



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Improving Outcomes for Children Programme

MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP

Annual Report 2019

## Foreword

I am pleased to be able to introduce this first Annual Report for the Improving Outcomes for Children programme. The strategic direction of the programme has been overseen by my Ministerial Advisory Group, so ably chaired by Mr David Melding, AM.

I am grateful for David's leadership and his commitment to championing positive well-being and equality of outcomes for care experienced children and young people across Wales. We have both campaigned for a long time to improve children's rights and I am delighted we are still working together to realise our shared ambition.



I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Ministerial Advisory Group for their commitment and their continuing proactive engagement in delivering our wide-reaching programme of work. The Group benefits from a membership of key service delivery partners who generously provide strategic advice and scrutiny to the work programme. You will see by the breadth of content in this report that it is a challenging programme and I am enormously appreciative of everyone's contribution.

This report highlights the good progress we have made so far. For example, together we have established edge of care services in every local authority in Wales; we have rolled out the Reflect programme across Wales, emotionally and practically supporting parents who have had a child placed into care; we have introduced legislation to exempt all care leavers from paying council tax and established the St David's Day fund to help provide support to young people leaving care as they transition towards adulthood and independence. There are many more similarly meaningful examples throughout this report.

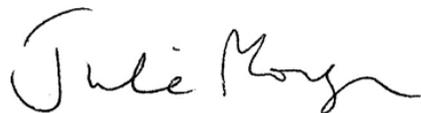
The report also focuses on what more can be done. Fundamentally, we need to make whole system improvements so that services are delivered which provide timely and early help to families, so they are supported to stay together with the ultimate aim of reducing the number of children in the care system.

The First Minister for Wales has further strengthened the Government's position by setting out his expectations that we reduce the number of children in care, reduce the number of children placed out of county and out of Wales and to reduce the number of children removed from parents with a learning disability. We have been working closely and at pace with local authorities to co-produce targeted plans to take forward these priorities based upon local context.

I am sure that readers of this report will already know that Welsh Government has pledged to improve outcomes for care experienced children. We have described our vision in our national strategy – *Taking Wales Forward* and in *Prosperity for All*, our programme for Government. My Cabinet colleagues and I are committed to doing what we can across our portfolios to deliver improvements.

Finally, and most importantly can I thank the children and young people who have actively engaged with this work programme. You are the most important people and we are privileged to work alongside you; I hope you feel you are being listened to. My sincere thanks to Dan Pitt, the Ministerial Advisory Group's vice Chair. Dan has experience of being in care and has so masterfully offered his views, wisdom, insight and perspective both in meetings and in delivering work. Dan has been particularly helpful in raising awareness of improving mental well-being. We are extremely grateful to you and I know you inspire so many others.

I hope you enjoy reading this Annual Report and I look forward to continuing to work with our partners so we can do our best for every care experienced child and young person in Wales.



Julie Morgan AM

Deputy Minister for Health & Social Services

The Ministerial Advisory Group on Outcomes for Children has now been in operation for over three years. In that time it has identified a range of best practice, addressed gaps in current evidence, and provided advice to the Welsh Government on how to advance its priorities for care experienced children and care leavers. Its dedicated membership is drawn from a very wide range of stakeholders and the Ministerial Advisory Group has been able to work at depth because of the vital support it receives from officials.



This report is designed to provide a public statement on progress to date, the barriers and challenges that need to be tackled, and some performance data to enable fuller scrutiny of our work. It fulfils one of the recommendations contained in the Public Accounts Committee's report on care experienced children and young people.

There is no doubt that much remains to be done to ensure that only those who need to be taken into care are removed from their families, and that adequate support is given to families on the edge of care. A rebalancing of practice and the accompanying resources would also lead to an improvement in the standards of care provided to those children and young people who need to be in care.

It is a privilege, as an opposition AM, to chair the Ministerial Advisory Group and contribute to the Welsh Government's work. No chair has been more ably assisted by his deputy chair – Dan Pitt from Voices from Care and the Group's change manager Phil Evans, former Director of Social Services in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Any comments and suggestions this Annual Report attracts would be very gratefully received as we move towards the final stages of this Assembly's term.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Melding". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

David Melding AM

## Contents

**Introduction..... 5**

### Our Current Priorities

**1. Safely reducing the number of children in need of care ..... 7**

What is the background? .....

What have we done in response?.....

What are the greatest challenges now? .....

**2. Having sufficient, high quality placement options for children who are looked after or leaving care ..... 13**

What's the background? .....

What have we done in response?.....

a. Education and Skills.....

b. Emotional and Mental Health.....

c. Placements.....

What are the greatest challenges now? .....

**3. Supporting children who are looked after to have the best possible journeys through care and into adulthood. .... 23**

What is the background? .....

What have we done in response?.....

What are the biggest challenges? .....

**What's been happening? Indicators and Information.....25**

## Introduction

Our new website for practitioners and the public has just been launched. It is hosted by Social Care Wales (<https://socialcare.wales/service-improvement/improving-outcomes-for-children-programme>). Some of the material you might otherwise see in this Annual Report is set out here in an accessible format. The website includes a short document, *Guide to the Ministerial Advisory Group*, which explains the basis for the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group, who we are and what we do.

For this reason, it's been possible to give this report a simple and action-oriented structure, based on our three main workstreams. Each section shares a common format:

- a What's the background?
- b What have we done in response?
- c What are the greatest challenges now?

The report describes how members of the Ministerial Advisory Group and of the Improving Outcomes for Children Team in Welsh Government have been exercising collective responsibility for making change happen, at pace and with maximum impact. As the report demonstrates, this means engaging in a wide range of activities - commissioning research, applying professional expertise, helping to formulate policy and then implementing reforms at all levels (national, regional and local).

There have been many achievements. Through our work programme, we have helped to promote significant new developments with the emphasis throughout on co-producing responsive and innovative services that improve outcomes. Of course, there are also many challenges which must be met and the report sets these out. For example, we must do more in ensuring that children, young people and families have a greater voice in finding their own answers, in designing services and in helping to deliver them. We must help to ensure that the voice of the child or young person and their families is not only heard but acted on to improve services. The focus must be on making changes in practice and systems as much as developing policy.

