

Scrutiny Report



Performance Scrutiny Committee – People

Part 1

Date: 17 September 2019

Subject **Looked After Children report**

Author Scrutiny Adviser

The following people have been invited to attend for this item:

Invitee:	Area / Role / Subject
Sally Anne Jenkins	Head of Children and Young Peoples Services
James Harris	Strategic Director – People

Section A – Committee Guidance and Recommendations

1 Recommendations to the Committee

The Committee is asked to consider;

1. The Welsh Government expectation of the reduction in Looked After Children in Newport and its feasibility.
2. The plan Officers have in place to achieve the reduction in Looked After Children.

2 Context

Background

- 2.1 The First Minister proposed in his manifesto a reduction in the numbers of children who are looked after across Wales as a priority for his government. The First Minister has carried this manifesto proposal into government and all Local Authorities are required to submit a template to Welsh Government outlining how they propose to reduce their numbers of children who are looked after. The completion of the template follows on from a number of meetings and discussions across the sector with Welsh Government officials. All Local Authorities have been visited by Welsh Government and have presented the local challenges with the support of the Statutory Director, the Chief Executive and the Cabinet Member.

The First Minister is concerned that the numbers of children who are looked after in Wales are per ten thousand significantly higher than in England. The implications for the children of Wales are that they are more likely to be removed from their family care and brought up within public care. The outcomes for children in care are well documented and while it is recognised that poorer outcomes are in very large part a result of early childhood experiences prior to becoming looked after the challenges of good public care and the need to support families to care well are evident throughout social care research. While short term risk can quickly be managed by removing children from the family home the long term implications of managing the risk in this way are additional costs and a failure to provide sustainable solutions.

This reports attached at **appendix one** and **appendix two** focusses on the required plan submitted to Welsh Government and the proposed actions to meet the expectation of a reduction. The template submitted to Welsh Government is attached to this report in order for Members to have the opportunity to be aware of the proposed direction of travel. While the template highlights areas of good practice there are no budget or staffing implications within the proposals for reduction submitted to Welsh Government. There is however a shift in culture required to manage increased levels of risk and this does potentially present challenges across the Council.

The additional factor is the cost of children who are looked after is leading to a position where the budgets for children's services across Wales and England are continuing to grow.

- A single child coming into the care of Newport City Council through the courts will result in a minimum spend of £20,000 in social work and legal costs. This is for the very simplest of cases and where a child does not remain in the care of the Local Authority.
- The costs of somewhere to live in Newport for children in care vary from £11,400 per annum for a child under the age of 4 with no additional needs to £306,800 per annum for a child aged over 11 in residential care.

Children's Services are the lead part of the Council in working to support the most vulnerable families and manage risk for children and young people across Newport. Every week the Local Authority receives at least 120 referrals which progress to some form of intervention. Of those 120 at least 25 will require a formal investigation with Social Services staff alongside colleagues in health and police. There are clear themes for the most vulnerable families including domestic abuse, substance misuse, poor parental mental health and the challenges of poverty. For Children's Services the task is to manage the presenting risk and then to support families wherever possible for children to remain at home. When that is no longer safely possible then Children's Services will intervene to provide the best possible care away from the family.

Working towards reducing the numbers of children who are looked after is challenging for all agencies but the current trajectory of ever rising numbers is untenable both in terms of the outcomes for children and the costs across the public sector. Early intervention and prevention to avert the need for children becoming looked after is preferable in terms of both cost avoidance and potentially better outcomes. Working collaboratively across the Council and with partner agencies is more likely to achieve successful prevention and divert children from becoming looked after.

3 Information Submitted to the Committee

- 3.1 **Appendix one** – Reduction Expectation Plan – May 2019
Appendix two – Revised Reduction Expectation Plan – July 2019

4. Suggested Areas of Focus

Role of the Committee

The role of the Committee in considering the report is to:

- Gain a greater understanding of the Welsh Government's expectation to decrease the number of children who are looked after by the Local Authority.
- Understand how the Officers aim to achieve the Welsh Government's plan to decrease the number of Looked After Children.
- Understand the risks to achieving lower numbers and what mitigations have the Officers put in place to ensure the safeguarding of Looked After Children.
- Conclusions:
 - What was the overall conclusion on the information contained within the reports?
 - Is the Committee satisfied that it has had all of the relevant information to base a conclusion on how Officers will reduce the numbers of Looked After Children?
 - Do any areas require a more in-depth review by the Committee?
 - Do the Committee wish to make any Comments / Recommendations to the Cabinet Member?

Section B – Supporting Information

5 Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The Looked After Children report has links to the *Aspirational People* and *Resilient Communities* Corporate Plan Commitments:

Well-being Objectives	Promote economic growth and regeneration whilst protecting the environment	Improve skills, educational outcomes & employment opportunities	Enable people to be healthy, independent & resilient	Build cohesive & sustainable communities
Corporate Plan Commitments	Thriving City	Aspirational People		Resilient Communities
Supporting Function	Modernised Council			

6 Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act

5 Ways of Working	Types of Questions to consider:
<p>Long-term The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.</p>	<p>Are there any long term trends developing that could affect how this plan is implemented to how the actions are prioritised?</p>
<p>Prevention Prevent problems occurring or getting worse.</p>	<p>How are you ensuring that the needs of the service users monitored and are taken into account when developing the long term strategy?</p>
<p>Integration Considering how public bodies' wellbeing objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.</p>	<p>How does the Council's implementation of the plan impact upon the services of other public bodies and their objectives?</p>
<p>Collaboration Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the organisation itself).</p>	<p>How are you using the knowledge / information / good practice of others to inform / influence the Council's work?</p>
<p>Involvement The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.</p>	<p>How as a Council are we ensuring we are consistently seeking the views of those who are impacted through the implementation of the plan?</p>
	<p>While developing a long term strategy, how are you ensuring the diverse communities are involved in your decision making?</p>

7. Background Papers

- [The Essentials - Wellbeing of Future Generation Act \(Wales\)](#)
- [Corporate Plan](#)

Report Completed: September 2019