believe this is essential to understand to allow greater comprehension of what is being delivered by the system at present.

³³ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 24

³⁴ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 309

³⁵ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 306

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.

Shortage of Placements

73. Having heard evidence from young people, the Committee was keen to explore the shortage of suitable permanent placements and the impact this has on the number of placements that children and young people experience.

74. Colin Turner, from the Fostering Network said

“The reality is that I don’t believe that anybody, at any one time, truly understands where all the vacancies are; where the particular pressures are on individual placements in individual communities. We know that there’s a shortage for sibling groups, for parent and child placements, and for placements for children with disabilities.”³⁶

75. He called for independent providers, the charitable sector and local authorities to work more co-operatively to identify the placement needs of children within authorities and across regions and co-produce services, saying:

“[...]this is about outcomes for children, not about who’s making the most profit. It’s about who can provide consistent quality care to the most vulnerable children in Wales.”

76. He suggested a national register could be created which listed all foster carers and vacancy rates. If coupled with a local needs analysis he said:

“[...] when we were actually embarking on recruitment campaigns for foster carers at least we could be targeting those foster carers for the children where there’s a demand in local areas.”³⁷

77. Naomi Alleyne set out a suggested model based on that in place for tracking potential adopters through the adoption service:

“What’s really useful through the adoption service at the moment is that they’re actually able to track how many adopters have been there in terms of the needs from children[...] it’s useful to track that so that

³⁶ RoP, 12 February 2016, Paragraph 12

³⁷ RoP, 12 February 2018, Paragraph 12

we've got a much better idea about what's needed in terms of numbers moving forward, and, actually, actions can then be taken to recruit, hopefully, the people who are there."³⁸

78. The Committee heard that there is a serious shortage of placements which results in a lack of choice. This is particularly pronounced in specialist residential care. For example, Kate Devonport from Conwy County Council set out an example where:

"... over a three-week period, over 70 resources were exhausted across the whole of the UK and we still had nowhere in the whole of the UK that would take a young lady with that sort of behaviour [parasuicide]. That's quite terrifying. These are our most vulnerable young people and we do not have a resource in Wales."³⁹

79. In written evidence Welsh Government said:

"Sometimes a child will need to be placed in a temporary or emergency arrangement while a more suitable longer-term placement is found. For example, a child may need to be placed in a children's home until a suitable foster placement becomes available, or a child to be placed for adoption may need to be placed with foster parents until a suitable adopter is found."⁴⁰

80. Alistair Davey representing the Welsh Government referred to work already underway:

"... the national fostering framework, which is very much looking at commissioning and placement costs. We know that it costs almost double for an independent fostering placement, as compared to a local authority placement. So, we're looking at a national marketing plan, national training, so we've got to look at how do we recruit and better retain our foster carers in Wales, because, obviously, there's a big shift there and saving that we can make to reinvest elsewhere."⁴¹

81. Welsh Government pointed the Committee to the **Analysis of outcomes for children and young people 4 to 5 years after a final Care Order** published in May 2018. It looked at basic placement related information for 1,076 children and

³⁸ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 165

³⁹ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 367

⁴⁰ Written Evidence, **PAC(5)-16-18 PTN2**, 11 June 2018

⁴¹ RoP, 30 April 2018, Paragraph 33

young people with a final Care Order made in Wales in the 12-month period from April 2012 to March 2013. Its aims were to examine:

- The placement journeys for children in care in Wales and how these compare with the outcomes aspired to in their Care Plan.
- Factors associated with more positive placement outcomes for children with a Care Order.

82. In respect of placements this study found

“Over three quarters of the whole cohort of children experienced a high level of placement stability – with either none (30%) or only one (46%) placement move from the time of the full Care Order in 2012-2013 until 31 March 2017. This was particularly the case for younger children aged 0-4 or 5-9 years at the time of the Care Order. Older children, particularly those aged 10-15 years, were likely to experience a greater number of placement moves – an average of 2.17 moves.”

83. It went on to make the following recommendation:

“There is increased availability of high quality long-term foster care placements which, in turn, ensure children experience timely (including first time) for ever placements that are more likely to meet their needs.”

84. Albert Heaney highlighted to the Committee that there was work underway in respect of a task and finish group on residential care as part of the Ministerial Advisory Group. He said it was looking at issues including:

“Do we have the right level and do we have the therapeutic support, which isn’t just what a social worker should do—it’s the type of support that goes in around that child and young person. So, where children sometimes move through and escalate in terms of concerns, it is looking at the models in terms of our residential provision.”⁴²

85. We note the Welsh Government’s written evidence refers to our inquiry in the MAG workplan for placements and sets a deadline of 2020:⁴³

⁴² RoP, 30 April 2018, Paragraph 121

⁴³ Written Evidence, **PAC(5)-12-18 P1**, 30 April 2018

“The Public Accounts Committee inquiry is examining placement and commissioning strategies and the MAG will wish to consider the Committee’s findings and recommendations.”

86. The Committee consider this to be insufficient and urge the Welsh Government to be proactively addressing the existing challenges around placements, with our reflections being able to help this in time. The CIW work could provide a key evidence base for the work of the MAG. We were therefore surprised that this workstream does not reflect the work of CIW thematic review and would hope that this has now been revised.

87. Given the tension that exists with insufficient placements, severely limiting choice, there are questions about how the quality of these placements can be assessed. This is particularly pertinent when those placements are outside Wales where Welsh Local Authorities have significantly less oversight.

88. The Committee currently believes that there may be a need for a framework to be established for assessing the quality of placements based around the needs of a child. However, we are mindful of the CIW work and will revisit this area later in the assembly having considered those findings.

End of Placements Reviews

89. Kate Lawson from the Fostering Network stressed that systematic “end-of-placement” reviews are needed to better understand why children are being moved and placements are ending. She said:

“...feedback from our helplines and feedback through our state of the nation clearly shows that that placement review isn’t systematically taking place before the end of the placement to fully understand whether the placement is ending in the child’s best interests, and that there aren’t any other financial motives or other things at play there.”⁴⁴

90. The Committee heard similar concerns from the range of young people we spoke to. They gave compelling evidence of being told they were being moved, without notice or without understanding why. They told us about the significant negative impact this has had on them and that it undermined the chances of them achieving good outcomes in the long term.

91. End of placement reviews are a vital part of the process to help the child deal with the disruption of moving placement – it is essential to remember that the

⁴⁴ RoP, 12 February 2018, Paragraph 54

ending of a placement, is the ending of a relationship, which can have a significant impact on people. They also provide assurance that local authorities decisions are being made in the individual child's best interest rather than because of financial incentives.

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.

