



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

18TH JULY 2023

RADICAL REFORM: IF NOT NOW, THEN WHEN?

**REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN
DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER,
COUNCILLOR G CAPLE**

Author: Annabel Lloyd

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides information to Corporate Parenting Board about the report by the Welsh Parliament's Children, Young People and Education Committee following inquiry linked to the Welsh Government's commitment to explore radical reform of current services for children looked after and care leavers as part of the Programme for Government.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board:

- 2.1 Note the information.
- 2.2 Receive an updated report when Government's decisions about the recommendations are known.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Children's Services are providing information about a report that is closely linked to Corporate Parenting Board's responsibilities and will likely influence next steps in policy development and delivery of services.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The report notes the inquiry's methods as having:

- Launched a consultation (which received 47 responses + 7 additional pieces of evidence).
- Spoken to as many care experienced young people and birth parents as we could, and to professionals who work with them.
- Heard from 13 panels of witnesses during Committee meetings

4.2 The table below summarises the key points in the report. The report itself can be found at: [If not now, then when? Radical reform for care experienced children and young people \(senedd.wales\)](#)

Issue	High Level Summary	Recommendation
Workload	Children's services social workers' caseloads (the number of children and families they work with at the same time) are much too high.	Legislate to place a duty on local authorities to calculate maximum safe caseloads for children's services social workers
Discrimination, stigma and corporate parenting	Time and time again, children and young people with care experience said that they are treated differently, in a negative way, to other children.	Make 'care experience' a protected characteristic under section 4 of the Equality Act 2010.
Support for Mental Health	There was a lot of evidence telling us concerns about the mental health of care experienced children and young people.	As part of umbrella reforms to corporate parenting, provide a statutory entitlement to trauma-informed therapeutic care for all care experienced children.
Data collection	Senedd researchers looked at the information available about the care system, care experienced children, and social services. They found that there are big gaps in data in Wales.	Place formal data collecting duties on all relevant public bodies, third sector and independent providers to collect comprehensive data on at least an annual basis relating to the care system, and at least quarterly relating to the social care workforce.
The challenges facing care experienced	A very high number of care experienced young people have one or more of their own children taken into care.	The statutory right to intensive, wrap-around edge-of-care support for all care experienced birth parents to reduce the risk of children being removed from their care, including

birth parents		specialist parental advocacy to navigate the social care and family courts systems.
Common reasons why children are being taken into care	<p>Research shows that domestic violence, substance misuse, mental health and learning disabilities are all part of the complex picture of why children in Wales are going into care.</p> <p>During evidence gathering, poverty was the most common reason given for children being removed from their parents.</p>	<p>Extend across the country and on a universal basis successful edge of care services, such as Barnardo's Baby & Me, which have been shown to increase the chance of children being able to stay with their birth parents.</p> <p>Subject to a successful full evaluation, roll out the problem-solving court model (The Family Drug and Alcohol Court model, or 'FDAC') across Wales.</p>
Being heard and advocacy for birth parents in the child protection system	<p>One of the main messages from the birth parents spoken to was that they are not listened to and that they are not involved in decision making throughout the child protection system. Many said that care proceedings confused them.</p> <p>The inquiry committee (the committee) heard a number of stories about birth parents having to attend court proceedings remotely from the hospital just hours after giving birth, and often struggling to get support for their own wellbeing</p>	<p>The statutory right to an 'active offer' of an independent support worker when the child is placed on the child protection register or made subject to pre-proceedings to support them to access early intervention services and navigate the social care and family court system. If a child is ultimately removed from their birth parents, the support should continue beyond the child's removal to signpost the birth parents to services that can help them come to terms with their loss.</p>
Residential parenting assessment	<p>The committee was shocked by the experiences of many of the birth parents spoken to who had been placed in a residential family assessment centre. The</p>	<p>That Welsh Government should commission an independent review into the efficacy and availability of parenting assessment</p>

