

Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation in Wales for children, young people's and their family issues, bringing organisations and individuals from all disciplines and sectors together to speak with one voice, to exchange knowledge and practice, and to provide opportunities to enhance policy and practice through shared learning. One of our core aims is to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) a reality in Wales. Children in Wales campaigns for sustainable quality services for all children and young people, with special attention for children in need and works to ensure children and young people have a voice in issues that affect them. Children in Wales facilitates the voice of children and young people to influence government policy making through its 'Cymru Ifanc/Young Wales' programme of work.

Children in Wales would wish to acknowledge the specific engagement with our member organisation **Voices from Care Cymru** who have kindly shared the notes from 3 engagement events they convened with care experienced children and young people to inform this inquiry and which took place in South East Wales, West Wales and North Wales. This is in addition to the policy exchange session with staff delivered by Children in Wales in September as part of collaborative arrangements under the **Getting More Involved in Social Care Programme of Work**. The comments by care experience young people are attached as appendices to our response.

1. Our Response

Children in Wales welcomes the opportunity to aid the Committee's Inquiry into care experienced children and young people, and to inform the four areas for scrutiny as outlined in the Terms of Reference over the course of this Assembly term.

1.1 This response focuses on the first line of inquiry – '**Expenditure and value for money of public services for care experienced children and young people**' – and is informed by our work over many years with the overarching aim of seeking to improve the well-being outcomes for all children and young people with care experience in Wales. This work includes helping to shape and inform policy and legislative developments through representation activity and engagement with our

member organisations¹, as well as the delivery of specific projects with the direct engagement of looked after children, care leavers and the professionals and kinship carers which support them².

1.2 We were delighted to have been able to accept the Committee's invitation to attend and provide verbal evidence to the **pre-inquiry stakeholder session** which took place in July 2017, with the aim of helping to further shape the Committees priorities for inquiry. Our response builds upon the comments made in that meeting and developments since.

1.3 **Care experienced children and young people should be seen as children first, each with their own individual identities, yet often sharing the same ambitions, aspirations and interests** as other children and young people with no experience or involvement in the statutory care system. However children and young people separated from their birth parents and their relatives, remain amongst the most vulnerable groups of children, often at greater risk of exploitation, abuse, gender based violence, bullying, hate crime and trafficking, as well as the stigma often associated with being in care which some young people have experienced.

1.4 Many will have faced a number of adverse childhood experiences prior to entering care and will require additional professional support and safeguards through a range of bespoke interventions from specialist services in addition to the universal social care, education and health provision to which all children have an entitlement.

1.5 Whilst the required resources and level of support required to meet the needs of each child will not be the same for every child in care, their entitlement to additional support and services underpinned by legislation should be consistent across all parts of Wales. **This the PAC will wish to examine further**

1.7 'Corporate Parents' should all have the same ambition and seek the same positive outcomes for care experienced children and young people in the same way as all of us do for all other children in Wales regardless of their background, circumstances or level of need. This should be the foundation for good corporate parenting arrangements.

¹ For example, A Vision for Looked after Children's Care in Wales 2016-2020

<http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/resource/vision-looked-childrens-care-wales-2016-2020/>

² See Getting involved in Social Care project <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/our-work/looked-children-2/getting-involved-social-care/>

1.8 It is essential to avoid describing children with care experience in terms of their deficits and as problems that need fixing and that we promote an assets based approach, identifying and promoting their strengths, abilities and achievements, as well as ensuring that we fully involve them in the decision making process.

1.9 The safeguarding, non-discrimination, participation and best interest of the principles for children enshrined in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC) and applied through Welsh legislation is applicable to all children and young people, including those with care experience. All levels of government have an obligation to protect all children from violence and exploitation, to the maximum extent possible, which would otherwise jeopardise their right to life, survival and development.

1.10 The UN have issued supplementary guidelines on the alternative care of children to support governments meet their obligations to care experienced children and young people under the UNCRC³.

