

Report

Cabinet



Part 1

Date: 19 June 2019

Subject **Expectation of reduction in the number of children who are looked after**

Purpose To ensure Cabinet Members are fully sighted on the expectations from Welsh Government for Children's Services and the challenges this poses.

Author Sally Jenkins

Ward City wide

Summary The First Minister has prioritised a reduction in the numbers of children who are looked after across Wales. This report focusses on the required plan submitted to Welsh Government and the proposed actions to meet the expectation of a reduction. In addition the report highlights the potential challenges this presents more widely across the Council.

Proposal **To share the Welsh Government expectation of a reduction children looked after numbers across the Council and with partner agencies including the Public Services Board**

Action by Sally Jenkins

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Children's Services staff
- Strategic Director for People
- Cabinet Member for Social Services

Please list here those officers and members you have consulted on this report.

Signed

Background

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 report 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.

There are no decisions arising from this report. Children's Services will be reporting regularly against the template to Welsh Government and continuing to work with all partners and take shared appropriate steps to address how to reduce the numbers of children who are looked after in the City.

Financial Summary

The proposals for Welsh Government are funded from with the core Children's Services budget.

The five LAs have submitted a proposal for additional funding from the ICF revenue streams. If this bid is successful the existing proposals to specifically target reducing the numbers of children subject to care proceedings will be strengthened.

Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
Continued rise in numbers of looked after children	H	M	The proposals in the Welsh Government template lay out mitigation. First discussions have taken place to widen the scope for involvement in responsibility for reducing the numbers of looked after children	Head of Children's Services, Strategic Director of People

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The work outlined in the Reduction template is part of the wider work of Children's Services which has been developed to support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and is focused on

Resilient Communities
Aspirational People

The Corporate Plan sets out the meeting of the Well Being Objectives. "Supporting children to remain safely with their families" is within Well Being Objective 3 – To enable people to be healthy, independent and resilient.

Options Available and considered

Not applicable

Preferred Option and Why

Not applicable

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

The report confirms there are no direct financial implications in the creation and implementation of the plan attached to this report. The Council has invested significantly in this area to keep up with growing demand which the action plan recognises and this is the case nationally in the UK.

Any reduction in looked after children should bring savings to the Council's budget and in the context of a significant projected financial challenge over the next 3 years and the significance of this budget area in relation to the overall budget, is welcomed. As the action plan acknowledges, this is a challenging aspiration given the complexity that surrounds the current situation.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the report at this stage, as Cabinet are simply being advised about the Welsh Government priority for reducing the numbers of children in care and the template response submitted on behalf of the Council, which sets out the proposed strategic approach to addressing this issue. The proposals set out in the template have no immediate financial or staffing implications, but will require cultural changes throughout the organisation. The emphasis on early intervention and prevention, to avoid taking children into care, is clearly beneficial to all concerned. However, this has to be balanced against the Council's statutory safeguarding duties under the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 and the increasing risk of satellite litigation and claims in "non removal" cases.

Comments of Head of People and Business Change

This report outlines how the Council will reduce the number of looked after children in its care. The proposals are closely linked to sustainable development and wellbeing principles with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention and working collaboratively to manage risk and enable children to remain safely with their families, with the aim of achieving better long-term outcomes for children. The improved wellbeing outcomes will benefit children themselves, their families and wider society and will also alleviate financial pressures on public services. There are no direct human resources implications to this report however cultural change will be required within the Council.

Comments of Cabinet Member

The Cabinet Member has approved the report for consideration by cabinet.

Local issues

Not applicable

Scrutiny Committees

None

Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 contains a Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force on 06 April 2011. The Act identifies a number of 'protected characteristics', namely age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; marriage and civil partnership. The new single duty aims to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the regular business of public authorities. Compliance with the duty is a legal obligation and is intended to result in better informed decision-making and policy development and services that are more effective for users. In exercising its functions, the Council must have due regard to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The Act is not overly prescriptive about the approach a public authority should take to ensure due regard, although it does set out that due regard to advancing equality involves: removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics; taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these differ from the need of other people; and encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

There is no decision linked to this report hence a FEIA will be completed as and when necessary.

Children and Families (Wales) Measure

Although no targeted consultation takes place specifically aimed at children and young people, consultation on planning applications and appeals is open to all of our citizens regardless of their age. Depending on the scale of the proposed development, applications are publicised via letters to neighbouring occupiers, site notices, press notices and/or social media. People replying to consultations are not required to provide their age or any other personal data, and therefore this data is not held or recorded in any way, and responses are not separated out by age.

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Report writers need to indicate how they have considered the five things public bodies need to think about to show they have applied the sustainable development principle put into place by the Act. You will need to demonstrate you have considered the following:

- Long term: the importance of balancing short- term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long – term needs
- Prevention: How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help us meet our objectives
- Integration: Consider how the proposals will impact on our wellbeing objectives, our wellbeing goals, other objectives or those of other public bodies
- Collaboration: have you considered how acting in collaboration with any other person or any other part of our organisation could help meet our wellbeing objectives
- Involvement: The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the wellbeing goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the City we serve.

Throughout this report the core principles of the WFG are referenced and interwoven. This is clearly a long term proposal which seeks to embed preventative working as a way to ensure good outcomes for citizens. Integration with other elements of the Council and public bodies is key to the success of the proposal. Working in collaboration with families and partner agencies is vital and drives this plan. Throughout Children's Services we are looking for new ways to fully involve and engage children, young people, parents and carers this plan is key to that work.

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Section 17(1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 imposes a duty on the Local Authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area.

Consultation

Comments received from wider consultation, including comments from elected members, are detailed in each application report in the attached schedule.

Background Papers

Template attached

Dated: 07 June 2019