Recruiting and commissioning models

92. The Children's Commissioner highlighted to the Committee that, the potential risk to the already limited supply meant a change towards a not for profit model would not be achievable overnight, but that this was:

“a direction that the Social Services and Well-being Act expected us to go with our care services, and I haven't really seen that happening yet it in these services.”⁴⁵

93. The Children's Commissioner also stressed that it may be more efficient and effective to commission on a regional or possibly national basis as many of the 22 Local Authorities were struggling:

“... trying to find very highly specialised placements for small numbers for whom they cannot provide for their needs in-house. So, the work that's going on now under the ministerial advisory group, I hope, will lead towards more regional and even, where necessary, national planning and commissioning of highly specialised services, because there are some very distinct shortages for distinct needs.”⁴⁶

94. Written Evidence from the Youth Offending Team Managers Cymru raised concerns that:

“A high percentage of budgets are spent on children placed within profit making organisations. There is limited availability of placements that can deliver a therapeutic needs led service. Money “invested” in other placements can yield little by way of positive outcome and become counter-productive often resulting in placement breakdown and greater costs incurred. It is acknowledged that a lot of effort is now

⁴⁵ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 29

⁴⁶ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 32

concentrating on avoiding children becoming looked after but numbers remain high. Once accommodated by a local authority, placements are often out of county making access to services and a return home more difficult.”⁴⁷

95. Gareth Jenkins, Assistant Director for Children’s Services, Caerphilly County Borough Council, explained that there have been previous steps to address this through the Children’s Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs).⁴⁸ It aims to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people and achieve value for money through working collaboratively. He said:

“All of the local authorities are signed up to that [Children’s Commissioning Consortium Cymru]. It has worked really hard to bring in a framework cost for each placement, depending on the variables within that. So, a foster placement will cost x amount and residential will cost x amount, and providers get on to that framework so, in effect, we’re all paying the same thing.”⁴⁹

96. Furthermore, this should remove the competition between local authorities as they would all pay the same and then the only option would be between working for a local authority or the independent sector.

97. He highlighted that the limitation to the framework was:

“...that we have difficult-to-place challenging young people, whom providers refuse to take unless we pay additional costs for them.”⁵⁰

98. Kate Lawson from the Fostering Network suggested that the most effective use of resources is based round “doing really high-quality individual assessments on what the needs of that child are”. In turn that provides the basis for the recruitment of foster carers and the commissioning arrangements. She said that “might require some more national oversight that those sufficiency statements and that planning is being done at a local level”.⁵¹

99. Sally Jenkins highlighted the 4Cs had done some positive work in terms of building a shared understanding of costs and looking at how to ensure there is a

⁴⁷ Written Evidence, **CECYP 03**

⁴⁸ a consortium of Welsh local authorities who collaborate in relation to commissioning placements for looked-after children

⁴⁹ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 271

⁵⁰ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraphs 272-273

⁵¹ RoP, 12 February 2018, Paragraph 53

proper framework for national and regional procurement, which ensures all providers are accurately assessed and quality assured. However, she emphasised that there was a need for more capacity to deliver this:

“In an ideal world, you’d have a range of providers in front of you and you’d choose. We’re actually in the opposite position at the moment.”⁵²

100. While the work underway is welcomed and much needed, the Committee believes there needs to be much bolder steps taken. We agree with the Children Commissioner’s assertion that everybody should be concerned about

“...the very, very high costs of private placements and the fact that the supply is so low that it’s not so much a marketplace as local authorities trying to find a placement that will meet this child’s needs, almost whatever the cost. I feel sure that, with better commissioning and better planning, we could provide not-for-profit—it doesn’t always have to be by the state—services that can meet these children’s needs.”⁵³

101. We believe that there needs to be a full analysis of the provision of placements. The Welsh Government must consider fully the framework for services that children in local authority care receive. There needs to be consideration of the model for Wales and recognition that young people are recognised as citizens and not clients. We fully agree with the Children Commissioner’s recommendation in her 2016-17 annual report that:

“Residential Care: The Welsh Government should ensure that local authorities deliver their duties under Section 16 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 to involve children and young people in the design and delivery of services and increase the range of not for profit services so that money invested in social care services can be spent on improving outcomes for children rather than providing returns for shareholders.”⁵⁴

102. We were extremely disappointed to find that the 2017-18 Children’s Commissioner’s report found that there had been no action from the Welsh Government in this respect.

103. There are insufficient placements in Wales. This is a difficult matter to address, as the numbers vary continuously, but the approach taken needs to be

⁵² RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 355

⁵³ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 24

⁵⁴ Children’s Commissioner for Wales, [Annual Report 2016-17](#) [Accessed 12 November 2018]

strategic and collaborative to ensure maximum value and ultimately the best outcome for those within the care of local authorities. It is illogical to have authorities within Wales competing against each other, with no consideration being given to the profit levels being made.

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 strategy for commissioning and managing the full spectrum of placements for Looked After Children.

4. Transparent funding

We considered whether spending specific to care experienced children and young people is sufficiently transparent across the range of public services.

Why is this important?

104. It is very difficult to identify the relevant funding for care experienced children in vital service areas such as education, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and housing. There is a risk that only social services are seen to be accountable for outcomes for care experienced children.

105. There is an unexplained variation of Social Services expenditure for care experienced children across local authorities. There is no apparent monitoring of whether those local authorities who spend more are achieving better outcomes for the children in their care. Cardiff spent £64,421 per looked after child in 2016-17, in contrast, Denbighshire spent £27,208 per looked after child. The Wales average was £45,302 per looked after child.

106. Representatives of the All Wales Heads of Children's Services told us that local authorities' financial commitment to care experienced children is becoming "rapidly unsustainable and nearing breaking point". When questioned, Welsh Government officials told us they do not have sight of any contingency plans local authorities may have in place should this situation continue.

107. More than £7 million of Welsh Government funding, targeted at care experienced children and those on the edge of care, has been moved into the Revenue Support Grant in 2018-19. This will make it more difficult to ensure it will be allocated to services for care experienced children.

108. The Pupil Development Grant (PDG) in Wales is allocated at £1,150 per pupil based on the numbers of looked after children. In 2018-19 £4.5 million was allocated based on 3,907 children registered as looked after. This element of the PDG can also be spent on adopted children. However, the actual amount (£4.5 million) has not been altered to account for the estimated 3,000 and 3,500 adopted pupils also eligible for this part of the PDG allocation.



What young people told us:

A worker accompanying young people told the Committee that:

“It’s a concern to children themselves. So, I’ve had children saying to me several times over the last year, ‘We’re quite upset that people can make a profit out of our care and out of our distress’. They don’t like the fact that they are individually tendered—and they know this. I find it astounding that they have to share it with them, but for some individual children, local authorities may have to approach up to 80 potential providers—or 100 providers—to try to get a placement for them. They have to put out a profile of the child. It isn’t a tendering process to individual providers. Children, quite naturally, find that really quite disturbing, and the fact there’s a profit made out of them.”¹²⁴

I do feel that sometimes we’re not told things because it saves them money for other stuff. When I was in school, my social worker said she would sort out a maths tutor for me to help me get my maths. She said this at the start of the year. As soon as we found out my exam dates, we told her. Then, I did my exam, still no tutor. She then phoned me after the exam and said, ‘We’ve sorted a maths tutor out for you.’ And it’s like, ‘Well, it’s a bit late now. You’ve

had the whole school year to do it, and now you've done it after the exam, which is now saving you money because I no longer need that maths tutor.'