2. Allocation of Resources

The **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child** in June 2016 issued a series of recommendations (Concluding Observations)⁴ in relation to care experienced children and young people which reflected a number of concerns put forward by non-government coalitions as part of the monitoring process. In relation to the allocation of resources, the UN Committee was ‘seriously concerned at the effects that recent fiscal policies and allocation of resources have had in contributing to inequality in children’s enjoyment of their rights, disproportionately affecting children in disadvantaged situations’ (11)

2.1 In our joint submission to the UN Committee⁵, we called for there to be improvement in the necessary systems to enable routine analysis of Government spending in all budget areas to ensure full compliance with the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. Similar duties for local authorities and relevant partners are in place under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, so similar arrangements should be put in place at a local level.

³ https://www.unicef.org/protection/alternative_care_Guidelines-English.pdf

⁴ <http://gov.wales/docs/dsilg/publications/cyp/160727-final-concluding-observations-2016-en.pdf>

⁵ All documents submitted to the UN Committee can be accessed via the website of the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner - http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=987&Lang=en

2.2 Regular child rights impact assessments of budget and economic decision-making processes should be undertaken and published, with budgetary lines for children in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations clearly defined. 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)

2.3 The PAC will therefore wish to consider whether the Welsh Government, all local governments and other public bodies including Local Health Boards have firmly in place transparent and participatory budgetary decision making processes and regularly publish disaggregated budgets showing spending on children, including those most vulnerable.

2.4 We would support recommendations from the PAC for the Welsh Government, local authorities and health authorities to improve the existing systems to enable routine analysis of spend on children **and** care experienced children which would ensure there is compliance with duties prescribed in existing legislation. There is clearly a deficit of data on health expenditure in relation to spend on care experienced children. Similarly, there is predictably a need for extra support for care experienced children in relation to their education as they usually have periods of trauma and/or miss school for periods of time or have to move school according to their placements in which case this should be funded appropriately.

3. Invest in Children – Prevent spend

We welcome the renewed emphasis on early intervention and prevention as prescribed in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Service and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014. Research to date has been very clear in that if there is sufficient investment made early enough when need is first identified, better outcome for children can be achieved without recourse to more costly services such as for mental health later on when problems have been allowed to progress.

3.1 Children in Wales has welcomed the creation of the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group in which we are a member, and the 3 core themes, including the need to identify what early intervention action could be taken to support families and children on the edge of care.

3.2 Investment in early intervention support and preventative services should not simply be about seeking to prevent children entering care however. For many children state intervention will be in their best interests and provide a place of safety from where many children go on to thrive and have positive experiences from which to build upon in later life as they reach adulthood. The focus should firmly be on preventing escalation of need, safeguarding and reducing harmful behaviours, with appropriate resources put in place to ensure that children are safe yet also thrive.

3.3 Significant cost savings could be made if there a move to a holistic prevention model supported by long term funding commitments, incorporating both universal and specialist services, and delivered by a range of public and third sector services. Unfortunately in these times of austerity, we know from our members that non statutory services are the ones that are being cut first thus reducing the opportunity for children young people and families to access support at the time they first need it. In particular third sector organisations have been adversely affected by either funding cuts or by total transfer of their services in-house by local authorities. This is not necessarily a cost saving to the public purse.

3.4 The PAC will also wish to take account of the emerging findings from the Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care⁶ aligning resources with outcomes that create value for the whole health and care system, including well-being

4. Deficit in service provision

The CSSIW inspection of care planning for looked after children and care leavers (2015)⁷ reported that too many care experienced children and young people couldn't access appropriate services to meet their psychological and emotional health needs, when they need them, and for however long they need them.