The Ministerial Advisory Group seeks to ensure that our commitment to following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is overt and transparent in everything we do. The Improving Outcomes for Children work programme is designed to incorporate these requirements and those of the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards. The Vice Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Group is a care experienced young

adult and his influence has been considerable. It was Dan who inspired the *Listen. Act. Thrive* project, described later in this report. It reviewed how the emotional and mental health of care experienced children and young people is currently being assessed and made significant recommendations for action which are being incorporated into the work programme. Care experienced young people were involved at every stage - focus groups to find out views; feeding back and consulting on recommendations; and in the launch event.

We consult and involve children and young people in our work as much as possible. For example, a pilot project (commissioned by the Welsh Government and supported by the Children's Commissioner for Wales) has allowed six Welsh local authorities to use the *Bright Spots 'Your Life Your Care'* survey to discover what matters to care experienced children and to help influence improvements in the way local services are delivered. The local authorities set out to:

- improve the care experience for all looked after children;
- give children a voice on their own well-being; and
- highlight the 'Bright Spots' of practice that contribute to children flourishing in care.

The use of the surveys by 686 children and young people in Welsh local authorities produced many important insights. Most children in care in Wales are settled in their placements and happy with their lives overall. However, 36% of children (4-7yrs) did not understand why they were looked after. About a quarter of children and young people wanted more frequent contact with a parent – while nearly one in five (19%) young people (11-18yrs) and 15% children (8-10yrs) had no contact with either parent. A third of young people (11-18yrs) felt they had too little contact with their siblings. A quarter of young people (11-18yrs) had three or more social workers in the year. To support implementation of the children's performance framework, a children's survey is being commissioned on a national basis.

The Ministerial Advisory Group has supported implementation of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy for Children and Young People and adoption of the new National Participation Charter/kitemark. With additional funding made available by Welsh Government, local authorities now commission independent advocacy services in each region in line with the National Approach and promote the 'active offer', to ensure that eligible children and young people are enabled and supported to express choice and (where possible and appropriate) exercise control over the decisions that are made and the support they receive. Guidance has also been published on the role, function, status and remit of the Independent Reviewing Officers who help to manage the planning and review process for all children who are in care.

## OUR CURRENT PRIORITIES

# 1. Safely reducing the number of children in need of care

## What is the background?

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 emphasises how we must support families to stay together, where this is safe and in the best interests of the child. For children and young people, this means:

- identifying and assessing as early as possible those children who need care and support (including help to achieve emotional well-being and resilience)
- helping them to use the strengths in their families and resources in their communities for support
- ensuring intervention at a stage which prevents needs becoming critical.

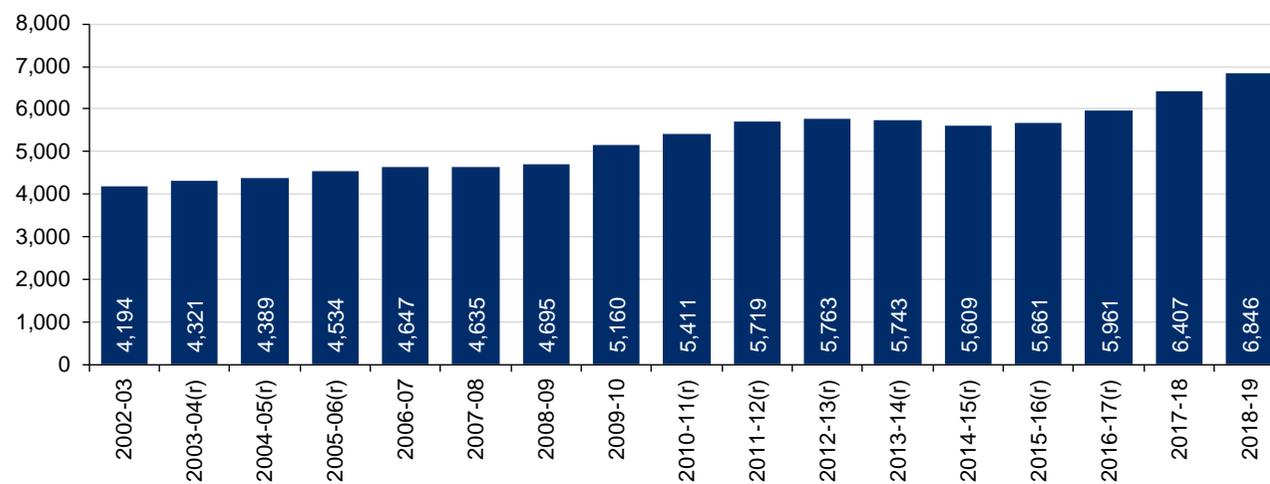
However, Wales has some of the highest rates of children looked after across the UK and there is considerable variation between the rates of individual local authorities. There have been a number of significant reports exploring the increase in numbers of children in care.

The All Wales Heads of Children's Services, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the Association of Directors of Social Services commissioned Cordis Bright to undertake research on the differences in the looked after children populations across five local authorities in Wales. The research findings, published in 2013, found some variation in the numbers and rates of looked after children across local authorities could be explained by differences in the demographic and socio-economic profile of each local authority. However, the findings also highlighted that the demographic and socio-economic factors only go part of the way to explain differences between local authorities. Other factors affecting the numbers and rates of looked after children related to issues more within the control of the local authority and their partners. In particular the way local areas lead, organise and deploy their resources and services for vulnerable children and families.

The Wales Centre for Public Policy produced a briefing paper in March 2019 which sets out to explain why rates of looked after children are high in Wales<sup>1</sup>. The paper seeks to quantify, at a national and local level, the impact of factors such as:

- deprivation;
- the effects of the ‘trigger trio’ (domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and parental mental ill health) on parenting capacity and resources;
- differences in policy and practice between local authorities, including the approach taken to providing care and support; and
- decisions made in family courts.

