

Date: Wednesday 26 March 2003

Venue: Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly for Wales

Title: Children First Programme – Report on Outcomes

Purpose

1. To update the Committee on improvements in services made by local authorities under the Welsh Assembly Government Children First Programme.

Summary

2. This paper fulfils the commitment made by the Minister for Health and Social Services during the discussions on the paper HSS-04-03 (p1) presented to the Committee on the 12th March 2003.

Background

3. Children First is a major programme designed to transform the management and delivery of social services for children in Wales. It was set up in April 1999 in response to the issues raised in the Utting report of the review of safeguards for children living away from home, "People like Us". It has since become the main vehicle to progress actions arising from the Waterhouse report "Lost in care".

4. "People like Us" painted a very poor picture of outcomes for care leavers. At that time more than 50% of care leavers were unemployed, 17% of young women leaving care were pregnant or mothers, and 30% of young, single homeless people had been in care.

5. As well as the child protection issues raised in "Lost in Care", the report commented on four other key areas where outcomes for looked after children were poor. These were health, education, services for care leavers and youth offending. Information reported by Utting suggested that only 25% of looked after children were attending medical examinations and 75% left school with no qualifications.

6. When the Children First programme started, the information base was very low, with many local authorities struggling to provide information against the indicators. In the first year of the programme local authorities were asked to baseline services and outcomes so far as possible. The amount and quality of data provided has improved year on year. Local authorities have used Children First funding to improve information and planning and to begin to address poor outcomes. New services have been developed by local authorities, many in

partnership with other statutory organisations and the independent sector, as well as strengthening and improving existing services.

7. Children First was introduced originally as a three-year grant programme. The National Assembly has extended the grant by a further two years, to the end of 2003-04. The Children First budget for 2002/03 is £16.3 million, rising to £25.2 million in 2003/04, the majority of which is paid directly to local authorities as Children First Grant. After this time additional funding will be built into the local authority revenue support. Whilst the specific grant will no longer be paid directly to authorities, the Welsh Assembly Government will continue to monitor progress against Children First indicators.

8. As part of the conditions for receipt of the grant, every year each local authority submits an individual Management Action Plan. This provides information about the authority's progress in relation to each of the objectives and sub-objectives, using key indicators within the Children First programme, as well as setting out future plans and actions needed to improve performance. The authorities publish these plans and an analysis of the information returned for 1999 - 2002 is set out in Annex One. The latest reporting date was March 2002 and some indicators were only reported on for part of that year.

9. There are a number of factors to be considered when evaluating the Children First key indicators. Authorities have improved significantly their ability to collect information and the quality and reliability of data. But many do not yet have the capacity to routinely provide robust data against every indicator. This problem can be exacerbated when authorities are reliant on other organisations to provide information on some of the indicators. Where numbers are small changes in percentages can be dramatic while having limited significance. This means that some authorities report swings from year to year in respect of some indicators that cannot be taken as providing evidence for a trend.

10. Collating and reporting on the Children First indicators are only preliminary stages in their use for improving outcomes for children in need. Information requires analysis and interrogation so that its significance can be evaluated and used as the basis for further planning and action. It is important that reported performance against indicators be critically examined to ensure that it reflects the intended process or outcome. Local authorities' examination of the information should include consideration of how they might develop and improve their information collection, analysis and use. Joint teams from the Children and Families Division and the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales meet every local authority each year to discuss the data.

11. The Children First Team is currently drawing up a research tender for a detailed analysis and evaluation of outcomes and improvements made over the whole life of the grant (which comes to an end in March 2004). Indicators for 2003-2004 have been revised and expanded to provide a more comprehensive data set.

Children First communications strategy.

12. The Children First communication strategy aims to raise knowledge and understanding of the Children First Programme amongst all key stakeholders, support implementation of the programme across Wales and spread good practice amongst key agencies. To achieve this the Welsh Assembly Government has arranged conferences, seminars and workshops aimed at raising the profile of both Children First and key issues for looked after children. As well as the annual Children First event to mark the anniversary of the publication of the Waterhouse report there have been two consultation events with children and young people, a multi-agency conference around leaving care, a conference of the education of looked after children, training workshops on

health eating for looked after children and a corporate parenting conference. Events around the needs of disabled young people are planned during 2003.

Educational Attainments.

13. The improvements in performance for the last few years were not reflected in the last collated results. Local Authority Social Services Performance Statistics for the year ending 31 March 2002 showed the percentage of looked after children leaving care at 16+ with at least 1 GCSE/GNVQ as 33% across Wales. (See also 25 below. There is a national target for 50% of children leaving care aged 16+ to have 2 or more GCSE/GNVQ by 2002, and 75% by 2003.) Achieving consistent improvement in outcomes will require sustained effort over many years.