4.1 For too many children, the availability of the services they receive can be dependent on where they live and information being made available about their existence. The challenge remains about how to achieve consistency of service provision that provides value for money and delivers improved well-being outcomes for care experienced children and children on the cusp of care. For children requiring **therapeutic services**, this can be a particular challenge. Whilst there are some multi-disciplinary services working across the third sector, health,

⁶ <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2017-07/170714-review-interim-report-en.pdf>

⁷ <http://cssiw.org.uk/docs/cssiw/report/150130Iacn.pdf>

education and social services⁸, these are not universally available for all care experienced children in all areas. Reducing mental health problems at an early stage through the provision of appropriate early intervention emotional and mental health services can help reduce the need for costly interventions such as CAMHS later on but also importantly help achieve stability and improved outcome for children in terms of their education, training/skills and placement.

5. Renewed emphasis on parenting and family support

We welcome the investment made by Welsh Government on programmes, such as Families First and Flying Start, which in general seek to improve the well being outcomes for parents and their children who present with additional challenges or live in challenging situations due to external factors such as low income. Families First has witnessed many changes since its conception in 2012 with many Team Around The Family projects working with children and families presenting with a range of complex needs that do not meet the threshold for local authority children's services.

5.1 PAC will wish to consider recent evaluations of these programmes and the extent to which they are helping to support families and children in preventing the need for care proceedings and keeping families together, as well as the interventions they deliver when some children are reunited with their families after leaving care.

6. Kinship care

Many children with care status are placed with family and friends. Children in Wales has produced a guide with and for kinship carers⁹ to help grandparents and other family members to access support and information on their rights and have a clearer understanding of the responsibilities of others. Despite some studies showing that children report a high level of satisfaction with kinship care arrangements, the UK as a whole has a low level of kinship carer arrangements. To date however, our experience shows that there can be high levels of need for services for kinship carers (many of whom are grandparents) who are struggling to care for their young relatives. We would support a greater emphasis being given to quality kinship care placements.

⁸ For example

https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/3417/moving_into_maturity_briefing.pdf

⁹ <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/resource/kinship-care-guide-wales/>

7. Resources allocated for LAC

The national data publically available indicates that Social Services Revenue Expenditure on LAC services has increased by 35% since 2010 (currently £244m) with 46% of this spent on fostering services, 27% on residential care and 8% on leaving care services. The data also shows that there is wide variation in expenditure between local authorities per child looked after.

7.1 In the context of the data which is made available, the PAC will wish to further explore

- Are the local authorities which are spending the most or the least per child spending their resources wisely and most efficiently and providing value for money in terms of improving the outcomes for children?
- What is the relationship between current spend on LAC services and spending on early intervention and preventative services?
- Where there has been a reduction in spend on LAC by some local authorities in spite of numbers increasing, what has been the reasoning for this?
- Disaggregated data for spend by e.g. education and health

7.2 In the context of **statutory advocacy** provision for care experienced children and young people, encouraging strides have been made by Welsh Government, working in partnership with ADSSC, advocacy service providers and the CCfW, in developing a 'Range and Level Mechanism' (RLM) as part of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy programme of work¹⁰. The RLM can consistently calculate the funding levels required to deliver the National Approach on a local, regional or national basis, based on the cost of an 'advocacy hour' plus average running costs set against a target 'take up' percentage of the eligible population. Whilst this is presently being implemented across Wales and will be subject to monitoring arrangements, it will enable local authority commissioners working collaboratively across 6 regions to effectively plan and allocate sufficient funds. There are some

¹⁰ See Children in Wales joint response to the NAFW CYPE Committee inquiry 2016-17 <http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s55968/SAP%2010%20All%20Wales%20Children%20and%20Young%20Peoples%20Advocacy%20Providers%20Group.pdf> and related information <http://senedd.assembly.wales/ieIssueDetails.aspx?Id=16199&Opt=3>

emerging concerns from our members that current levels of funding dedicated to statutory advocacy could be lost when it is absorbed into the RSG¹¹.