**Number of Children Looked After in Wales as at 31 March 2019**



Source: SSDA903; Looked after children census

(a) Excluding children looked after in short-term placements.  
(r) The data has been revised since previously published.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Wales Centre for Public Policy *Analysis of factors contributing to high rates of care*: <http://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/190715-Analysis-of-Factors-Contributing-to-High-Rates-of-Care-REVISED.pdf>

**The *Care Crisis Review*, published in June 2018, confirmed the sense of crisis that is now felt by many young people, families and those working within the system because of increased use of court proceedings<sup>2</sup>.** In Wales and in England, the number of care order applications reached record levels in 2017 and the number of looked after children was at its highest since the Children Act 1989. The number of children in care has been rising steadily since the early 1990s, except for a period in England in the mid-2000s. Key figures in the family justice sector and in the children's social care sector have been voicing concern that the care system is under pressure. They point out:

- the growing number of families facing the stresses of poverty;
- the need to help people at early stages of family difficulties to prevent problems getting worse and to support children and those caring for them.

**Reports like the *Care Crisis Review* also find grounds for optimism.** The underpinning legislation and its underpinning principles are seen as being fundamentally sound. Some local authorities are bucking national trends of rising numbers and exercising their statutory responsibilities to a high standard. There are exciting developments at all levels within policy, practice and service development, many of them in Wales. As shown next in this report, the members of the Ministerial Advisory group have been involved in some of the initiatives that help support vulnerable families on the edge of care, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, and additional resources have been found. This will help to reduce the numbers of children in care and to free up resources within local authorities to focus on preventative action and improved support for children who are in care.

**Despite these reports, their findings and recommendations, the number of children in care in Wales continues to grow.** That is why the First Minister for Wales has identified the increasing numbers of children in care as a priority area. He is clear that too many children are removed from their families into the care system and has set the following policy goals.

- Reduce the numbers of children in care.
- Reduce numbers of children placed out of county.
- Reduce numbers of children placed out of Wales.

---

<sup>2</sup> [The \*Care Crisis Review\*: Factors contributing to national increases in the numbers of looked after children and applications for care orders:](https://www.frg.org.uk/images/Care_Crisis/Care-Crisis-Review-Factors-report-FINAL.pdf)  
[https://www.frg.org.uk/images/Care\\_Crisis/Care-Crisis-Review-Factors-report-FINAL.pdf](https://www.frg.org.uk/images/Care_Crisis/Care-Crisis-Review-Factors-report-FINAL.pdf)

Reduce the number of children removed from parents with a learning disability. These priorities are consistent with the UNCRC - articles 3 (best interests), 9 (separation from parents) and 18 (supporting parents to bring up their child).

## What have we done in response?

**To reinforce moves towards greater prevention, members of the Ministerial Advisory Group volunteered their time to undertake an Appreciative Inquiry at six local authorities across Wales.** The Inquiry sought to identify effective approaches to family support and strategies for managing risk which help reduce safely the numbers of children in need of care<sup>3</sup>.

The findings from the Inquiry have been useful in determining how the Welsh Government provides future investment to strengthen support for vulnerable families whose children are at risk of entering the care system and to provide additional therapeutic services<sup>4</sup>. Family support services in the community also play a vital role in assisting family reunification and exit from care. Since 2017/18, Welsh Government has invested £9m to expand local authority prevention and early intervention services. A significant portion of this money was used to ensure all local authorities put in place edge of care services. From April, a further £15 million investment over two years was made via the Integrated Care Fund to help reduce the need for care and more intensive therapeutic services. Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) are required to publish their plans for making best use of this grant including additional capacity for family conferences and reunification. The Ministerial Advisory Group has been instrumental in advising how new monies can be targeted at areas of highest priority.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ministerial Advisory Group, December 2018: *Family Support Services in Six Local Authorities*

<sup>4</sup> Ministerial Advisory Group *Reducing the number of children in need of care*: <https://llyw.cymru/sites/default/files/publications/2019-08/lleihau-nifer-y-plant-sydd-angen-gofal.pdf> and <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-08/reducing-the-number-of-children-in-need-of-care.pdf>



**The Reflect project has been rolled out across Wales to reduce the number of children being taken into care by breaking the cycle of repeat pregnancies and recurrent care proceedings.** Parents are encouraged to understand their past, to work with their present and to achieve their future goals. The arrangements for supporting kinship carers are being strengthened through co-production of a kinship care guide with funding from Children in Wales. The Ministerial Advisory Group supported this development and the consultation process regarding a national framework for special guardianship support services, including common eligibility criteria for financial and other support.

In response to the First Minister's priorities, Welsh Government and partners developed a 'Reduction Expectations' approach to help local authorities put in place plans for reducing the numbers of children who experience care. The Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services have co-operated with Welsh Government on this agenda. Led by an Independent Chair and supported by government officials, meetings were held with each local authority to discuss how they manage their service, their approach to risk and how they oversee entrance and exit from care. Officials worked with local authorities to develop a reporting template in which they could set out their own bespoke reduction expectation

plans, tailored to their populations and demography. Reduction expectation plans will span the course of three years, with anticipated figures set out for each year from 2019 to 2022.

## What are the greatest challenges now?

There are consistent themes emerging from this work. **It is clear that there is pressure throughout the looked after children system.** Deprivation and austerity play a significant part in the increase in numbers of looked after children but they are not the whole story. There are other key factors that play a part such as the different business models adopted, different practices to deliver services and relationships with key partners. It makes good sense to build a peer support system where organisations can learn from each other about what is working and to enable discussions where challenges can be worked through.

**In some areas, children's services are adversely affected by workforce and workload issues caused by problems in staff recruitment and retention.**

With support from Social Care Wales, the Improving Outcomes for Children programme has worked to find ways of encouraging practice which is focused on children's needs and better outcomes for them. For example, champions and mentors were appointed in each local authority area to help staff at the front line develop the skills needed for this approach to be effective. As a result, the first-ever workforce strategy is being developed this year by Social Care Wales and Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW), in partnership with the NHS and local government, the voluntary and independent sectors as well as regulators, professional bodies and education providers.