If your friends are going on a trip somewhere and your counsellor says, 'No, you can't go because it'll cost too much money', then it makes you feel as if you're worth less than your own friends. I don't think that's right at all.

In response to the question, 'Do you feel like a commodity?' The three witnesses all responded: **Yes**

"We need love and care not to pay their rent."

We often talk about the financial cost of moving children from one place to the other for the local authorities, but what is the cost for the young person who's having to move around in terms of the displacement, in terms of their education achievements, in terms of their health, and just in terms of their social network, and meeting different friends, moving around, at very short notice. We can't put a price on those sorts of things, but they're lasting damage for many young children who go through the system.



What did we find out?

Transparency of spending on care experienced children ---

109. Much of our report focuses on Social Services spending on looked after children as they are a key provider of services to children on the edge of care and care experienced children. The absence of transparent allocations and spending in other key service areas such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Housing and Education (apart from the PDG) makes it extremely difficult to assess whether the spending in these services areas delivers good outcomes for care experienced children.

110. Children in Wales told the Committee that regular Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA) of budget and economic decision-making processes should be undertaken and published, with budgetary lines for children in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations clearly defined. It says this should include children and young people with care experience as well as those children identified as being potentially at risk of entering the care system, including children with care and support needs (preventative spend).

111. The **Welsh Government's CRIA process** includes completion of a template, which prompts officials to consider key questions around analysing the impact of the proposal on children and young people, and setting out whether and how the proposal supports and promotes children's rights. The Welsh Government's **Budget Advisory Group for Equality** (BAGE) also has a role to provide advice, support and challenge to improve equality considerations of the budget process. For the budget 2018-19, the Welsh Government has opted to use a **strategic integrated impact assessment** to underpin its decisions to allocate resources.

112. We are clear that spending must be more transparent and that there is genuine collective responsibility in the intended ethos of "corporate parenting". This is discussed further in Chapter five of this report.

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 Service. This is essential to ensure a comprehensive picture of the money invested in supporting this group.

A system at "crisis point"?

113. Councillor Geraint Hopkins told us that local authorities were at "crisis point". Further to this, one of the starkest statements the Committee heard through this

inquiry was that from Councillor Huw David who told us local authorities' financial commitment to looked-after children has become "unsustainable".

114. Expenditure has risen by 65 per cent in 10 years, a 35 per cent increase in real terms. Councillor Huw David suggested that this was:

"...a long-term increase in the number of children who we're having to take into care, because they have been the victims of abuse or neglect. It's obviously a last resort for any authority; it's not a decision we take lightly. It's not a decision we take on our own—it's a decision that, obviously, we take to the courts, and routinely and unfortunately what the courts are telling us is not that we shouldn't be taking any of these children into care, it's that we haven't taken them into care soon enough..."⁵⁶

Variation in social services spend

115. Statistics published by the Welsh Government show a significant variation in spend per care experienced child between local authorities. Councillor Geraint Hopkins explained variations very much depended on individual situations and the complexity of the case to determine the cost. Councillor Huw David explained comparisons were difficult as:

"...in different parts of Wales, different services are in different directorates, if I can use that term. So, it might be that the early help and intervention spend in Wrexham is in a different part of the council and therefore hasn't been counted in that expenditure. So, we will go back and we will check that. To be fair to Monmouthshire, it depends, if you started from a—. Because, historically, I think there have been very low levels of looked-after children in Monmouthshire, and it may be that, historically, there have been high levels in Wrexham, because there has been that—. You know, there are differences across Wales."⁵⁷

116. Welsh Government Official Albert Heaney acknowledged the variation:

"As a senior official, working for Welsh Government, I think this is one of the most critical issues facing us; it is a real pressure point for local authority social services."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 46

⁵⁷ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 101

⁵⁸ RoP, 30 April 2018, Paragraph 38

117. The Committee recognises that there are several elements that make up the expenditure and a range of factors which cause differences between local authorities. We believe, however, that there is a need to understand better the significant variances between local authorities. Collating data on the variances will be a valuable source of information to understand comparative spend and this is the most effective way to establish whether best value for money is being achieved, and most importantly improve spend.

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.

Ring-fenced funding moving into the Revenue Support Grant

118. In May 2017, the then Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children announced that there would be £8 million from a budget consequential to further support care experienced children. The Welsh Government stated:

“The funding will be used to reduce the numbers of children entering care and improving the outcomes for children and young people in care through a £5m investment in expanding local authority edge of care services; £850k to roll out the Reflect project across Wales which aims to reduce the number of children being taken into care by breaking the cycle of repeat pregnancies and recurrent care proceedings; £1.625m to support care leavers to successful futures and independent living by providing additional resources to local authority traineeship/work placement schemes and extending the provision of personal advisers up to age 25; £400k to implement the National Fostering Framework and £125k to develop adoption support work.”⁵⁹

119. This funding has been included in the Revenue Support Grant from April 2018. This is the overall grant local authorities receive from Welsh Government for all its services and therefore means that local authorities can now decide to spend this additional money on its own priorities. This is surprising as a Welsh Government cabinet paper in November 2017 set out the funding was aimed at

⁵⁹ CYPE(5)-32-17 P1, 22 November 2017: [Welsh Government budget paper 2018-19](#)

helping to “drive the 3 year change programme which primarily reduce the numbers coming into care”.⁶⁰

120. In her written evidence the Children’s Commissioner, raised concerns about the incorporation of Grant funding into the RSG after the initial period, particularly as:

“Grant funding is also subject to reporting requirements to ensure that money is being spent in accordance with the stated aims and outcomes; once the money forms part of the RSG there is no requirement on local authorities to continue to fund that particular piece or work or priority area. Whilst I recognise that elected members at a local level need to retain a level of control over priorities for funding, and accountability back to citizens in their area, there are some recent policy changes that may be at risk of discontinuance if not backed up by statutory requirements.”⁶¹

121. Sally Jenkins said while this allocation was really welcomed, the concern for Heads of Service was that while they:

“...absolutely recognise that the control needs to sit with the local authorities, but it’s also how do we ensure that that money, which has clearly been designated to be spent in children’s services, can be spent there against that backdrop of other cuts. That’s been really difficult for many of us. I think, by and large, local authorities have worked really hard to support that money staying with children’s services, and to be able to undertake the work that it was allocated for, but that is a continuing challenge for all of us.”⁶²

122. The Committee believes it is essential that edge of care services and services for children in the system, for example advocacy, have dedicated funding. We note that the £8 million transfer into the RSG was implemented without a Children’s Rights Impact Assessment. We agree with the concerns raised that this money will not necessarily be allocated to edge of care, which seems entirely feasible given the financial pressure faced by local authorities. Given the importance of edge of care services and the potential impact they may have, we intend to do further work on this as part of this inquiry.