14. There is wide variation in performance for this indicator with some authorities having figures as low as 13% and others as high as 86%. There has been much debate about what information might be collated to accurately reflect the educational progress made by looked after children. Whilst GCSE/GNVQ figures can be used to compare performance against the general population, this approach does not take account of the higher concentration children with learning difficulties and/or special educational needs in the population of looked after children. Local authorities have expressed concerns that the continuing focus on GCSEs is too narrow and marginalises or excludes large numbers of looked after children for whom other types of qualification or attainment may be more appropriate. The latest Children First guidance for 2003/04 seeks local authorities views on extending the range of qualifications on which data is collected to ensure that the wide range of achievements by looked after children are fully recognised.

15. The new Guidance On Education For Looked After Children (issued in November 2001) was aimed to address many of the problems commonly encountered by looked after children. It emphasises the importance of full time attendance in a mainstream school and maintaining continuity. It also sets out the responsibilities of authorities and professionals and the need for clear accountability. It requires a Personal Education Plan (PEP) to be developed for each looked after child. This must clearly set out the child's educational needs, the actions and services needed to meet these, the people responsible for the actions, timescales and intended outcomes.

16. Two new indicators have been introduced to the Children First programme from 2002, to gather a broader set of data. These indicators are also intended to underpin the need for information to be derived from individual children's records as opposed to the provision of aggregated data from the Local Education Authority, which is not easy to relate back to the individual child. Local authorities are required to report on the percentage of looked after children with PEPs and the number of pupils with school exclusions.

17. Children First grant has been used by many authorities to fund LAC (looked after children) specialist posts to promote educational achievement for looked after children and co-ordinate work across agencies. There are signs that these arrangements are having an impact on reducing exclusions, improving attendance and improving educational stability for children.

Improvements in health.

18. Evidence from research and inspections shows that many looked after children have significantly increased health needs in comparison with children from comparable socio-economic backgrounds. They may also have experienced poorer access to services, including universal services such as dental services, immunisations, routine child health surveillance and health promotion. Annual health assessments are an important way to

ensure that such needs are being adequately identified and met. However, professionals and children have frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the statutory medical examination required for all looked after children. It was perceived as stigmatising and ineffective in addressing all the health needs of a child. Uptake four years ago was at a very low level (only 25% in some authorities). Many authorities have used Children First grant to fund specialist health posts and projects to promote improvement in the health of children who are looked after and the uptake rate has been steadily improving. In 2001-2002 10 authorities are reporting figures of 75% uptake or higher.

19. On January 1st 2003 the National Assembly brought into force amendments in the Arrangements for Placement of Children Regulations and the Review of Children's Cases Regulations. These amendments have changed the focus of legal requirements to ensure a holistic approach, including a review of mental and emotional health, is adopted; each child must now have a personal health plan, and children under five will now have two health assessments per year (previously this requirement only applied up to the age of 2). The first full reporting year to be affected by these arrangements will be 2003-2004.

Adoption and fostering trends.

20. There has been an increase of over 50% in the numbers of children placed for adoption since 1998. This needs to be set in the context of increases of around 7% in the number of looked after children and 40% in the number of children subject to care orders over the same period. The increase in the number of children subject to care orders and numbers of children placed for adoption suggests that authorities are acting to avoid drift and indecision in assessment and care planning for children and may also reflect increased activity involving the placement of numbers of children who have been awaiting an adoptive placement for some time. The increase in adoptive placements requires further consideration to establish the reasons it is occurring and that will take place later this year as part of an all Wales development programme associated with the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act.

21. The number of foster carers has also increased overall, although the total number includes those who belong to independent fostering agencies. Authorities are increasingly reporting that their in-house fostering services do not always have the capacity to meet all their requirements and there is evidence that they are, individually and collaboratively, seeking innovative as well as tried and tested methods, to recruit, retain and develop foster carers. Examples include marketing strategies to improve recruitment, payment for skills schemes, improved support services and training opportunities. Many of the developments are taking place with the assistance of Children First funding.

Placement Choice and stability.

22. The availability of an adequate range of placements is essential to ensuring that children whose lives have already been disrupted have the stability and emotional security necessary for them to have the opportunity of achieving good outcomes, particularly in health and education.

23. Information provided by the Local Government Data Unit shows that for the year ending March 02 the percentage of looked after children with three or more placements in the year averaged 8% across Wales, against a target of 10%. This figure includes 16 authorities where the percentage was 8% or less. There is no absolute measure of good or bad performance against this indicator. Generally, a lower figure will indicate greater stability for individual children, but a very low figure may indicate drift in planning. Local authorities should

ensure that reviews of children's cases take place as required and include consideration of whether the placement arrangements for the child are meeting their needs and whether placement moves are consistent with achieving the care plan for the child.