In addition, The Fostering Network was awarded funding to deliver *Fostering Well-being*, a pilot programme designed to test and evaluate social pedagogy principles in a foster care environment. The pilot programme has proven successful and will be expanded to other regions across Wales.

Many of the other factors that drive the need for family support and care services can be tackled only by whole system change across public services and beyond. There is widespread recognition that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as physical and emotional abuse or being in a household where there is domestic violence, substance misuse, parental separation or mental illness can have a negative impact on a child's development. As the report of the Appreciative Inquiry states, the impact of such experiences can live on long after they take place, often with very serious consequences and with clear implications for child protection services. Reducing the number of harmful experiences suffered by children in Wales is a key driver to creating healthier and happier future generations. Understanding how children and young people develop resilience and providing support that helps to build it are key factors in helping to reduce the impact of exposure to ACEs.

## 2. Having sufficient, high quality placement options for children who are looked after or leaving care

The latest research by the **Institute of Public Care**<sup>5</sup>, showed that a significant proportion of care experienced children and young people will have:

- ❖ a recognised disability or a diagnosed attachment disorder or stated emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- ❖ less opportunity to achieve good educational qualifications;
- ❖ greater health, well-being and housing needs as adults;
- ❖ increased risks of being involved in substance misuse,
- ❖ behavioural issues resulting from the trauma of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences); and
- ❖ increased risks of coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

The IPC research indicated that 71% of children in their sample were considered to have overall positive outcomes after 4-5 years, with stable placements and good education. However, many of these children still had enduring education, health, and well-being support needs.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/publications/pdf/Placement-outcomes-children-young-people-4-5-years-after-final-care-order-en.pdf>

## What's the background?

**As Corporate Parents for care experienced children, elected members and officers from across each local authority (including education and housing) should ensure that they are providing the quality of care that would be good enough for their own children.** It is a local authority's responsibility to keep them safe, to make sure that their experiences in care are positive, and to improve their access to opportunities that will help them to succeed in life. They must prioritise work to ensure that care experienced children and young people get the right services and support so they can enjoy as much as possible the same life chances as other children.

## What have we done in response?

**A Corporate Parenting Task and Finish Group has been re-established to look at ways in which corporate parenting can be strengthened across public services.** While local authorities are well versed in their responsibilities toward care experienced children, the Group will be considering what corporate parenting means for other public sector organisations in Wales. This will consider recent developments in local authorities which are intent on improving the 'offer' or 'pledge' which they make to care experienced children and young people. The new offer can cover areas such as advice and assistance; well-being; learning, training and employment; safeguarding from harm; growing up; having a say and inclusion. Voices From Care Cymru, together with AFA Cymru, have been working to benchmark good practice in corporate parenting and to explore whether young people can develop a kite mark to quality assure the corporate parenting strategies adopted by a local authority.

### a. Education and Skills

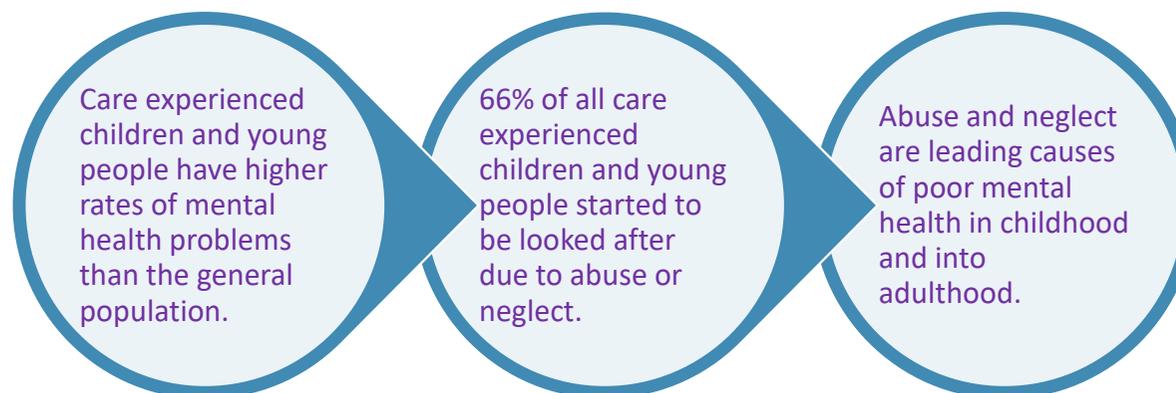
**The joint three-year education and social services strategy, *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales*, strengthened arrangements to support the education of children who are looked after.** It has achieved a better understanding of the barriers faced by looked after children as learners in education and by setting out how social and education services can work together to deliver better outcomes. Since the strategy ended earlier this year, Welsh Government has been working with key partners to co-produce the strategic direction to improve the educational attainment and experience of looked after children. Events have been held with care experienced young people and professionals to co-produce the approach.

We have committed to the Pupil Development Grant for the remainder of the Assembly term. Through these grant arrangements, regional education consortia receive £5 million a year to provide educational support to children who are looked after. Good parenting by the state should provide a solid foundation for individuals to grow. This requires stability, security and a commitment to ensuring that each child has the best start in life. Only when there is effective cross-government working across the whole public sector, with each agency owning as core business its responsibilities towards supporting children who are looked after and working effectively with third sector partners can we hope to achieve these standards. We are determined to ensure that looked after children receive the same education chances and opportunities as their peers.

In 2019 we extended the PDG Access grant to looked after children. This funding is not limited to supporting the cost of school uniform; it will support greater aspiration, cultural enrichment, well-being and resilience. Whether it is help buying school uniform or getting the right clothing or equipment for young people to take part in their favourite sport or activity inside or outside of school, then PDG Access will support those opportunities.