<p>placements and parent and child foster placements</p>	<p>committee is not convinced that these assessments need to be carried out in a way which takes away so much of birth parents' privacy. Based on what was heard, the committee is not surprised that some parents say these placements are deeply traumatising.</p>	<p>placements. The review should consider the ethics, utility and value for money of both residential placements, and parent and child foster placements, and identify what changes can be made to improve the process for families, and any barriers that need to be overcome to take those steps. The independent review should report no later than December 2023.</p>
<p>Being heard and the 'active offer' of advocacy</p>	<p>Many young people said that young people in care are not listened to, or given an opportunity to be involved in decisions about their lives.</p>	<p>Give children in care and care leavers a statutory right to long-term advocacy support via an assigned advocate on an 'opt-out' basis.</p> <p>That the Welsh Government make residential visiting advocacy a condition of registration for residential care homes for children in Wales.</p> <p>The Welsh Government should also work with UK governments to ensure that every child domiciled outside Wales but placed in a Welsh residential care home is offered an individual advocate too.</p>
<p>Foster Care</p>	<p>As of 31 March 2022, 69.4% of children in care were in foster care. However, the committee heard that there are not enough good quality foster placements,</p>	<p>Mandate all foster carers to register directly with Social Care Wales, in line with other roles that have significant daily contact with</p>

	<p>and that local authorities are struggling to find suitable placements to meet the needs of children and young people.</p> <p>The idea behind the online database of fostering placements provided by the '4Cs' is thought to be a really good one. However, the database is clearly not working as effectively as it could.</p>	<p>children, and create a national register of all fostering placements and approved foster carers across both the local authority and independent sectors.</p> <p>That the Welsh Government carry out a review of the 4Cs' database with the input of front line practitioners as soon as possible and alongside the establishment of a national register for foster carers.</p>
Schools	<p>Education services are a corporate parent, and have a responsibility to promote educational achievement of children in care, to safeguard them and to promote their well-being</p>	<p>That the Welsh Government consults with Estyn and other key stakeholders to examine the most recent attainment results relating to care experienced children, find out how well schools are following the Welsh Government's guidance, and how the Welsh Government and others will improve the school experiences of care experienced children.</p>
Kinship Care	<p>The committee understands the calls from some for kinship carers to be given the same levels of support - financial or otherwise - as foster carers.</p>	<p>That the Welsh Government consults care experienced children and young people, kinship carers, third sector organisations, local governments and others to better understand the extent to which kinship care is being increasingly used as an alternative to placing children in foster or residential care, the experiences of children in kinship care, and the support needs of kinship carers. As part of</p>

		<p>that work, the Welsh Government should explore the potential of amending by regulations the criteria that kinship carers are required to meet to be entitled to the same financial support as foster carers.</p>
<p>Unregistered and unregulated placements</p>	<p>The committee is very worried by the evidence received about the use of unregistered accommodation, the use of some types of unregulated accommodation, the rise in deprivation of liberty orders, and the rates of children in care who go missing.</p> <p>The children and young people who are affected by these issues are likely to be some of the most vulnerable children in the country. Many will have experienced very high levels of trauma, neglect, and abuse.</p>	<p>That the Welsh Government and the Association of Directors of Social Services must jointly publish no later than December 2023 an action plan setting out how they will prevent the use of illegal, unregistered accommodation in Wales.</p> <p>That the Welsh Government should carry out and publish an analysis of the use of unregulated accommodation across Wales for children in care and care leavers up to the age of 21. The analysis should identify the numbers of children and young people in unregulated accommodation, and clearly break that down between accommodation that it considers to provide quality accommodation and support, and accommodation that does not. Once complete, the Welsh Government should set out its policy position in relation to unregulated accommodation.</p> <p>That the Welsh Government should carry out an immediate analysis of the use of</p>

		Deprivation of Liberty Orders across Wales for the past 24 months, broken down by local authority which has responsibility for the child, age of the child and the length of the order, and which should be published no later than December 2023. The Welsh Government and the Association of Directors of Social Services should jointly publish no later than December 2023 an action plan setting out how they will reduce the use of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.
Running Away	The Committee heard that some care experienced children and young people feel that they have no choice but to use unhealthy, unsafe or dangerous behaviour to be listened to. Running away may be a call for help, a last resort, or something else entirely. But it is also dangerous, placing the child at risk of significant harm or exploitation.	That the Welsh Government should respond to the concerns raised by NYAS Cymru in oral evidence on 15 February 2023, and by the Children's Society in their written response to our consultation, in relation to incidents of children missing from care. It should set out clearly its expectations of local authorities, the police, and other statutory partners in their response to incidents of missing children, and its views on their calls for statutory return home interviews.
Reforms to the on-going support young people receive when	The committee heard that some young people have positive experiences of leaving care. They had learnt some life skills, and had been able to go to university or do apprenticeships. However, most of the things we heard show that young people in care in Wales	Extend the threshold for statutory support provided to all care leavers by the local authority from 21 to 25, as is currently provided to care leavers in education or training.

