



CABINET – 18TH SEPTEMBER 2019

SUBJECT: WELSH GOVERNMENT – LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN REDUCTION EXPECTATIONS

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Cabinet of Welsh Government's expectation on all Council's to safely reduce the numbers of children Looked After in Wales and seek endorsement of the proposed actions to be undertaken in Caerphilly in response.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The First Minister for Wales made a manifesto pledge to reduce the numbers of children Looked After in Wales by 2022.
- 2.2 In February 2019, Welsh Government advised that they would be visiting each Local Authority to discuss local plans to reduce Looked After numbers. Their visit to Caerphilly took place at the end of March 2019 and the Council was invited to submit a reduction plan to Welsh Government by the end of April 2019. Subsequently, Welsh Government amended the report template and the final version that was submitted in July is attached for information at Appendix 1.
- 2.3 In recognition of the challenges facing Local Authorities, Welsh Government announced additional Integrated Care Funding (ICF) specifically focussed on supporting the reduction of the number of Looked After Children. This report includes details of how this funding will be utilised within Caerphilly.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet are requested to note the content of this report and the Welsh Government Template attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 Cabinet are requested to support the service developments detailed within this report aimed at achieving an overall reduction in Looked After numbers by the end of March 2022.
- 3.3 Cabinet are requested to consider including the 'Safe Reduction of Children Looked After' within Wellbeing Objective 6 of the Corporate Plan: Support citizens to remain independent and improve their well-being.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To ensure Cabinet is fully aware of the expectations of Welsh Government to safely reduce the number of children Looked After and to endorse the plans to achieve this within

Caerphilly.

5. THE REPORT

Welsh Government Reduction Expectations

- 5.1 Cabinet will note that for the current financial year, the Council is predicting a continued rise in Looked After numbers because the proposed actions and new service developments will not be fully implemented until the end of 2019/20.
- 5.2 Based on previous annual increases, it is predicted that by 31st March 2020, the Council could be looking after 490 children. It is proposed that, based on 490 children, we will aim to achieve a 10% (49) reduction by the end of March 2022.
- 5.3 Cabinet are fully aware that children Looked After are the most vulnerable children receiving services from the Council. It is therefore really important to acknowledge that any reduction can only be made where it is deemed safe to do so for that individual child.
- 5.3 As the attached template reports, we will work to try to achieve this reduction through a number of different ways including:
- The systematic review of all children placed with parents who are subject of Care Orders to consider revocation of those Orders
 - The systematic review of all children placed with relative foster carers on Care Orders where the Order could transfer to Special Guardianship
 - Reducing the number of children entering care through the development of Family Group Meetings and improved long term Family Support services
 - Increased use of Section 76 (voluntary) care placements for periods longer than 16 weeks
- 5.4 Welsh Government are concerned about the number of children Looked After placed out of county. Caerphilly's strategic intention is to place children as 'close to home' as possible which can sometimes mean an out of county placement is preferable. For example, a child from Rhymney may be better placed in Merthyr or Ebbw Vale in order to maintain links with family and school rather than being placed with Caerphilly carers in Risca.
- 5.5 There are currently 113 children placed out of area. 41 are placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) with the majority being placed within reasonable travelling distance of Caerphilly. Cabinet are already aware that increased recruitment of foster carers in Caerphilly has resulted in a reduction of 27 IFA placements. It is also important to note that 46 children are placed with Caerphilly approved foster carers out of area – 20 with relatives and 26 with mainstream foster carers. 19 children are placed in residential settings out of area. These placements are made based on the individual needs of the children and the lack of local residential provision.
- 5.6 Welsh Government also expect Local Authorities to reduce the numbers of children Looked After outside of Wales. Caerphilly currently has 10 children placed out of Wales. This is a very low percentage of the total number (2%/449). Committee Members will see from the attached report that there are no plans to change the placements of 8 of those 10 children because it would not be in the best interests of the individual children. The report also acknowledges that there will always be a need to place outside Wales for specialist services that may not be available in Wales.
- 5.7 Finally, Welsh Government expect to see a reduction in the number of children removed from the care of parents who have a learning disability. Caerphilly has a very robust process in place to assess the cognitive ability of parents and specialist assessments are completed wherever necessary. The number of children removed from parents with a diagnosed Learning Disability is not considered disproportionate in Caerphilly and as a result no specific

actions have been identified to address this. However, it is recognised that the development of enhanced family support services will assist children to remain at home where parents have learning difficulties (not diagnosed disability).