24. The Welsh Assembly Government has undertaken the following work in this area

- issued a draft document to assist local authorities in their strategic planning around placements;
- set up an implementation group to take forward the recommendations contained within the draft strategic framework document;
- commissioned research into specialist placement provision and reviews of the structure and future development of fostering, residential care and placement commissioning arrangements;
- is jointly funding, with the ADSS and the Local Authority Commissioning Group development work on a placement database service;
- there has also been a development workshop on foster care, a residential care conference and a Children First event, all of which focused on placement choice and stability.

New arrangements for Care Leavers

25. New arrangements under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 were introduced from 1 October 2001, with associated Assembly regulations and guidance. The arrangements apply progressively (no retrospection) and it will be 5 years before all care leavers from age 16 to 21 are caught by the arrangements. Indicators measure outcomes at age 19. Outcomes will in large part be determined by the success of earlier interventions to improve stability, health status and educational attainment. In 2001-2002 the all Wales average for looked after children aged 16+ with a pathway plan was 89% (a pathway plan sets out a child's route to independent living.) Some authorities were also reporting figures as high as 85% for children who had left care who were in touch with the authority, and some authorities had figures up to 50% for care leavers who were in education, training or employment at 19 years old.

Assessments

26. Effective assessment is an essential prerequisite to identify the needs of each child, in order to plan to achieve the optimal outcomes for the child. In 2001, the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families was introduced and in July 2002 all authorities reported that they had implemented it. They are required to provide data relating to the use of the Framework from the year ending 31 March 2003.

Joint reviews

27. 17 of the 22 authorities have been the subject of a joint review, 3 are currently being reviewed and reviews are to take place in the remaining authorities by the end of 2003. Each authority prepares an action plan in response to findings and recommendations from their joint review. SSIW and District Audit are involved in monitoring implementation of the authorities action plans. To date all authorities, including those where the joint review identified greatest cause for concern, have given priority to and acted to ensure investment at political and management levels in implementing their action plan to secure necessary improvements. Subsequent inspections of children's services in those authorities found not to be serving people well and to have poor prospects for improvement have found tangible and measurable improvements alongside continuing commitment within the authorities to ensuring further improvement.

Financial Implications

28. There are no additional financial implications arising out of this paper.

Cross Cutting Themes

29. Better outcomes for looked after children require close collaboration between health, education and social services .

Action for Subject Committee

30. To note the progress made in the Children First Programme

Contact Point: Keith Ingham, Children and Families Division, tel: 6746

Annex One

Children First Management Action Plans – consolidated responses

Objective: To ensure that children looked after gain maximum life chance benefits from education opportunities, health care and social care.

To promote the performance of individual children looked after at key stage SATs, GCSE and GNVQ. To ensure that each child's educational needs are effectively assessed at the point at which they become looked after and are recorded in care plans.

*** Key indicator: the percentage of young people leaving care aged 16 or over with at least one GCSE grade A to G or GNVQ.**

The all Wales average for 2001-2002 was at 33%. This is lower than the previous year, where the all Wales average was 42%. Most authorities have shown positive upward trends over the last three years, for example one local authority figures are 99-00 30%, 00-01 43%, 01-02 67%.

* Utting figure was 25% in 1997

* this is calculated when children leave care (not when they sit GCSE's)

* Welsh target of 50% by 2002 and 75% by 2003.

* information from the Local government data unit.

Key indicator: percentage/number of children and young people looked after with a PEP (personal education plan) within 20 school days of entering care or joining a new school.

This is a new indicator only added in 2002. Preliminary results show that most local authorities have now got agreed PEPs and have started to use them. The 20 day target can be problematic where children enter care during a school holiday but some authorities are already achieving up to 80%.

* Welsh target of 100%

* will be reported on from 2002-2003

To promote the healthy development of individual children looked after.

Key indicator: the percentage of looked after children with recent health checks

This indicator has improved considerably over the last few years. Many local authorities are now offering more child-friendly health assessments, often conducted by health visitors or district nurses and this has helped to increase the uptake. In one authority the figures have gone from 99-00 29%, 00-01 70%, to 01-02 82%.

1999-2000, the range was from 29% to 100% (5 authorities over 75%), 2000-2001 the range was from 50% to 100% (8 authorities over 75%) and in 2001-2002 the range was from 50% - 100% (10 authorities over 75%)

* National target of 100%.

To reduce the rate of offending by children looked after.

Key indicator: the relative rate of offending for looked after children

Only 7 local authorities provided these figures in 99-00. In from 00-01 to 01-02 7 authorities provided data that indicated a decline in offending rates. The range in 01-02 is from 2% to 20%.

Authorities have only reported on the absolute rate of offending and not the rate relative to the general population.

Objective: To ensure that children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care.

To reduce the number of changes of main carer for children looked after.

Key indicator: the percentage of children looked after at 31 March with three or more placements during the year.