7.3 There could be some mileage at least exploring the possibility of utilising the learning from the NASA example and seeking to apply it to other services for care experienced children and young people (where this is possible and indeed appropriate)

8. Placement choice, availability, suitability and stability

Appropriate matching and placement stability are conducive to helping to improve the well-being outcomes for care experienced children and young people, but also help to avoid additional costly interventions and actions when placements breakdown. Presently, over 500 (1 in 10) of children in care experience 3 or more placements per year. This is totally unacceptable as placement breakdown leading to multiple placements is both detrimental and disruptive for the child and their family, and costly for the placing local authority. A wider pool of placements is needed to ensure successful placements.

8.1 To illustrate this point, research by Demos (2010)¹² 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)

8.2 The PAC will wish to explore the availability of placements as well as the decision making process around matching and placement. Are non-emergency placements influenced in any way by where there happens to be a vacancy available at a particular time or solely determined by considerations around their suitability for the child with regard to their best interests, wishing & feelings, as

¹¹ See the joint response of NYAS Cymru and Tros Gynnal Plant to this inquiry

¹² https://www.demos.co.uk/files/In_Loco_Parentis_-_web.pdf

well as the need for the child to retain meaningful contact with their siblings, relatives and friends where it is appropriate and safe to do so.

8.3 We know that there is an issue of capacity within foster care with a lack of foster care families in Wales, particularly for teenage children. Appropriate financial recompense may be one factor amongst many other factors. PAC will wish to explore the implications of this in terms of the challenges this presents for local authorities seeking to place a child in an appropriate setting.

8.4 Given the focus of this inquiry, PAC will be particularly interested to learn how a lack of placements can impact on current spend and budgets, and whether children can/are being placed in more costly and less appropriate settings, for instance in placements out of area (and often outside of Wales¹³) and/or in costly residential care settings (over a ¼ of social service revenue expenditure is for residential care for less than 5% of the looked after population)

8.5 PAC will also be interested to explore the decision making process in respect of whether children are placed in care settings managed by profit making private care providers, local authority care providers or third sector not-for-profit providers. What factors are driving decisions and is full consideration being given to any additional needs a child may present which could be addressed by the placement provider. We do not believe that profits should be made by providers in relation to children's placements.

8.6 A placement should not be seen as simply a place to stay, but should provide wrap around quality support to help address needs and to help children recover, as well as seek to empower, build skills and resilience amongst children and young people. Are placement providers reinvesting in children in Wales? We welcome the recent example of co-production and cooperation between third sector foster care providers in Wales with the recent launch of collaborative arrangements between Action for Children, Barnardo's Cymru and TACT Cymru¹⁴.

8.7 There is a real need for a full assessment of placement planning processes undertaken at a local level

¹³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-39861470>

¹⁴ <http://www.tactcare.org.uk/news/charitable-fostering-providers-cymru/>

9. Renewed emphasis on Tackling Child Poverty

30% of children in Wales are in low income families, a figure which has increased over the past year and remains higher than in England and the other devolved nations. Independent projections suggest that child poverty will rise to around 5 million children across the UK by 2020 with the situation exacerbated by changes through welfare reform¹⁵.

9.1 The link between poverty and care has long been debated. A recent study by Cardiff University¹⁶ examined the link between child protection, care and social-economic status and reported that there was a higher chance of a child becoming 'looked after' if they came from a deprived area.

9.2 One could conclude that channelling sufficient resources to tackling deprivation and child welfare inequalities, alongside helping to prevent family breakdown where a lack of income is an aggravating factor would help stem the number of children entering the care system. The PAC may wish to consider seeking assurances that the maximum extent of available resources is being channelled to help tackle child poverty in Wales to help avoid children entering the care system due in part to income related pressures in the family. How many children enter the care system due in part to socio economic factors is not known. Capturing and reporting on this would be a welcome recommendation from the PAC to both Welsh and local governments.

10. Engagement with care experienced children and young people

Children with lived experience of living in care will be well placed to share their experiences and there are a number of third sector providers who would be best placed to support the PAC in accessing young people. Children in Wales through our Young Wales and Getting Engaged projects has worked with Voices from Care Cymru who convene a series of regional events throughout. The Chief Executive of Children in Wales also Co-Chairs Voices from Care Cymru with a young person.