⁶⁰ Welsh Government **Cabinet Paper** November 2017

⁶¹ Written Evidence, **CECYP 05**

⁶² RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 338

123. Chapter five of this report discusses the move of funding for advocacy services into the RSG.

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommend 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.

Pupil Development Grant

124. The Pupil Development Grant (PDG) provides schools with additional funding of £1,150 per pupil eligible for free school meals. Regional Education Consortia are also provided with PDG for both looked after and adopted children.

125. In 2018-19 £4.5 million will be paid to the regional education consortia to distribute for use on looked after and adopted children, based on 3,907 children registered as looked after. It does not account for the number of pupils who have been adopted, estimated to be between 3,000 and 3,500, despite them being eligible for this funding. It could therefore be argued that the amount of money available for looked after children is almost half of what it is intended/or should be. In England, looked after pupils receive a rate of £1,900 per pupil for both adopted and looked after children and it is paid directly to the school.

126. We welcome the reassurance in the written evidence from the Welsh Government that:

“... consideration was being given to collecting data on adopted children through the pupil level annual school census (PLASC).”

127. However, it is unclear to the Committee why the Welsh Government expects Regional Consortia to fund adopted children and looked after children based on the number of looked after children only. This instantly reduces the money available to these groups and must be addressed.

128. The Children, Young People and Education Committee undertook an inquiry into “Targeted funding to improve educational outcomes”. Its report⁶³, published in June 2018, included the following recommendations in respect of spending on looked after and adopted children:

⁶³ Children, Young People and Education Committee Report: **Targeted funding to improve educational outcomes**, June 2018

CYPE Committee recommendation: The Welsh Government should ensure there is an effective, strategic approach to using the Looked After Children and adopted children PDG, giving due consideration to ICF Consulting's evaluation and subsequently making any improvements which are identified as necessary.

CYPE Committee recommendation: In conjunction with the regional consortia, the Welsh Government should ensure that the PDG for Looked After Children and adopted children is used specifically for these groups of pupils. In doing so, the Welsh Government should take account of relevant aspects of ICF Consulting's evaluation report.

CYPE Committee recommendation: The Welsh Government should urgently consider how the PDG can be used for improving Looked After Children's engagement with their education, including attendance rates and exclusion rates. This should take into account the conclusions of ICF Consulting's evaluation.

CYPE Committee recommendation: The Welsh Government should review data on Looked After Children's attainment throughout the lifetime of the PDG and the implications that changes to performance measures might have had. The Welsh Government should publish its assessment of this, and consider how the PDG can deliver greater impact in terms of improving Looked After Children's educational outcomes.

CYPE Committee recommendation: The Welsh Government should extend the PDG to include children who have been looked after for any significant period in their lives. The Welsh Government should fund allocations to the regional consortia accordingly and ensure that the consortia also target the PDG at these pupils. In doing so, the Welsh Government should decide what constitutes a significant period, including giving consideration to the Committee's suggestion of any period of 13 weeks or more, as is used for determining eligibility to after care services for former Looked After Children.

CYPE Committee recommendation: The Welsh Government should put in place a mechanism from academic year 2018/19 to enable parents to inform schools when their children are adopted children and to have that information gathered and added to the child's school record. This information should then be used to target support under the PDG at pupils known to be adopted children and to enable individual pupil

educational outcomes for adopted children to be monitored in a similar way to Looked After Children.

CYPE Committee recommendation: The Welsh Government should ensure that it funds its allocations of the Looked After Children and adopted children PDG to each regional consortia per Looked After Child and known adopted child in each region. Where the number of adopted children is not precisely known, a best estimate should be used.

129. We have identified the value for money of the PDG for care-experienced children as a future stream to be considered. We were disappointed an evaluation of the PDG for looked after children was commissioned by the Welsh Government at a much later point than the evaluation for pupils eligible for free school meals and remained unpublished at time of drafting this report.

130. The Welsh Government's response to the recommendations of the Children, Young People and Education Committee's report was published in September 2018. We were disappointed that the Welsh Government rejected the recommendation around ensuring the funding for the Looked After Children and adopted children PDG was allocated to each regional consortia per Looked After Child and known adopted child in each region due to a lack of the appropriate information.

131. While we understand that there are difficulties in collating this information, and welcome that the Cabinet Secretary has written to headteachers highlighting the need to know who their adopted children are to ensure adequate support⁶⁴, we are not convinced this is sufficient. We have identified the Pupil Development Grant as an area we will consider in terms of value for money at a future point, and that a key group of looked after children are eligible for the grant but not directly funded is a matter of concern.

⁶⁴ Cab Sec response to CYPE

5. Prevention and intervention

We asked whether public bodies have placed enough emphasis on a long-term preventative spend approach, in line with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, to maximize the benefits of public expenditure for this group of children.

Why is this important?

132. Children living in Wales are more likely to go into care than those in England. The Wales rate is 95 looked after children per 10,000 people, compared to a rate of 62 per 10,000 people in England. The Committee heard suggestions that even when you allow for poverty and deprivation, and some other factors, it is still 20 to 25 per cent more. The Committee believes that redirecting spending into preventative services could reduce the number of children taken into care resulting in better value for public money and better outcomes for children.

133. A common theme from the young people who gave evidence to us was the need to have their views considered.

134. While the average age of a young person when they leave home is 24, many young people leaving care are expected to be independent at 18. There is a need for continued investment into services to support young people leaving care. This is in the best interests of children and has the potential to be an effective example of preventative spending. Figures provided to the Committee by Fabric, a charity that aims to improve the emotional wellbeing of care leavers, show that 20% of homeless people are care leavers, 25% of adult prisoners have been in care, and 14% of young women leaving care are pregnant or already a mother. Only by providing sufficient support as young people transition into adulthood can we address this.



What young people told us:

“When you get taken off your parents, they should try and help them as well, like, get better, or come off drugs, or whatever the situation is. There should be support there for them as well to try and get us home, but there’s not, there’s nothing.”

“It’s also about knowing about the right to advocacy, because every care-experienced young person has a right to an advocate, but they don’t know they have a right to an advocate. They can’t access advocacy services, unfortunately.”

“It’s not so much that you can’t access advocacy services; it’s that if young people don’t know that advocacy exists then they’re not offered it. And, to be honest, I think, personally, that it may be a cost-cutting measure on the part of some authorities. They just don’t want to spend the money on advocacy, because we all know that local authority budgets are really stretched at the moment.”

“[...] I had a lot of trouble when I was leaving care. Oh, yes. There was a lot of support and guidance when I was in care, but then, when you get to 18, it’s, ‘You’re on your own, Jack. Good luck’, and it’s like, ‘Okay’.”