## b. Emotional and Mental Health

### Emotional and Mental Health Issues that may affect Care Experienced children



**Article 24 of the UNCRC provides children with a right to the best possible health. In part because of early life experiences, care experienced children have a greater incidence of poor mental and emotional health.** The previous section of this report described how the effects of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or exposure to domestic violence, substance misuse, parental separation or mental illness are profound and long-term. Providing the right level of help, including therapeutic support, can reduce the emotional trauma caused by the impact of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and other disadvantages. However, it can be difficult to get access to the right help at the right time because of thresholds for specialist services. Not all foster parents, teachers, residential workers and social workers are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for providing appropriate help.

On behalf of the Ministerial Advisory Group, NSPCC and Voices From Care Cymru consulted with care experienced young people about support for their emotional and mental health. Their report, *Listen. Act. Thrive*, was launched at an event attended by the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services and recommendations shared with the Ministerial Advisory Group.

The Welsh Government has made significant investment to improve mental health services for children and young people. This includes £15m new investment for Regional Partnership Boards to develop therapeutic support services. In addition, it is investing £2.5 million to develop adoption support services which help adopted children who need a form of emotional support but may not need the specialist service provided by CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services).

### c. Placements

**Stable placements are crucial to providing children in care with a feeling of belonging and security - one of the key factors to better life chances and educational attainment.** For children already in care, this means making every effort to re-unify families when appropriate, in the interests of the child and when it is safe to do so. There is strong evidence that it is becoming more difficult to match children with appropriate placements across the range of options such as fostering, adoption and residential care. The Improving Outcomes for Children Programme has been actively engaged in a wide range of initiatives by central government and local government to improve placement choice, quality and stability.

#### i. Fostering

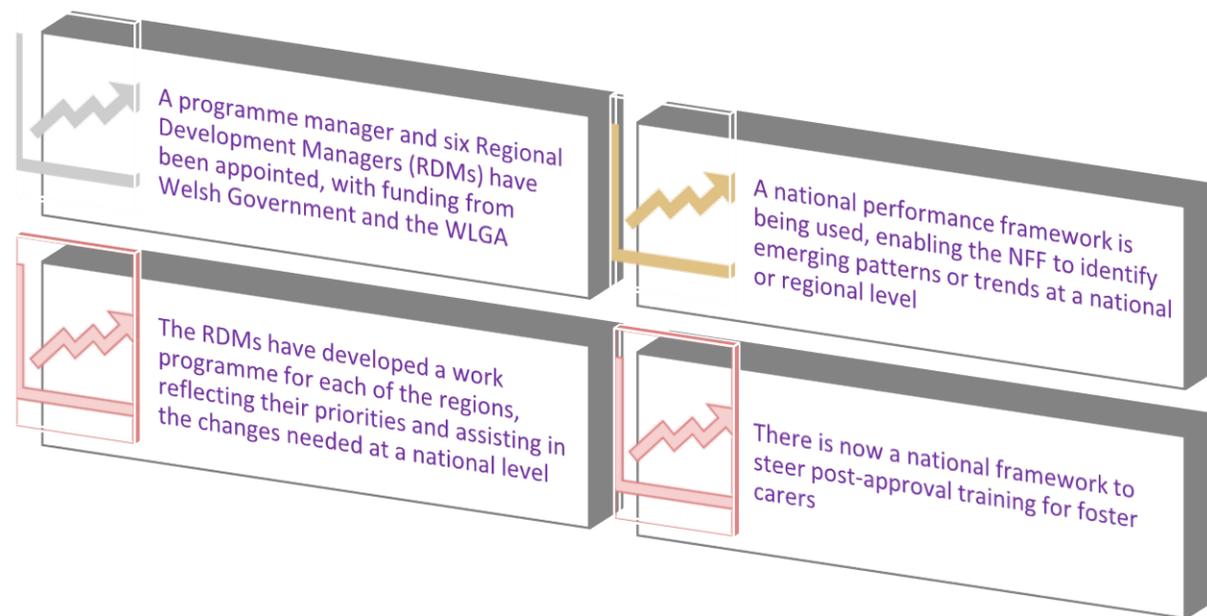
This work includes sponsoring the National Fostering Framework (NFF), a collaboration of fostering professionals and organisations from across Wales. Fostering is the primary source of care for the most vulnerable children, providing placements for over two-thirds of all children who are looked after. Foster care is a skilled and varied role undertaken with children of all ages, from new-born babies through to young adults. Some children are looked after on a short-term basis before returning home or moving on to other permanence options; others remain in foster care for longer periods, some throughout their childhoods. Some carers provide care for children on a generic basis while others (kinship carers) look after children who are part of their extended family.

Given the scale of change required and the complex issues needing resolution, the NFF first scoped out a functional model for public services fostering in Wales which can operate at local, regional and all-Wales levels. They then developed a three-year implementation programme for this model and other agreed improvements. This has allowed services to benefit from opportunities of working on a bigger scale (greater strategic direction, better co-

ordination, sharing resources, delivering consistency) without losing the advantages of localism (meeting the specific needs of individual areas, strong accountability, direct links to practice). Local authorities and regions have been making considerable efforts to improve:

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

### National Fostering Framework Achievements



**The National Adoption Service for Wales is an innovative collaborative, bringing together all local authority adoption services into a three-tier structure.** Regionally, local authorities work together within five regional collaboratives to provide a range of adoption services. Each regional collaborative has links with the voluntary adoption agencies, health and education. They all provide the adoption agency functions for children, recruiting and assessing adopters, offering counselling to birth parents and advice to adopted adults. Nationally, the Director of Operations and a small central team, hosted by the City of Cardiff Council on behalf of all local authorities, drive improvement, consistency and co-ordination.

