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Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref:
Council Leaders
Directors of Social Services
Heads of Children's Services

24 September 2020

Dear colleague,

Looked after children reduction expectation plans – Year 1 (2019/20) outcomes

Thank you to you and your teams for continuing to constructively engage with officials on the work to reduce the numbers of children in care and bring those who are in care closer to home.

This is a challenging agenda, however there is a shared consensus amongst local authorities to work together to manage our looked after children numbers so the best possible outcomes for children in our care can be delivered and more can be invested in prevention. The key principle remains that children have a right to live with their birth families where possible, with additional support where needed.

As you will be aware, reduction expectation plans are in place for three years, covering the period 2019-2022. Following the submission of end of year returns for 2019/20, we are now able to communicate the outcomes achieved over the first year of delivery. In 2019/20 we saw an:

- increase of 280 looked after children (4%)
- increase of 99 children placed out of county (5.2%)
- increase of 27 children placed out of Wales (7%)
- increase of 19 children removed from a parent with a learning disability (19%), however as figures are reported from only eight of 22 authorities, this figure is unreliable.

As of 31 March 2020, there were 7,180 children looked after in Wales, at a rate of 114 per 10,000 population (previously 109 per 10,000 population). Over the past year the number of children in care but not with own parents, wider relatives or friends has increased only by 0.75% (33 children). This is at a rate of 69 per 10,000 population, considerably below the 114 per 10,000 population for the whole children looked after population in Wales.

Across Wales, local authorities set out to achieve a 2.9% reduction in children looked after numbers in 2019/20. A 4% increase in looked after numbers is therefore very disappointing. Further work is required to ensure these reductions are delivered.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

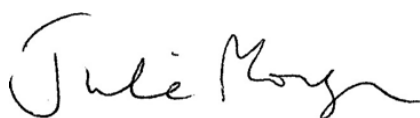
We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Of particular concern is the continued variation in achievement of reductions across local authorities in Wales. While most have kept increases to a minimum or achieved small reductions, including your own authority, a small number have seen large increases which are adversely affecting the national picture. To align numbers of children in care with the reductions offered by local authorities for years 2 & 3, targeted action is required.

- Research by the Wales Centre for Public Policy, with CASCADE at Cardiff University, on variation of children looked after rates amongst local authorities has recommenced (this work had paused due to COVID). This research is looking at whether the values and decision making of social workers impact on the variation in children looked after rates.
- Continued engagement with the judiciary – a ministerial meeting is due to be held shortly with the judiciary to discuss reduction expectations and the role of the Welsh judiciary. We will continue to work to improve trust and confidence between local authorities and the courts.
- We will establish a transformation and support team to reduce variation amongst local authorities and support consistent all-Wales best practice, deliver reductions of children in care and fulfil the sufficiency duty in relation to placements within local authority boundaries. The team will seek to hold conversations with local authorities on progress made to date against reduction plans and future plans for delivery. Authorities who have not achieved their own reduction expectation plans in 2019/20 and/or have the most problematic increasing rates will be prioritised for support.
- Increase focus on restorative practices, to help drive cultural practice around prevention and reunification from care. This will include expanding new and existing innovative models for parental advocacy, family reunification and family group conferencing, which support children safely remaining with birth parents and wider family.
- Deliver the All Wales Heads of Children's Services' Peer Learning Framework to enable local authorities to share and exchange examples of good practice. Implementation has been delayed due to COVID-19, however this will now be reinvigorated. Working alongside Social Care Wales, peer review workshops will be delivered between local authority areas to identify opportunities for shared learning.
- Following the IPC research and the first Minister's round table meeting, officials will co-produce the development of guidance on supporting parents with learning disability.

Officials are available to discuss these proposals in more detail. We hope you will continue to engage positively to co-produce solutions that work best for your local authority.

Yours sincerely,



Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services