¹⁵ <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/resource/child-family-poverty-wales-results-child-family-survey-2016/>

¹⁶ <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade/files/2017/02/Child-Welfare-Inequalities-Project-Wales-Country-Report.pdf>

11. Other considerations related to ‘value for money’

PAC will also wish to consider the cost for other services, for example the **Police**, when children go missing from their placements¹⁷, and the great risk to children placed in residential placements of child sexual exploitation¹⁸. A recent report of the summit hosted by the South Wales Police and CSSIW made several key recommendations which if implemented, would not only reduce the risks to vulnerable children but in the context of this inquiry, have a positive effect on finite resources¹⁹. These included removing barriers to multi-agency working, improved sharing of information and communication, and more placement options to allow for good quality care. Compliance with Part 9 Statutory Guidance on Partnership Arrangements to strengthen cooperation and strategic planning is a prerequisite to improving outcome for care experiences children.

11.1 We welcome the recent announcement of a recurrent **£1m St. David’s Day Fund** to help care experience young people aged 16–25 to be able to access a range of opportunities following calls from the CCfW for such a scheme to be put in place. Whilst the fund is still very much in its infancy, the PAC will wish to enquire what monitoring and reporting arrangements are in place to ensure the best use of these funds and to enable shared learning across local authorities as the administrators for this fund. It would be useful to know what of this funding if any is being used for services delivered by third sector organisations.

11.2 Finally, we are particularly interested in the emerging issues of how care leavers who are young parents themselves are supported or otherwise to become successful parents. This issue was originally raised by Voices from Care and is currently being researched by Cascade in Cardiff University. .

¹⁷ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/shocking-figures-show-hundreds-wales-13369630>

¹⁸ <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-right-care.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://cssiw.org.uk/our-reports/national-thematic-report/2017/170818-joint-police-summit-report/?lang=en>

APPENDIX 1

Issues

- I moved around a lot and to places that weren't suitable for my needs eg. Too strict / didn't fit in. I settled better in a care home and told them that's what I wanted from the start but nobody listened. Not everyone wants to be fostered, some would prefer a residential, or vice versa.
- 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.
- I've had 14 different placements in 1 year.
- More training is needed for carers about LGBTQ+ and other cultural / religious backgrounds. You shouldn't have to celebrate the faith of your carers – it can be disruptive.
- Short-term placements should be considered when there are concerns about safety but some placements last 5–6 days and aren't right for the individual – too disruptive.
- Lots of experience of older foster carers – assumed grandparents. Need to consider individual needs.
- Needs of the individuals need to be considered eg. Likes and dislikes (pets etc)

Support

- What support do you receive as care experience children and young people?
- **Good support**
- Barnardo's – listening and free Sunday lunch
- Aftercare – apprenticeship
- LAC nurse – BUT only once a year
- Voices from Care – let us take the reins, talk to people and make connections ourselves

- Advocacy – good when you know about it

Council tax – helped to set up payment plan when struggling with payments

Bad support

- CAMHS – long waiting lists, don't listen and referrals take very long time, if referred at all
- Barnardo's – closed so support stopped
- Aftercare – all depends on the social worker, very inconsistent
- You are seen as a casefile by your social worker
- Advocacy – need to know about it to get something out of it
- Housing Association – not helpful with rent and have also been put in some dangerous housing (dangerous boiler)
- Supported housing – I was 18 and was put into a house with a 53 year old violent, alcoholic.
- I've been moved around too often
- Mistakes! Only get 1 chance and then you are thrown out – not sympathetic to the fact that it might be your first time living on your own and being independent.
- Aftercare don't learn from their previous cases

Challenges

Are there any challenges in accessing the support you need?

- When you leave care the access to support shrinks
- Aftercare is the only support but it isn't fit for purpose
- In care – access to loads of stuff but once leave there is nothing. Huge disparity as no money to continue doing the things you had access to previously

- Once you leave care, you don't want to go back to your carers to say you are struggling. You feel they have moved on or perhaps feel they were doing it for the money only (lack of confidence in whether they actually care about you).