What did we find out about this?

Better outcomes from investment in “edge of care” services?

135. One area of interest to us was evidence from some of the young people that, in their view, their families had not always received the right support. They told us this might have meant they could have stayed with their birth families and have improved outcomes from being kept out of the care system.

136. It was suggested redirecting spending into preventative services could reduce the number of children taken into care, which would result in better value for public money and outcomes for children. Naomi Alleyne highlighted the Early Intervention Foundation had put the cost of late intervention in England and Wales:

“...at almost £17 billion, with £6.2 billion falling directly on children’s social care.”⁶⁵

137. In May 2017, the then Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children announced that there would be £8 million from a budget consequential to further support care experienced children. £5 million of this was for services to expand edge of care services. Funding of £850K was also provided to expand the “Reflect project” from a pilot in Newport to an all Wales project. This project is referred to further in paragraph 117 of this report. Chapter four of this report discusses our views on this funding being transferred into the Revenue Support Grant.

138. The £5m annual investment in expanding local authority “edge of care services” aims to strengthen support for vulnerable families and prevent children going into care. The Welsh Government has set out “these investments have the potential to prevent around 330 children annually from entering the care system”.⁶⁶

139. Our interest in preventative and early intervention services is set within the context of the increase in numbers of care experienced children per 10,000 children which have been rising in Wales since the early 1990s. One of the Care Crisis Review reports published in June 2018⁶⁷ found that over the last decade,

⁶⁵ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 177

⁶⁶ Welsh Government **Cabinet Paper** November 2017

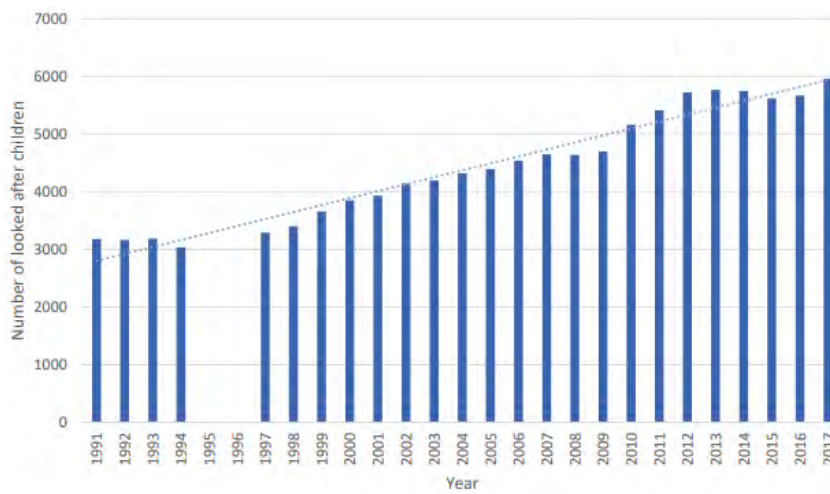
⁶⁷ Care Crisis Review, **Factors contributing to national increases in number of looked after children and applications for care orders** (June 2018) [Accessed 27 September 2018]

applications for care orders has more than doubled in England and Wales. The report states:

“In 2017 in England and Wales local authorities had larger numbers of children in care than ever before. The previous year the courts had record numbers of applications for care proceedings. There are serious concerns about whether the child welfare and family justice systems can be sustained with the current levels of demand.”

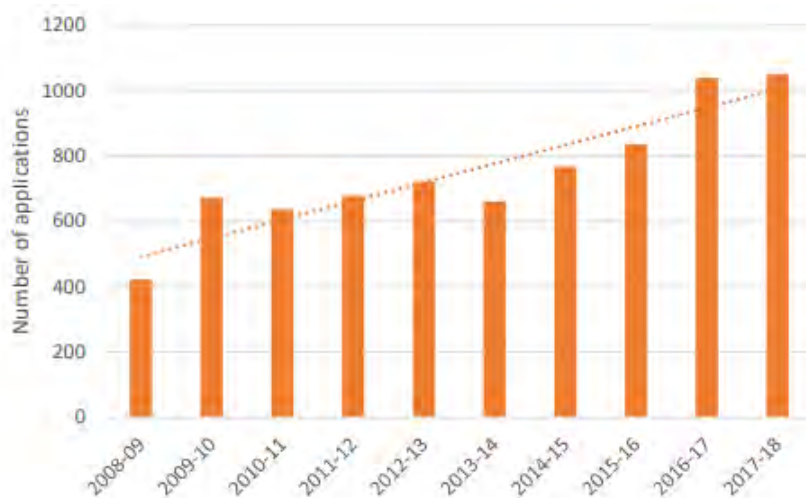
140. The report includes the following graphs:

Number of looked after children in Wales



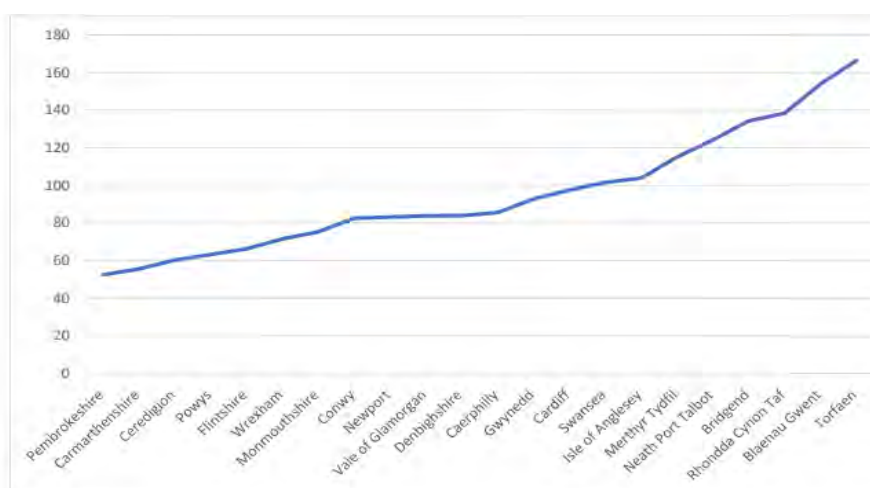
Source: StatsWales: Children looked after at 31 March 1977-2002

Public care applications in Wales



Source: Cafcass Cymru

Looked after children per 10,000 children by local authority in Wales 2017



Source: StatsWales

141. Written evidence from Welsh Government reflects this data stating:

“As of 31 March 2017, there were 5,954 looked after children in Wales, an increase of 5% from last year. The rate of looked after children is 95 per 10,000 in Wales, compared to 62 per 10,000 in England. The rates of looked after children vary across local authorities in Wales and whilst they generally correlate to levels of deprivation there are local authorities with significant levels of deprivation that have a relatively low looked after children rates.”⁶⁸

142. There has recently been more UK wide focus on mothers involved in recurrent care proceedings where successive children are removed into care. The Care Crisis Review report of June 2018⁶⁹ found that “approximately one in four women who have been involved in care proceedings are at risk of re-appearing in care proceedings within seven years. These figures have been fairly stable over the last decade”.