<p>they leave care</p>	<p>face a cliff edge of support when they turn 18. The committee heard that, in reality, the level of support they receive after turning 18, and certainly after turning 21, is very low, or completely non-existent, and that many young people feel that they have nobody to turn to. They also heard that some very vulnerable young people are housed in accommodation without support, some turn to alcohol or drugs, or even become involved in unlawful activities. They heard many times that care leavers should be supported for longer after they turn 18. Some said that all care leavers should be supported until they are 25. Others said that it should depend on the person.</p> <p>The committee heard calls for When I am Ready to be changed to help more young people stay in foster carers. They also heard that the age limit for leaving foster care under the scheme should be raised to 25 for all young people, not just those in education or training.</p> <p>The committee believes that all children in care should be entitled to the same fundamental levels of support, including children in residential care. However, they acknowledge that extending When I am Ready to children in residential care will probably be complicated, and might have unintended consequences.</p>	<p>Amend the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, fostering regulations and codes of practice and guidance relating to When I am Ready to extend the age limit for all young people who wish to participate in the scheme to 25, and to remove the financial and operational barriers that foster carers face when providing When I am Ready services.</p> <p>That the Welsh Government should carry out a review alongside care experienced young people and other key stakeholders to ascertain how When I am Ready can be extended to young people in residential care, the barriers to that extension and what actions can be taken to overcome those barriers. The review should report no later than December 2023.</p>
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<p>Housing and homelessness</p>	<p>The committee heard from lots of young people that finding safe, appropriate accommodation is a really big problem when they leave care. Some young people are put in accommodation which made them feel unsafe, such as emergency hostels, B&Bs and other accommodation with no on-site support. Professionals said that there is a big shortage of good quality housing and some even called it a “major crisis”.</p> <p>Young people said that they struggle to get hold of their YPA, or that they don’t offer them the support they need. One young person said she had been put on an ‘unallocated list’, and had to call the main office to ask for any YPA support on a duty rota basis. Some of the professionals spoken to had similar views. They also said that the law isn’t clear enough about what exactly YPAs are responsible for.</p>	<p>As part of umbrella reforms to corporate parenting, give care leavers priority in housing allocations and give care experienced people up to the age of 25 “priority need” status when homeless.</p> <p>That the Welsh Government carry out a review of Young Person’s Advisors in Wales, considering the concerns set out in the main report about YPAs and pathway plans, and the likely impacts of the reforms in the report for YPAs.</p> <p>As part of umbrella reforms to corporate parenting, place duties on the newly formed Commission for Tertiary Education to promote tertiary education to care experienced people.</p>
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5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out in relation to this specific report, as it is for information only.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Likewise, a Welsh Language Impact Assessment has not been carried out.

7 CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 Professionals, young people and parents with experience of the services took part in the inquiry itself.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 The work outlined in this report is delivered within children's services budgeted resources.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

10. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 10.1 The implementation of any future reforms will make a positive contribution towards the Council's Corporate Plan Vision of '*a County Borough that has high aspirations, is confident and promotes opportunity for all*'; as it will deliver against the specific priorities of '*People - Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone and Place - Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work*'.

- 10.2 It will also help the Council to meet three of the seven wellbeing goals that The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015' puts in place as follows:

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

10.3 The proposed changes are also consistent with the sustainable approach promoted by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act through the five ways of working:

10.4 Long-term – the recommendations seek to make a long-term difference to children’s lives, the way we work with families and the Council’s resources.

- Prevention – the recommendations are fundamentally focused upon strengthening the support provided to children and families to keep them together.
- Integration – the recommendations will require improved integration of social care and mental health service delivery to children.
- Collaboration – the recommendations will require collaboration with statutory and non-statutory service providers, and families.
- Involvement – Implementing the recommendations will require the involvement of children, families and staff.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 Corporate Parenting Board have been informed about the recommendations arising from the inquiry into radical reform of children’s services

11.2 When government announces its response and intentions in relation to the recommendations, children’s services will update Corporate Parenting Board alongside any next steps that are required in this local authority.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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