- Members of the Ministerial Advisory Group have played a significant role in developing the capacity of the National Adoption Service to meet the need for placements and to put in place a national model of adoption support. Welsh Government has provided local authorities with £2.3 million funding in 2019/20 to help strengthen adoption provision to prevent children re-entering care and to reduce the time they spend waiting to exit care through adoption. New arrangements for pre-approval work with adopters and post adoption assessments are in place. The Regional Collaboratives are working with voluntary adoption agency partners to put in place specialist adopter recruitment schemes (such as Adopting Together) to meet the placement needs of sibling groups, older children and children with additional complex needs. A new Adoption Register has been launched. Recently the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) (Amendment) Directions 2019 have come into force which places a requirement that children who are awaiting an adoptive placement and approved prospective adopters across Wales to be placed on the Wales Adoption Register within a month. This will speed up matching of children with prospective adopters and will therefore reduce the length of time that children are waiting to be placed.

Resources have been made available to increase the extent to which adopted children have received their life journey material. This is a key element in providing them with a means of understanding their history and background; the figures have improved considerably.

TESSA – a therapeutic education support service for adoptive families began to be established in Wales in early 2019 utilising funding from the National Lottery Community Fund. Part of the Welsh Government’s 2.3 million investment for adoption services is being used to enhance this service further to deliver:

- A focus on early intervention and support as soon as post settling-in concerns are raised
- Professional psychological assessments for children with information shared with parents and other support staff
- Therapeutic parenting support
- Ongoing parent partner support.

### iii. Residential Care

Children who are looked after by their local authority, and who need care and support in a residential setting are generally accommodated in children's homes registered under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. A Task and Finish Group has been meeting to develop and oversee the work programme needed to deal with a range of issues about how well children and young people are served by the current arrangements. The Task and Finish Group is working to deal with fact that models of care, quality and location of residential services are not necessarily what local authorities want or need to commission to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people.

The Task and Finish Group commissioned research to increase our understanding about the characteristics of Welsh children and young people placed in residential settings. Wales Data Cymru was commissioned to build a profile of children's residential care across local authority and private sector provision. This demonstrated that the evidence base, especially in respect of outcomes, was not strong and providers need to improve consistency in data collection. Cordis Bright was asked to explore different models of residential care, across the UK and internationally. Their report concluded that, although there is no single model with sufficient evidence to support a wholesale move to adopt it, there are common threads that should feature in any model adopted in Wales. Cordis Bright and the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) have run workshops for local authorities and private sector providers, to disseminate these findings and help develop capacity within the residential care sector.

The profile of residential care showed a concern about the lack of emergency or crisis provision, including remand, and residential care for children at the highest end of the continuum of need. Regions are being asked to consider commissioning together so that this shortfall is addressed. Regional Partnership Boards can bid for capital and revenue funding from the Integrated Care Fund to support development of new approaches. From April 2019, the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru have put in place a new flexible framework for residential care commissioned from the private sector, which should encourage planned changes in the way services are provided.

The Task and Finish Group also commissioned good practice guidance for out-of-area and cross-border placements, and a report into emergency placements for children transferred to local authority accommodation under the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act 1984, or subject to remand. A sub-group has been set up to consider PACE and remand placements, and reduce the numbers of young people had overnight in police custody.

## What are the greatest challenges now?

**Local authorities have a duty to take steps to ensure that they have sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of the children they look after ('the sufficiency duty').** All local authorities in Wales have an in-house fostering service and some provide in-house residential accommodation. One provides a secure accommodation service. Local authorities also commission foster and residential care from private providers and voluntary organisations. The Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) works with local authorities to develop local and regional placement commissioning strategies, although more work remains to be done especially around regional commissioning of specialist services.

**We need to continue working with the National Fostering Framework to develop a strategy for local authority fostering services as a whole.** This consists of three major strands which include branding and marketing to increase foster carer capacity; a common approach to local authority fostering services (training, professional support, policy documents and handbooks) and producing business cases which examine the resource implications of specific elements in the work programme and of the infrastructure needed to underpin the overall strategy (including harmonisation of local authority fees and allowances).

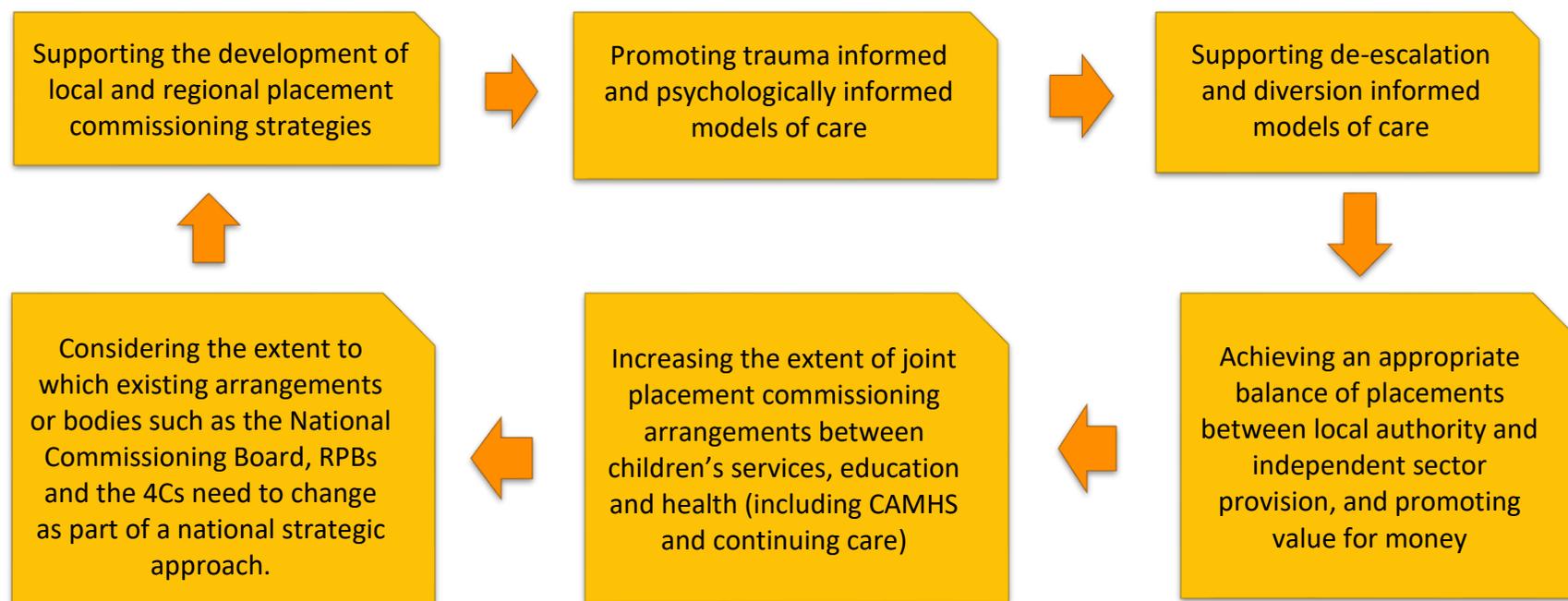
**The Welsh Government has made a commitment to develop a national strategic approach to the commissioning of placements for looked after children.** The need for this has been highlighted in several forums and reports. This includes the Care Crisis Review report, work commissioned by the Children's Residential Care Task and Finish Group, and most recently by the National Assembly for Wales' Public Accounts Committee in its *'Care Experienced Children and Young People* Report.