143. We heard that the primary aim of the Reflect project is to prevent women who have experienced the compulsory removal of a child from experiencing a repeat pregnancy in the short-term, whilst the removal of any future child remains the most likely outcome. The programme was developed by Newport City Council, with the assistance of Barnardo’s Cymru, to support mothers following the compulsory, permanent removal of one or more children due to child

⁶⁸ **Welsh Government written evidence, 30 April 2018**

⁶⁹ Care Crisis Review, **Options for Change Report** (June 2018) [Accessed 27 September 2018]

protection concerns. In May 2018 the Welsh Government announced funding for the programme to be rolled out across Wales.

144. The Committee was particularly interested in the extent to which children could be appropriately prevented from entering the care system and whether such an approach both secures improved outcomes but also provides better value for money in the long term.

145. This may be of relevance to young women who become pregnant whilst in care. A Welsh study published in 2016 showed:

“More than five times as many currently looked after young people (5%) were recorded as pregnant compared to the general population of under 18-year-olds in Wales (0.8%). Looked after children were significantly more likely to progress a pregnancy through to a live birth than non-looked after children: 70% (28 out of 40 pregnancies) compared to 28% (183 out of 661 pregnancies).”⁷⁰

146. It also showed that:

“The risk of young pregnancy is heightened by frequent placement moves, linked to the impact of this on young people’s ability to build healthy relationships (either with partners or trusted professionals).”

147. The Care Crisis Review report⁷¹ published in June 2018 states:

“Successive research studies have also found an over-representation of parents with childhood care experiences involved in care proceedings and the increased likelihood of their children being removed from their care.”

148. The Fostering Network told the Committee that public spending pressures on local authorities had resulted in a “severe reduction” in early intervention children’s services.

149. Councillor Huw David highlighted that local authorities were keen to intervene early on the basis that:

⁷⁰ Cascade Research Briefing: **Looked after children, care leavers and risk of teenage conception; findings from Wales: Summary of a National Response** (January 2016) [Accessed 27 September 2017]

⁷¹ Care Crisis Review Report, **Options for Change**, June 2018 [Accessed 12 November 2018]

“... once they’ve reached that crisis point, for whatever reason, it is very difficult to go back and it’s also very expensive, obviously, to place a child in care. We want to work with the families before they reach that stage, because that has better outcomes for the children, it’s better for the parents, and it’s better for the state, as well, not to actually become the corporate parent. The evidence is that, in most cases, you can do that. I was looking at evidence this morning: 85 per cent of the families that we’ve worked with in our edge of care programme in Bridgend over the last four years, the children have stayed with their families. They’re not being looked after by other people; they’re getting support from a family support worker or educational psychologist, or education welfare officer or some additional support like that.”⁷²

150. Similarly, Councillor Geraint Hopkins highlighted that this is challenging for local authorities as:

“...while we are trying to shift spend from the crisis end of the expenditure to early intervention, we still have to meet the costs of the crisis. So, you’re trying your best to invest in early intervention services and you’ve got a finite amount of money to spend, you’re spending it, we all acknowledge, at the higher end of need, you’re trying to move spend for early intervention services, but you simply don’t have the money to do that while you’re also still dealing with the current crisis.”⁷³

151. Alistair Davey highlighted some of the levers available to the Welsh Government around early intervention stating, “the earlier that you get in to that, the more money you are going to save down the line”. He added:

“[...]in terms of the ministerial advisory group, one of the work streams that we’re now developing is very much around prevention and intervention, because I think you’re right, this is about getting the right balance between very early intervention and prevention, going all the way through to edge of care, because the role of the ministerial advisory group is both looking at preventing children coming into care, improving outcomes for children in care, and improving outcomes for care leavers. So, the real focus that we’re placing at the moment, as we

⁷² RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 77

⁷³ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 65

go forward around that value for money, is on the prevention and intervention agenda.”⁷⁴

152. The Committee did not explore in great detail in this inquiry about the value of aspects such as kinship care within the lives of care experienced children and young people. However, we note the conclusion of the Care Crisis Review “that there is currently a significant untapped resource that exists for some children in and on the edge of care, namely, their wider family and community”. We also note and endorse its view that “greater focus on exploring and supporting this resource could safely avert children needing to come into care or could help them thrive in the care system” and are keen that the Welsh Government consider and act on the recommendations in this review.

153. It appears evident to the Committee that there needs to be clear funding for edge of care services. It is here that real change could impact the lives of children who potentially may enter care. We accept that the current funding provision will be incorporated into the Revenue Support Grant, and have recommended this is monitored. But we believe that more needs to be done.

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.

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services

154. In terms of outcomes for young people, we heard evidence that the current system is not adequately supporting care experienced children to be emotionally and mentally healthy in terms of early intervention and preventative services. The lack of support for these children to become emotionally resilient, has the potential to result in more money needed when “crises” occur later down the line.

155. Councillor Geraint Hopkins told us:

“...clearly, from a children’s services point of view, we need access to a good, timely CAMHS service. The courts require it when we’re doing psychological assessments and, also, we need it in that ongoing support that we give to children who need CAMHS. I think everybody has agreed that CAMHS could do a lot more than it is. To be fair to

⁷⁴ RoP, 30 April 2018, Paragraph 28

everybody, they're under pressure, just as we all are, and we need to consider that."⁷⁵

156. Carmarthenshire County Council in its written evidence suggested:

"All looked after children are not currently, but should be prioritised for CAMHS consultation, assessment and therapy if required. CAMHS should receive additional funding for Looked After Children specifically as currently they are unable to prioritise this group due to overstretched resources. The children with unresolved psychological issues, whilst not presenting with mental illness, are quite likely to present these problems as adults therefore this should be considered as an important preventative approach to practice. This is supported by Adverse Childhood Experiences research. Whilst pockets of good practice may exist, it does not appear to be consistent across Wales."⁷⁶

157. Naomi Alleyne highlighted the need for a whole systems approach to support care experienced children become emotionally resilient saying that is:

"...not just the formal CAMHS system, but a lot more counselling within schools and emotional support provided at earlier stages, if you like, rather than, again, when things get to crisis point."⁷⁷

158. The Children, Young People and Education Committee (CYPE) undertook an inquiry into the emotional and mental health support for children and young people⁷⁸ and published its Report in April 2018 and Lynne Neagle AM provided oral evidence to us as Chair of the Committee. In respect of care experienced children, the Committee's report stated:

"...particularly alarmed to receive joint evidence from children's services, adoption services and local authorities describing services for looked after children being at 'breaking point' and 'in crisis', with joint working arrangements between the NHS and local government on therapeutic services described as arguably falling 'backwards'."