For 2001-2002 the all Wales average was 8% *. 14 authorities achieved the national target of less than 10%. 11 authorities reported improvements on the year before.

For 99-00 the range was from 3% to 12% (15 authorities at 10% or under), for 00-01 the range was from 0% to 14% (18 authorities at 10% or under) and for 01-02 the range was from 3% to 13%. (14 authorities at 10% or under. Note: only 19 authorities have provided this data so far this year.)

*

All Wales average 99-00 6.2%, 00-01 7.0%, 01-02 8%

National target of less than 16% 99-00, 10% or less 02-03.

(* figures from the Audit Commission website)

To maximise the contribution adoption can make to providing permanent families for children in appropriate cases.

*** Key indicator: The number of children adopted from local authority care during the year as a percentage of the number of children looked after at 31 March at the end of the year.**

All Wales figures

98/99 - 2.6% , 99/00 – 2.8%, 00/01 – 3.8%, 01-02 – 4.8%.

There has been an increase of over 50% of the numbers of children placed for adoption since 1998. This needs to be set in the context of increases of around 7% in total numbers of looked after children and around 40% in the number of children subject to care orders in the same period.

* numbers come from 903 returns.

To reduce the number of children in need who become looked after on an unplanned basis.

Key indicator: percentage of first placements which begin with a clear care plan in place.

For 2001-2002 the all Wales average was 64%. * The lowest figure was 11% and the highest 100%. 16 authorities had percentages of 60% or above.

(Authorities report difficulty in achieving the 100% target related to some first placements occurring on an emergency basis. Performance against this indicator could be improved if authorities could achieve a reduction in the numbers of children entering care on an emergency basis, for example through use of alternative methods of intervention including improved assessment, care planning and commissioning of services to meet needs.)

National target of 100%.

*

This figure is provided by the local government data unit.

Objective: To ensure that young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood, are not isolated and are able to participate socially and economically as citizens.

To maximise the number of young people leaving care on or after their sixteenth birthday who have ready access to primary health care at the age of 19.

Key indicator: Percentage of these young people registered with a GP.

In 99-00, there was very little data recorded (this was before the new arrangements for care leavers came into being), in 00-01 data collection was better. The range was from 69% to 100% with 11 authorities having figures of 85%+. For 01-02 the range was from 28% to 100% with 8 authorities having figures of 85%+

National target of 100%

To maximise the number of young people leaving care on or after their sixteenth birthday who are still in touch with SSD, or a known and approved contact, at the age of 19.

Key indicator: Percentage of these young people with contact with a known and approved person at the age of 19.

This data was not collected in 99-00. For 00-01 the data range was from 30% to 100% with 6 authorities having figures of 85%+. For 01-02 the data range was from 35% to 100% with 9 authorities having figures of 85%+

(this will include young people who left care and probably the area before the new arrangements came into being.)

To maximise the number of young people leaving care on or after their sixteenth birthday, who are engaged in education, training, or employment at the age of 19.

Key indicator: Percentage of those young people who were looked after on 1 April in their 17th year (aged 16), who were engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19.

In 1999-2000 for several authorities this information was not available. Where data was provided only 5 authorities had figures over 50%, in 00-01 10 authorities had figures over 50% (range from 20% to 100%), and in 01-02 7 authorities had figures over 50% (range from 20% to 99%).

National target for 01-02 – 60% of the level amongst all young people in the same area.

To ensure those young people on their sixteenth birthday continue to receive effective support.

Key indicator: the percentage of young people in care on their 16th birthday who have a suitable plan for their

continuing care.


For 2001-2002 the all Wales figure was 89%

19 authorities had figures over 80% and of these 10 were at 100%.

All Wales fostering and adoption figures

| All Wales | 1998/9 | 1999/0 | 2000/1 | 2001/2 |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| No of foster carers and no of places | 1,961 | 2,059 | 1,853 | 1,892 |
| | 3,121 | 3,358 | 3,194 | 3,295 |
| No. of children in foster care placement | 2,550 | 2,519 | 2,691 | 2,690 |
| Total no. of children "looked after" | 3,400 | 3,313 | 3,574 | 3,644 |
| Children placed for adoption | 87 | 92 | 138 | 176 |

* information from 903 returns.



3.1 Stability of placements of children looked after by the authority by reference to the percentage of children looked after on 31st March in any year with 3 or more placements during the year. (2001-2002).

* information from the local government data unit website.

3.2 Educational qualifications of children looked after by reference to the percentage of young people leaving care aged 16 or over with at least 1 GCSE at grade A-G or GNVQ. (2001-2002.)



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information from the local government data unit website

3.3 The percentage of young people in care on their 16th birthday who have a suitable plan for their continuing care. (2001-2002)



*

information from the local government data unit website.