Changes for the future

If you could change one thing for care experienced children and young people, what would that change be?

- Second chance in housing post 21
- Smaller case files and input from the young people (need to know how to access and check all the information is accurate)
- Training for foster carers (LGBT / dealing with anger etc)
- More recruitment of good quality foster carers and from ALL walks of life (eg. Even those with minor criminal records so they can show us how change is possible)
- Second chances and more social workers

APPENDIX 2

Support

What support do you receive as care experience children and young people?

Good support

- Had a good structure/routine
- Inspirational support for future job opportunities
- Constant contact with carers – even after leaving
- Always had housing support
- Events to attend to get our voices heard as care experience young people
- Opportunities to get information to help young people with benefits
- PA – personal advisor

- Emotional support
- Education support
- Christmas support – providing Christmas hampers and Christmas gifts
- Providing social activities such as trips to Alton Towers
- Some Local Authorities provide free gym passes

Bad support

- Social worker
- Housing support
- Money and lack of funding for different support – some Local Authorities have more funds per person to help care leavers into independence
- Mental health support
- No support and poor adult social worker
- Being lied to by workers
- Not enough bereavement support available
- Being misunderstood and disappointed – not enough support to discuss who they are as a person
- Some in the group said they'd had good routine and structure but others disagreed
- Not being able to express yourself in certain ways
- Transitions – can't work or rent is higher, had to lose jobs and leave college course when moved

Changes for the future

If you could change one thing for care experienced children and young people, what would that change be?

- Better accommodation / housing

- PA support beyond the age of 21
- Mental health – lack of proper transitional support to adult services
- Make funding the same across Wales i.e. setting up home grant and funding for university
- Funding post 22 – i.e. housing benefit and benefits for college
- Better social work support after 18 – feel dumped when turning 18
- First homes grant – £1250 is not enough to set up first home
- Offer independent living skills training when in care – currently not given
- Give care experienced young people a chance to be a foster carer in the future
- More education and employment support
- Look at the transition from 17 to 18 – if you're in a job when you're 17 it's difficult to keep it long term if you have all the stress of moving when you're 18 and leaving care, especially when your new place is far away from your job and you need help and support with transport
- More support for the older ages of care experienced young people
- More support for transgender youths – transition in youths
- More education about the LGBTQA+ community
- Easier access to transport
- More social activities – this will help with mental health problems too
- Mental health awareness month events
- More information about public service jobs

APPENDIX 3

Support

What support do you receive as care experience children and young people?

Good support

- Went on holiday with foster carer
- Foster carers taking an interest
- Foster carer letting me do what I want
- PA helps me with travel
- PA listens to me
- Aftercare help me financially
- Paid for my uni tuition
- Had a learner mentor

Bad support

- No support since leaving care (I'm 21)
- Change in support workers
- No much support with budget
- Lack of support when part-time worked and got benefits cut so got into debt with housing
- Foster carer annoys me
- Foster carer doesn't always listen to what I like
- Not going on holiday with foster carer (going into respite instead)
- Not listening
- Not explaining

Challenges

Are there any challenges in accessing the support you need?

- Not knowing the support is there is the big challenge

- Barrier in accessing counselling because of how the list is
- Social worker – may need to be more understanding, need to listen, need to help
- Get rid of most of social services (not Jamie or Nicky)
- No phone to contact anyone to get support
- Transport (lack of links and lifts) and access to activities and some cost too much
- Being allowed to do things

Changes for the future

If you could change one thing for care experienced children and young people, what would that change be?

- I'm happy – don't need to change anything right now!!
- Nothing much at present but maybe the education system especially GCSE department as you need a grade C and above
- Social workers to listen more and understand how you feel
- To be able to use my phone / ipad through the night and have no cut off time to be able to listen to music when I feel anxious
- Access to more things (activities)
- Easier transport to places
- More social workers, less work (smaller case loads) and better pay