

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee
Ymchwiliad i blant a phobl ifanc sydd wedi bod mewn gofal / Inquiry into care
experienced children and young people
PAC(5) CECYP - 03
Ymateb gan Rheolwyr Timau Troseddu Ieuentid Cymru / Evidence from Youth
Offending Team Managers Wales

This response relates to observations of the experiences of children and young people known to prevention and statutory interventions delivered by Welsh Youth Offending Services.

1. The overall cost to and value for money of the range public services aimed at improving outcomes for care experienced children and young people;

YMC are of the opinion that overall public expenditure is disproportionate and not geared towards or effective in improving outcomes for care experienced children. A high percentage of budgets are spent on children placed within profit making organisations. There is limited availability of placements that can deliver a therapeutic needs led service. Money “invested” in other placements can yield little by way of positive outcome and become counter-productive often resulting in placement breakdown and greater costs incurred. It is acknowledged that a lot of effort is now concentrating on avoiding children becoming looked after but numbers remain high. Once accommodated by a local authority, placements are often out of county making access to services and a return home more difficult.

The most important and powerful influence on looked after children is their placement and the carers ability to meet their holistic needs. There is such a critical shortage of foster placements and needs led residential placements that the market is now dominated by the private companies.

2. Whether the Welsh Government’s desired outcomes for care experienced children and young people are being delivered by the current levels of public expenditure;

YMC believe that the desired outcomes regardless of costs are undermined by the urgency to find a placement and the lack of choice to allow the placement to be truly based on need. Matching children to appropriate placements is almost impossible in the current climate and this naturally can have a negative impact on the child at the time and also on their future development as grounded adults.

There is the potential for backwards steps in relationship building between YOT’s and Children’s Services teams where the likelihood of a secure placement through

the criminal route is seen as a solution to a problem and not an unacceptable outcome. This is a reflection on the desperate situation placing authorities can find themselves in when a child or young person with challenging behaviour is being refused placements. Numbers of children and young people entering secure under criminal orders are reducing year on year this needs to be sustained, lack of appropriate “welfare” placements could have a negative impact on this progress

Placement in secure is not a long term plan – these children and young people need to be prioritised for release. These are not new messages, they are repeated time and again, for example, they are contained in “Tell them not to forget about us” 2006.

3. Whether the extent of spending specific to care experienced children and young people is sufficiently transparent across the range of public services;

Whilst local authority colleagues are transparent in relation to spend it is difficult to express confidence that the services delivered are as transparent. Contract management and holding providers to account can be difficult but crucial.

Although there is a deprivation grant for children who are looked after, the use of this additional funding in schools is not always transparent. It is not transparent what the money allocated to looked after children is used for.

Children who have been removed from families can very often be behind in their educational achievement due to the circumstances of the home life. Multiple moves can result in multiple schools or no school at all. The quality of education delivered in house by providers does not always meet minimum requirements or the child’s entitlement? When placed out of Wales the Welsh educational context is lost.

All looked after children are not currently, but should be prioritised for CAMHS consultation, assessment and therapy if required. CAMHS or other appropriate services should receive additional funding for Looked after Children specifically as currently they are unable to prioritise this group due to overstretched resources. The children with unresolved psychological issues whilst not presenting with mental illness are likely to present problems as adults (as supported by Adverse Childhood Experience research) therefore early identification and intervention by CAMHS/counselling/psychologist support should be considered as an important preventative approach to practice. Some Youth Offending Services where seconded

CAMHS nurses have been maintained within the team have utilised the nurse time to assist the residential unit where appropriate.

Whilst some authorities will prioritise care leavers for apprenticeships there could be greater focus in this. Being in the looked after system coupled with a criminal record are barriers to this group of young people, with enhanced support and allowances to maintain work placements this could be overcome. There should be increased opportunities for looked after children not to have to compete with peers.

4. Whether public bodies have placed sufficient emphasis on a long-term preventative spend approach, in line with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, to maximise the benefits of public expenditure for this group of children.

YMC support the emphasis on early access to services and early intervention for those families who need additional support building resilience and the vision of Wales having self-sufficient confident future generations. This over time should reduce the number of children needing to be looked after.

Youth Offending Services have seen a shift in delivery as we prevent or divert increasing numbers of children and young people away from the justice system. YMC have expressed concern that the funding to continue this very important area of delivery is short term and constantly under threat even though the evidence regarding effectiveness is unquestionable.

There are many projects and approaches across Wales where Youth Offending Services are working in partnership to divert children and young people from becoming looked after using the staff skill base and partner relations that have made reduction in first time entrants so successful. Youth Offending Services are pro-active in their efforts to de-criminalise children and young people who have become looked after through effective joined up approaches with police, judiciary and care providers.