⁷⁵ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 86

⁷⁶ Written Evidence, **CECYP 08**

⁷⁷ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 87

⁷⁸ Children, Young People and Education Committee Report, **The Emotional and mental health of young people** (April 2018)

159. To address these concerns, the CYPE Committee’s report included the following:

Recommendation 22. That the Welsh Government work across agencies to ensure that the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people are assessed on entry to care and on receipt of a referral order within the youth justice system, and routinely thereafter. This will help inform planning of adequate provision of multi-disciplinary support to meet their often-complex needs in a timely and appropriate way.

Recommendation 23. That the Welsh Government, within six months of this report’s publication, undertake a piece of work on the provision of emotional, behavioural and mental health support for looked after and adopted children. This should

- be informed by the activity of the Ministerial Advisory Group on looked after children and the T4CYP Programme’s work; and
- consider, in the case of looked after children, the extent to which public bodies are adhering to their responsibilities as corporate parents to provide both the physical and emotional support they need.

160. The Welsh Government accepted Recommendation 22 stating this was already the case and that work was ongoing. It said:

“All children and young people in care have a right to have a health assessment and a health plan, which should include an assessment of mental health needs. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 requires social care and health professionals to work together to ensure the good health of LAC and that their health is checked on a regular basis. The first assessment should occur before, or within, the first 20 days of being in care and should reoccur at six monthly intervals for under-fives, and at least annually for over five year olds.”

161. It accepted Recommendation 23 in principle saying:

“This is a detailed piece of work, which cannot be completed within such a short timeframe. Work is in hand both within the Together for Children and Young People Programme, the MAG Residential Task and

Finish Group and WLGA led Complex Needs Group, all of which need to work together and inform the thinking and activity of each group.”⁷⁹

162. Whilst the Committee welcomes that the Welsh Government have accepted Recommendation 22, we are unclear how it intends to ensure the assessments on entry to care are happening. The evidence we have received, echoing that of CYPE Committee suggests that the care experienced children are clearly not getting the support they need. Given the vital nature of the support from CAMHS and the preventative benefits it offers, we believe that there needs to be accountability to ensure these assessments take place.

163. The Committee is concerned that the Welsh Government only accepted Recommendation 23 in principle, but in essence rejected it. While the concerns over the timeframe are legitimate, the need for rapid action is apparent and the Welsh Government has failed to acknowledge the corporate parenting aspect of this recommendation at all.

164. We are also mindful that there needs to be a wider offer for those who may be reluctant to engage with CAMHS or fearful of the potential stigma relating to being in CAMHS. For example, one young person told us in private:

“I was going through a rough patch, my social worker at the time was like, ‘Let’s sort out CAMHS’. I was like, ‘I don’t need CAMHS. All I need is support by family and friends’, and whoever else I wanted. I was not ready at all for counselling or other sorts of things, right? So, obviously, I had to go to CAMHS, and, let’s be honest, it made it worse.”

165. We note that the CYPE Committee expressed disappointment at the Welsh Government’s response to its report. Lynne Neagle AM, Committee Chair stated:

“As a committee, we reject this response; it is not good enough.”⁸⁰

166. Lynne Neagle AM added:

“I regrettably have to say that I and the committee are deeply disappointed with the Welsh Government’s response to our recommendations. Firstly, too many vital points have been rejected. Secondly, while many recommendations are accepted in principle, this

⁷⁹ Welsh Government **Response** to CYPE Report,

⁸⁰ **Plenary** 4 July 2018

is largely on the basis that the Welsh Government perceives that the things we have called for are already in place.”⁸¹

167. We note that in September 2018, in response to the CYPE Committee report, the Welsh Government announced a Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group on a Whole-School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing⁸² and that the Chair of CYPE Committee wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services and the Cabinet Secretary for Education in which she says the Committee “would welcome a revised written response to our report’s recommendations by March 2019”.⁸³

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.

Moving on from care

168. Another key focus of preventative spending is the investment in services to support young people when they move out of the care of the local authority.

169. Alistair Davey highlighted:

“... things like the St David’s fund are supporting care leavers coming out and ensuring that we decrease the number who are not in employment, education or training, because they’re six times more likely to have their children taken into care. We’ve got to look at all parts of the system here, about how it reinforces prevention and intervention.”⁸⁴

170. “When I am Ready” is the term used in Wales for an arrangement whereby a young person in foster care remains with their former foster carer beyond the age of 18. This scheme was set up by the Welsh Government in 2015 to prepare local authorities for their new duties in respect of post-18 living arrangements under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Local authorities are required to

⁸¹ **Plenary** 4 July 2018

⁸² **Welsh Government Written Statement - Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group on a Whole-School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing, 7 September 2018**

⁸³ Written Evidence, CYPE(5)-24-18 PTN8, 20 September 2018

⁸⁴ RoP, 30 April 2018, Paragraph 97

operate their own local “When I am Ready” schemes in line with national guidelines.

171. There was broad support for this scheme, but there were some concerns about the funding. Councillor Geraint Hopkins, supported the principle of young people remaining in foster care longer. Inevitably this means more placements are needed. He said:

“I think the point we make is that if, as a national body, you put further demands on us, then you should be prepared to help us pay for them. I don’t think that’s an unreasonable position to take.”⁸⁵

172. The Fostering Network in its written evidence suggested:

“When I’m Ready and other 18+ living options are a good first step, but we believe that local authorities should continue their commitment as corporate parents in the longer term. This would have long-term benefits for the individual and both benefits and savings for society as a whole.”⁸⁶

173. Given the startling statistics about the outcomes for care experienced children who subsequently either have their children taken into care, or end up in prison or homeless, the Committee believes that this transitional support for leaving care is essential. Funding these services should result in improved outcomes for young people and financial savings in the long term. We would expect the figures gathered in recommendation seven would also set out funding for care leavers and how value is being achieved in this respect.

Corporate Parenting

174. Local authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked after children using the concept of “corporate parenting”. The concept is that of collective responsibility across services and across local authorities to safeguard and promote the life chances of looked after children. The Welsh Government and WLGA jointly published “**Councillor’s Guide to being a good corporate parent to children in care and care leavers**”, 2009. The Welsh Government website states:

“A good corporate parent seeks the same outcomes for children in their care and care leavers that every good parent would want for their own

⁸⁵ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 147

⁸⁶ Written Evidence, **PAC(5)-05-18 P3, 12 February 2018**

children by ensuring they do everything possible to give them the best possible start in life.”