**Members of the Ministerial Advisory Group are involved with helping to oversee and co-ordinate emerging national and regional approaches to placement planning and commissioning in fostering, adoption and residential care.** The emphasis now needs to be on a whole systems approach which prioritises partnership working, flexibility and alignment of activity at local, regional and national levels.

A sub-group on secure accommodation has been looking at ways of developing residential care for children and young people at the highest end of the continuum of need. They generally display a range of risky behaviours, including self-harm, violence to others, having been sexually exploited or associating with dangerous adults. This is often accompanied by a lack of insight into, or denial of, the risks. Many of the children have mental health, emotional or developmental disorders. CASCADE, Cardiff University has published a report on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people from Wales receiving Secure Accommodation Orders. The pressing need is for safe and stable environments for these young people whilst

therapeutic interventions are put in place. The emerging consensus is that this provision needs to be developed on a regional and multi-agency basis, but this is a very complex undertaking. Considerable work is being undertaken to understand how it can be achieved in practice.

**The Improving Outcomes for Children Programme aims to better enable local authorities to source suitable and timely placements for the children and young people they look after and to ensure that more of them can be placed closer to home.**



### 3. Supporting children who are looked after to have the best possible journeys through care and into adulthood.

#### What is the background?

**As corporate parents, local authorities are required to help young people in their care move towards independence in a similar way to parents who have children living at home with them.** Providing appropriate support and guidance to a young person early in their journey towards independence helps to maximise life chances. All young adults need support and direction to help them achieve their goals and ambitions. Care leavers often make the transition to independent living earlier than most children and in more difficult circumstances. They often face barriers which prevent them from achieving their goals, such as a lack of stable housing and finances. This can make it very challenging for them to take up further or higher education, apprenticeship or job opportunities.

Social services, welfare benefits, training providers, housing, health and education departments must work together to plan each young person's move to independence. They should act and respond promptly when plans change or things go wrong. As demonstrated by work undertaken by the Children's Commissioner with local authorities across Wales, good results are being achieved. We are seeing more concerted efforts to provide training and apprenticeship opportunities, more accommodation options, clear information and financial support, opportunities for care leavers to develop and monitor the support they are offered, and ways of reducing poverty among care leavers. These examples need to become Welsh standard practice.

#### What have we done in response?

**Opportunities for further education, training and apprenticeships** Funding of £625,000 has been allocated to local authorities so that they can establish or enhance schemes which operate on the basis that care leavers should be seen as part of the 'family business' and offered training and job opportunities within the council's own workforce. To support them, with making the transition, entitlement to a personal adviser has been extended to those up to the age of 25, at an investment of £1 million.

**Housing and income** Local authorities are providing appropriate accommodation where it is available but there are also challenges. Local authorities describe very close links between social services and housing colleagues including joint assessment and joint working arrangements. Since April 2016,

young people in Wales have the right to stay with their foster families beyond the age of 18 under a scheme known as *When I am Ready*. Voices from Care have also been successful in a bid to the Esme Fairburn Foundation for a project to evaluate young people's experience of *When I am Ready* and its impact upon their well-being outcomes. The £1m St David's Day Fund has been established by Welsh Government to provide direct financial support to care leavers so they can access opportunities that will help them make a successful transition towards independent living and successful adult lives. In 2017/18, nearly 2,000 young people benefited from the fund. For 2019/20, this fund has been doubled. The Welsh Government has also worked with local authorities to exempt care leavers from paying Council Tax; this became law from April 2019, and this is a big step forward in our work to support young people transitioning towards independence.

Through the Improving Outcomes for Children programme, we are continuing to explore ways in which we can support young people to become independent. There are several projects where funding has been provided for this purpose. For example, Welsh Government has supported Action for Children's Skills for Living programme. A joint Social Services and Housing Group has been set up to develop accommodation options for young people leaving care, and to prevent youth homelessness.

## What are the biggest challenges?

**Working with partners, the Welsh Government is looking at a range of suitable accommodation options for care experienced young people**, through a new joint Social Services and Housing Group. The Children's Residential Care Task and Finish Group commissioned a report on schemes from across the UK which provide accommodation for young people leaving residential care, and Voices from Care consulted with care experienced young people on their views and experiences of transitional support when moving from residential care to independent living. They recommended:

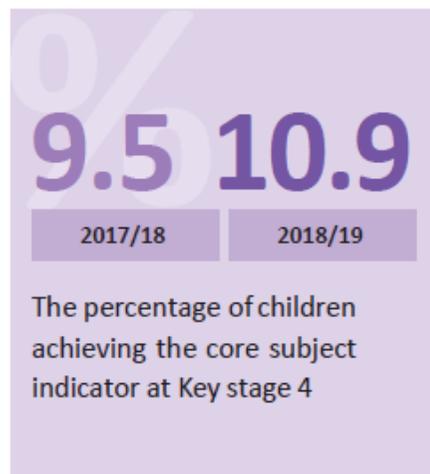
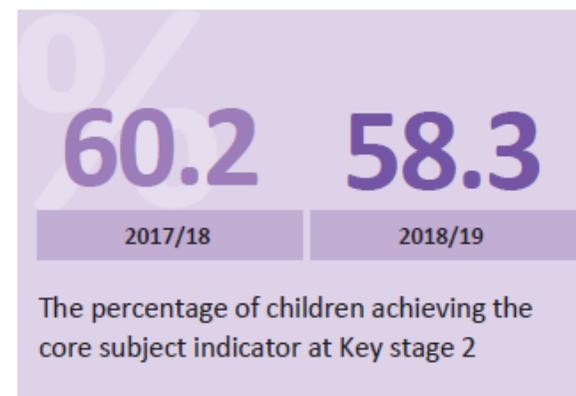
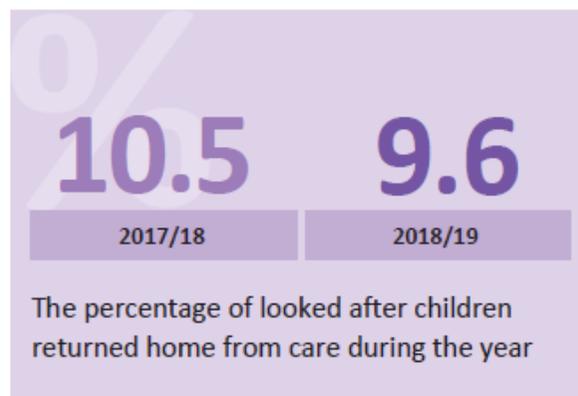
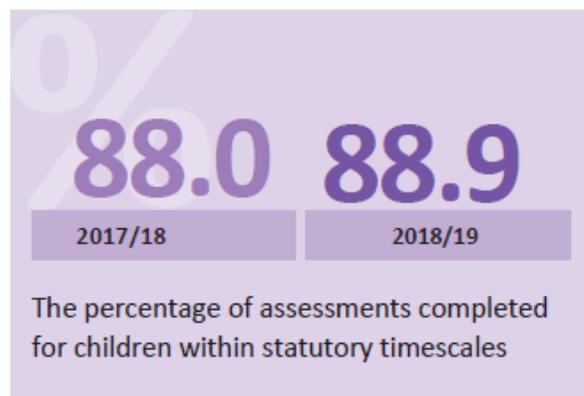
- increased focus on emotional well-being and support, in addition to practical support for independence;
- more emphasis on peer support, advice and encouragement; and
- flexible, slower and staggered options towards independence.

The challenge will be to develop not only a multi-agency approach which includes social services, housing and homelessness services, education and employment support but also a framework of support around the transition to independence which offers care leavers genuine choice and control.

## What's been happening?

### FACTS AND FIGURES

#### Quantitative Children's Services performance measures 2018-19\*



## What's been happening?

### FACTS AND FIGURES

#### Information

**£15 million investment** announced by Welsh Government over two years in additional funding to Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) to strengthen support for vulnerable families whose children are at risk of entering the care system and to provide additional therapeutic services.

**£2.3m funding** provided to local authorities by Welsh Government in 2019-20 to help strengthen adoption support, to prevent children re-entering care and reduce the time they spend waiting to exit care through adoption.

**£625,000** has been made available to local authorities to encourage greater use of apprenticeship and trainee schemes for care leavers.

**£1 million** to local authorities from Welsh Government to help establish additional capacity for family conferences and reunification.

Over **700 families** work with Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS) teams every year.

Over **1,900** care experienced young people supported so far through the £1m St David's Day Fund.

Almost **700** care experienced children and young people across six local authorities took part in the Bright Spots survey about their well-being. To support implementation of the children's performance framework, a children's survey is being commissioned on a national basis.

**All care leavers** are now entitled to exemption from paying council tax.

National Practice Standards for Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and for Independent Visitors have been developed, to provide consistency in service provision across Wales.

The Special Guardianship Orders code of practice has been developed.

## What's been happening?

### FACTS AND FIGURES

#### Information

At least 244 families across Wales have made use of the **Reflect programme**, designed to reduce the number of children being taken into care by breaking the cycle of repeat pregnancies and recurrent care proceedings.

**71% of care experienced children** in a research sample had overall positive outcomes four to five years after a final care order. These children had stable placements and good education. However, many of them continued to need support with their education, health and well-being.

**All care leavers** up to age 25 must be offered a Personal Adviser, regardless of circumstances. An additional 20 Personal Advisers have been recruited with over 500 young people accepting the offer.

Social Services revenue expenditure on looked after children services has **risen by over 20%** since 2011-12. The largest portion is spent on fostering services (45%), followed by residential care (25%) and leaving care support services (8%).

In 2018, a far higher proportion of adopted children (61%) had **life journey material**, a key element in helping them to understand and make sense of their personal history.

**The Fostering Well-Being (Social Pedagogy) scheme** has been successfully rolled out across Cwm Taf and this pilot is being extended to Cardiff and the Vale before implementation on a national scale.

\* The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 introduced a new performance measurement framework for local authorities in relation to their social services functions. The data will be used to inform national policy development; support local authorities to learn, plan and improve; enable people to understand the quality of social services and inform the regulation and inspection regime in Wales. The new code of practice and associated performance and improvement framework will come into effect on 1st April 2020 and will apply to the financial year 2020-21 and beyond. During the transitional period, on an All Wales basis we mainly rely upon experimental statistics derived from Social Services Performance Measures returns. Some of the quantitative performance measures had been collected previously prior to the implementation of the Act: however, results are not comparable due to changes to definitions and calculations.

Social services revenue outturn expenditure: <https://statswales.gov.wales/v/G01H>

Children looked after by local authorities: April 2018 to March 2019: <https://gov.wales/children-looked-after-local-authorities-april-2017-march-2018>

Children receiving care and support: April 2017 to March 2018: <https://gov.wales/children-receiving-care-and-support-april-2017-march-2018>

You can find out more about the work of the Improving Outcomes Programme at:

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