Integrated Care Funding (ICF) Grant

- 5.8 To support the First Minister's Manifesto Pledge, Welsh Government has released additional ICF funding to support regional proposals to reduce Looked After numbers.
- 5.9 Working in partnership with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and the four other Gwent Local Authorities, a regional service model approach was agreed that could be delivered in each Local Authority area. This consists of four key strands:
- Family Group Meetings
 - Special Guardianship Supports
 - Enhanced 'Edge of Care' services and
 - Mediation services for children facing homelessness

Family Group Meetings

- 5.10 A Family Group Meeting is a way for families, including wider family and close friends to come together to discuss a concern or problem which involves the children or young people in the family. They can be held in a range of circumstances from help for a family early on when they are beginning to experience difficulties right up to when families are involved with Child Protection services and children may be at risk of becoming Looked After.
- 5.11 The aim of the Meeting is to make a plan to support the child or young person that everyone is engaged in and supports. Families can be 'experts' on themselves. They are often the best people to make safety plans for their children and the meeting is an opportunity for families to take control of the decision making in their lives, helping families to identify their own strengths and solutions to their difficulties.

Special Guardianship Support:

- 5.12 This proposal is aimed at delivering a consistent Gwent wide 'offer' of support to Special Guardians to both assist them in their caring role but also to assist the Courts in having a viable alternative to adoption and long term fostering.
- 5.13 If a child or young person cannot be cared for by their parent(s), Local Authorities have a duty to find permanent alternative carers for them. A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) provides a legally secure placement for a child until they reach the age of eighteen years. It can be a positive alternative to adoption because it retains the child's sense of identity and belonging. The Special Guardians have Parental Responsibility to care for the child and make all the decisions about their upbringing.
- 5.14 The aim is for each Local Authority to 'offer' the following range of supports:
- Improved assessment and ongoing support
 - Establishing education priority status for children subject to SGO's in each Local Authority
 - Providing support to remain in education provision and enhance academic achievement (similar to that provided to children Looked After)
 - Develop daytime and evening peer support groups for Special Guardians
 - Provide a training programme for Special Guardians
 - Offer out of hours telephone contacts in line with foster carers

- Organise family days, social events and activities
- Provide advice and assistance including signposting to other services
- Provide mediation to assist with new or existing contact arrangements
- Access to Psychology consultation and support

Enhanced Edge of Care Support:

- 5.15 Edge of Care Services are those aimed at preventing the need for a child to become Looked After and supporting care experienced children to be able to return home to their families wherever possible. Caerphilly has historically invested in this type of service through the development of the Intensive Support Team. This was enhanced last year through dedicated funding by Welsh Government and continues to be a priority specifically referred to in this new tranche of ICF funding.
- 5.16 The proposal is to expand the Intensive Support Team to include Psychology support, an Education worker, a children's Community Connector and additional Family Support Workers.
- 5.17 In addition, it is proposed to utilise service specific reserves to fund a team of Family Aides/Support Workers to offer practical parenting and emotional support to those families where parents have learning difficulties and where children can be supported to remain at home with the additional support. This support may need to be for longer periods of time but will reduce the need for removal.

Mediation support for young people facing homelessness:

- 5.18 The best place for young people to live is within their families but sometimes there may be difficulties which make it hard to live in the family home. Mediation is a structured process where individuals try and resolve differences and problems with the support of an impartial mediator.
- 5.19 Outcomes from successful mediation include:
- The young person can remain at home or return home with a level of support
 - The young person remains at home or returns home temporarily whilst accommodation options are fully explored and a planned move is able to be achieved rather than moving in a crisis
 - The young person is unable to return home but relationships within the family are positively repaired and maintained for the longer term

Risks for the Council

- 5.20 Children's Services are actively supporting Social Work Teams to manage more risks outside Court proceedings. We are encouraging Social Workers to support families to identify their own solutions where the parenting standards are considered to be 'good enough' and where it is safe to do so. We also intend to use voluntary care i.e. where there is no court order, for longer periods of time. Currently, there is an expectation from the Judiciary that court proceedings should be issued if a child has been in voluntary care for 16 weeks however, historically, voluntary care has been able to be used as a positive family support.
- 5.21 All of the above actions are likely to lead to criticisms from the Judiciary and CAFCASS if we subsequently have to issue court proceedings and it is important that Cabinet are aware of this risk.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 This section should set out what assumptions have been made in proposing the recommendations in the report. The assumptions could include, amongst other things, inflation, costs, expenditure, population, policy, service demand etc. If no assumptions have been made or were thought necessary, then this should be stated.

7. LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES

- 7.1 Social Services & Well Being (Wales) Act 2014.

7.2 Corporate Plan 2018-2023.

The content of this report contributes towards Well Being Objective 6: Support citizens to remain independent and improve their well-being

8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 8.1 The content of this report contributes to the following Well Being Goals:

- A resilient Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities

The report is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act as follows:

- Long Term – the provision of safe care and accommodation for children in the greatest need is, and always will be, a key strategic priority for the Council. Improving outcomes for children Looked After will deliver longer term improvements for them individually.
- Prevention – Children’s Services is committed to preventing the escalation of need and subsequent demand on higher tier statutory services through the delivery of early intervention and family support services.
- Integration – Service developments across Children’s Services and the region are increasingly integrated with Health and other professionals eg. MyST, Gwent Attachment Service, Psychology support to Supporting Family Change, Intensive Support and Fostering Teams
- Collaboration – the developments funded through the WG ICF funding have been agreed across the five Local Authorities and the Regional Partnerships.
- Involvement – all key stakeholders have been consulted and involved in the development of the WG Reduction Expectations Plan and service developments.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Council’s full Equality Impact Assessment process does not need to be applied.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Any increase or reduction in the number of children Looked After by the Council has a direct impact on the Children’s Services and Social Services budget.
- 10.2 The service development proposals outlined in this report rely on the use of the Welsh Government ICF funding made available to support the reduction in Looked After Numbers. However, this funding is currently due to end in March 2021.

11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no personnel or HR implications arising from this report.

12. CONSULTATIONS

12.1 The report is for information purposes and reflects the views of consultees.

13. STATUTORY POWER

13.1 Social Services & Well Being (Wales) Act 2014

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Councillor Lyndon Binding – Chair of Social Services Scrutiny Committee
Councillor John Bevan – Vice Chair of Social Services Scrutiny Committee
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Children’s Services Divisional Management Team

Appendices: Appendix 1 -Welsh Government Reduction Expectations Template July 2019

July 1, 2019

Caerphilly County Borough Council – Children’s Services**Service Description:**

Caerphilly Children’s Services provides a full range of statutory services to safeguard children and young people and to support them to achieve their full potential. Working in partnership, our aim is to co-produce appropriate Care & Support Plans that meet the individual needs of children, young people and their families and carers. We rely on the co-operation of other key statutory partner agencies and third sector providers to ensure the services provided are responsive to need and support families at the lowest possible level of need.

Children’s Services are committed to the following four strategic priorities and these underpin all the work that we do:

- 1. To support families to stay together** and reduce the need for children to be Looked After by ensuring a focus on early intervention and prevention across all service provision for children, young people and their families.
- 2. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the ‘edge of care’** by making sure that need is accurately assessed, resulting in the right children being accommodated at the right time. This includes supporting families to avoid children becoming accommodated unnecessarily and by making arrangements within their wider family networks.
- 3. To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements** to meet the diverse range of children’s needs.
- 4. To give children and young people clearly planned journeys through care** which remain focused on achieving outcomes, preventing drift and enabling reunification with family and friends wherever safe to do so. We will work on achieving placement stability and ensuring positive move on for children and young people leaving the care system.

Headline performance measures:

- reduction in the number of children in care
- reduction in the number of children placed out of county
- reduction in the number of children placed out of Wales
- reduction in the number of children removed from parents with a learning disability

Proposed Reduction Expectations – numbers of children in care

Year One (2019/20): Aim to remain below the projected increase in numbers for 2019/20 (estimated to be 54 per year) giving a potential total number of 490 children Looked After by 31st March 2020

Plus:

- To introduce the enhanced support package for Special Guardians
- To further develop enhanced ‘edge of care’ supports including the development of Family Group Meetings
- To develop an intensive family support service for parents with learning difficulties

Year Two (2020/21): Based on the 31st March 2020 figure, we will then aim to reduce the overall number of children Looked After by 10% by the end of Year 3.