175. The Committee heard several concerns that there is a lack of ownership within this structure. Irfan Alam, Head of Children’s Services at Cardiff Council said:

“...at the moment, it feels like we—the royal ‘we’—heads of children’s services, end up holding the baby at the end of the line, and it’s us who’re looking for that placement and carrying the risk if we can’t find a placement. For me, it’s about the ownership with partners—health, police and education. If our partners worked with us and saw this as an issue that all of us can grapple with together and find a solution together, it would be the golden nugget, in my view, but at the moment, the statutory responsibility to seek and provide a placement sits just with us—the heads of children’s services. So, I think that one thing could potentially help.”⁸⁷

176. Councillor Huw David, called for more responsibility for corporate parenting. He referred to the approach adopted in Bridgend of adopting a Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee:

“Every cabinet member sits on that and we have representations from each and every political group, but what we don’t have is representation from the local partners like the health board, like the police service. —the support and services that these young people need and these children need are not from just one agency, they’re almost always often from education, from health, from police, from the local housing association.”⁸⁸

177. Gareth Jenkins, Assistant Director for Children’s Services, Caerphilly County Borough Council, said:

“... anything that Welsh Government can do to really bolster the corporate parenting role that the whole local authority has, not just children’s services, in order to support our young people leaving care would be really helpful.”⁸⁹

178. The All-Party Group on Looked After Children stressed that:

⁸⁷ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 369

⁸⁸ RoP, 26 February 2018, Paragraph 223

⁸⁹ RoP, 29 January 2018, Paragraph 381

“...the corporate parenting obligation should extend across public services embracing health, housing, education and ... the police. If we want to achieve a transformation this is the sort of radical thinking that is required. Corporate parenting cannot start and end in Children’s Services departments of local authorities.”⁹⁰

179. In the Welsh Government’s written evidence, the Committee notes that one of the actions for work stream three of the Ministerial Advisory Group is:

Work Strand	Progress	Timescale
19. Revise and extend Corporate Parenting guidance so that senior officers in housing, education, criminal justice, health and other public services are aware of their corporate responsibilities for looked after children.	Corporate Parenting event held on 8 February 2018. Voices from Care working on refresh of guidance in 2018/19 Financial Year.	May 2019

180. The Committee believes the role of corporate parents is vital in the life of care experienced children. We heard from young people about the impact that support from a range of different areas such as a teacher and a librarian, and the importance of having several different support routes. For example, in the Children in Wales written response, one young person said:

“There needs to be more than 1 designated teacher in each school that has experience supporting young people in care. If you don’t like that one person, you miss out on all the support on offer.”⁹¹

181. It is important that we all take this role seriously and do our utmost to fulfil these duties. We believe that this needs to be more than just guidance and should be demonstrable action.

182. The Committee has identified corporate parenting as a potential area for further investigation. We intend to return to look at how the roles of corporate parents are fulfilled considering the revised guidance.

Advocacy

183. Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide advocacy services to some groups of children, specifically “looked after children”, “children in need” and “care

⁹⁰ Written Evidence, **CECYP.14**

⁹¹ Written Evidence, **CECYP.06**

leavers”, initially a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989. More recently these duties have been included in the Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014).

184. Advocacy services aim to promote the views, wishes, and feelings of a child, to ensure they are considered and acted upon during the decision-making process that affect a child’s life. It should also help to ensure that the right services are in place.

185. Advocacy should be:

- child or young person led;
- confidential (unless there are child protection concerns); and
- representative of the voice of the child rather than working from a best interest perspective.

186. The Welsh Government has committed to “an active offer”. This means all children and young people should be made aware of advocacy services and how to access an advocate when entering the statutory care system. This should be taken forward by local authorities via a “National Approach to Statutory Advocacy Services”.

187. In its 2017 inquiry, the Children, Young People and Education Committee heard that “there has been a frustrating and unacceptable delay in agreeing and implementing the ‘National Approach to Statutory Advocacy Services’”.⁹²

188. It also considered the extent to which financial considerations have been a barrier to implementing the “National Approach”. Advocacy Services are funded via the Revenue Support Grant and the Committee heard “the most striking and immediate finding was that there was a huge variation in the amount of money that local authorities were spending on their statutory advocacy duty”.⁹³

189. At that time, the CYPE Committee was told that Welsh Government has allocated £500-550K towards the implementation of the national approach which had been costed at between £1 and £1.1 million. However, it was not the intention in the longer-term to ring-fence the additional funding to ensure that it sustained at the current level.⁹⁴

⁹² Children, Young People and Education Committee Report, **Report of the inquiry into statutory advocacy provision** (February 2017)

⁹³ *ibid*

⁹⁴ Written Evidence, **CECYP 01**

190. Alistair Davey said that the Welsh Government had:

“...invested a lot of money in the service—£550,000 to get the social services regional collaboratives up and running. So, that has been a big challenge for us, but now that work is well under way, ...we’re getting really positive feedback now that that’s really starting to bite, and we’re driving that consistency across Wales.”⁹⁵

191. Tros Gynnal Children and National Youth Advocacy Services (NYAS) Wales raised concerns in their written evidence about funding for advocacy services saying:

“We have concerns about the commitment [to] long term funding for Welsh Government policies and initiatives for example the current financial improvements to enable LAC to access their statutory advocacy entitlements. We are very concerned that in 2019 this current level of funding will be absorbed [in]to the revenue support grant with no sanctions.”⁹⁶

192. Understanding the needs of the child is vital to providing the right support and achieving good outcomes. The Committee believe investment in the “active offer” of Advocacy Services for all care experienced children would not only be in the best interests of children but has the potential to redirect time and money into the most beneficial and cost-effective way.

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.

⁹⁵ RoP, 30 April 2018, Paragraph 24

⁹⁶ Written Evidence, **CECYP 01**

Annex – Witnesses

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in full at:

<http://senedd.assembly.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=16183>

Date	Name and Organisation
29 January 2018	<p>Sally Holland, Children’s Commissioner for Wales</p> <p>Rachel Thomas, Office of the Children’s Commissioner for Wales</p> <p>Irfan Alam, Cardiff City Council</p> <p>Kate Devonport, Conwy County Borough Council</p> <p>Sally Jenkins, Newport City Council</p> <p>Gareth Jenkins, Caerphilly County Borough Council</p>
12 February 2018	<p>Young People from Voices from Care*</p> <p>Chris Dunn, Voices from Care*</p> <p>Sean O’Neil, Children in Wales*</p> <p>Young People from Fabric*</p> <p>Harri Coleman, Fabric*</p> <p>Colin Turner, The Fostering Network in Wales</p> <p>Kate Lawson, The Fostering Network</p> <p>* The Committee heard from Voices from Care, Children in Wales and Fabric in private evidence sessions</p>
26 February 2018	<p>Councillor Huw David – Welsh Local Government Association</p> <p>Councillor Geraint Hopkins – Welsh Local Government Association</p> <p>Naomi Alleyne – Welsh Local Government Association</p>

30 April 2018

David Melding AM – Chair of the Welsh Government’s Ministerial Advisory Group*

Lynne Neagle AM – Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee*

Albert Heaney – Welsh Government

Alistair Davey – Welsh Government

* The Committee heard from David Melding AM and Lynne Neagle AM in a private evidence session