(for example: based on 490 projection @ 31.03.20 this will be a target of 49 over the two years)

Plus:

- Continue to systematically review all children on Care Orders who are placed at home with parents and the conversion of Care Orders to Special Guardianship Orders wherever appropriate to do so

Proposed Reduction Expectations – numbers of children placed out of county

Year One (2019/20): Caerphilly has already reduced out of county IFA placements by 27 in the current year

Year Two (2020/21): Aim to reduce by 5 more

Year Three (2021/22): Aim to reduce by 5 more

As at 31st March 2019, there were 113 children Looked After in out of county placements broken down as follows:

Placement Type (903 Return)	No of children
F6: Out Of County, placement with Foster Carer through Agency	41
F4: Foster placement with relative or friend, Out of County	20
F5: Placement with a CCBC Foster Carer – Out of County	26
H4: Children Homes & Hostels Outside LA boundary	19
H5: Residential Accommodation Not Subject To Childrens Homes Regs.	4
R2:Other Res Setting:-NHS/health Trust Estab Medical Or Nursing	1
R3:Other Res Setting:- Family Centre Or Mother And Baby Unit	1
R5:Other Res Setting:- Young Offender Institution Or Prison	1
Total	113

Caerphilly’s intention is to place children and young people ‘closer to home’ which can often mean an out of county placement is the preferred choice. For

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reduce the rate of entry into care through the full implementation of Family Support, Family Group Meetings and Edge of Care services <p>Year Three (2021/22): As detailed in Year 2 above</p> <p>Plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the use of Section 76 accommodation for periods longer than 16 weeks ie reduce the rate of issue (against current Judicial practice) Increase the use of ‘other family arrangements’ without having to make children Looked After to do so (against current Judicial practice) 	<p>example, a child from Rhymney will be better placed in Merthyr Tydfil or Blaenau Gwent in order to maintain links with their school, family and community than being placed with in-house carers in Risca.</p> <p>It is important to note that 46 children are actually placed with CCBC Foster Carers (mainstream and relative) even though they are technically out of county</p>
<p>Proposed Reduction Expectations – numbers of children placed out of Wales</p> <p>Year One (2019/20): 2 current children placed in residential care who could potentially return to CCBC or Wales. Targets beyond that are unable to be set for the reasons outlined below</p> <p>Year Two (2020/21): unable to set target</p> <p>Year Three (2021/22): unable to set target</p> <p>Caerphilly has 10 children Looked After out of Wales. This is a very low percentage at 2.3% of the total number of children Looked After. Of the 10 children:</p>	<p>Proposed Reduction Expectations – numbers of children removed from parents with a learning disability</p> <p>Year One (2019/20): unable to set target</p> <p>Year Two (2020/21): unable to set target</p> <p>Year Three (2021/22): unable to set target</p> <p>As reported in the May 2019 Template:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caerphilly has a very clear process to enable practitioners to support parents with learning disability and learning difficulties Any parent where there may be concerns about their ability to comprehend or their capacity are subject of an independent

<p>2 are placed with a parents 4 are placed with relatives 1 is in an IFA – matched as Long Term 2 are in residential placements and 1 is in Great Ormond Street Hospital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a result 8 of the 10 placements cannot be changed – it would not be in the children’s best interests to be moved from parents, relatives, long term matched placement or hospital • It is important to acknowledge that some specialist provision eg Secure Accommodation or Mental Health provision will inevitably be outside of Wales while the current placement resources in Wales remain limited. • All out of county and out of country placements are considered by the multi agency Complex Needs Panel 	<p>Cognitive Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This Cognitive Assessment identifies the most appropriate approaches to be utilised when working with the parent or will determine the need for a Parenting Assessment Manual (PAM’s) assessment • Caerphilly does not consider the number of children removed from parents with a diagnosed LD as being disproportionate in this local authority
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Please briefly provide an explanation of your overall approach to out of county and cross-border placements and your plans to increase placement capacity?

The Local Authority’s approach to out of county / out of country placements is outlined in the above sections – as reported in the May 2019 Template.

In relation to increasing in county provision:

- We have increased foster carer recruitment by 100% in the last 12 months – 20 new carers compared to 10 in 2017/18
- We have developed a bespoke residential placement for a particularly challenging and hard to place child to maintain them in-county and have a second such placement under development for a child currently in secure accommodation.
- We will increase in-house residential provision by 4 beds by the end of 2019 which will assist with a reduction in the reliance on out of county placements

It is important to acknowledge that in certain circumstances placing out of county is the most appropriate option for a child eg where there are Child Sexual Exploitation, Harmful Sexualised Behaviour or Mental Health concerns

Any additional text to describe your rationale?

Please refer to the previous template submitted by the Local Authority in May 2019