

Flintshire County Council

Social Services

Children's Services

**Support and Placement
Strategy
2019 - 2022**

Contents

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Executive Summary | |
| 1 Introduction | |
| Being Looked After | |
| The Care and Support we Offer | |
| Purpose of the Strategy | |
| Voice of Children and Young People | |
| The Bigger Picture - How this Strategy fits with: | |
| ○ Local priorities | |
| ○ United Convention of the Rights of the Child | |
| ○ Legislation | |
| 2 Key Facts | |
| People | |
| Placements | |
| Quality | |
| Risk | |
| Cost | |
| 3 Understanding the challenges and solutions | |
| Edge of Care Services | |
| Foster Care | |
| Residential Care | |
| Leaving Care | |
| Children Looked After Educational Development and Attainment | |
| Partnership working | |
| 4 Making It Happen | |
| Our Action Plan | |
| 5 Appendices | |
| Appendix 1 – Placement Considerations | |
| Appendix 2 – What Children and Young People Say | |
| Appendix 3 – Underpinning legislation | |

Executive Summary

This Strategy details Flintshire County Council's commitment to ensure safe, high quality, support for children on the edge of care services and to the children we look after. Our aim is to support this cohort of children and young people so they are able to develop the skills and resilience to lead fulfilled lives. The Strategy is set out in 4 Sections. The key messages in each Section are summarised as:

Section 1: What we want to achieve

We want to:

1. **Safely reduce the number of children who need to be looked after.**

This means:

- ✓ enhancing our offer of effective and timely intensive family support
- ✓ working with families so they are able to develop their resilience and, where needed, develop their own support arrangements, particularly for children aged 16+
- ✓ establishing a multi-disciplinary team to provide intensive assessment and support to prevent problems from escalating and to support effective community based placements

2. **Support looked after children in local high quality placements.** This means:

- ✓ creating more local authority foster care placements
- ✓ targeted growth in the availability of independent fostering placements
- ✓ working with local and regional providers to reshape provision to meet local need
- ✓ stimulate growth in specialist provision for children and young people who have complex mental and emotional health needs
- ✓ developing our approach to commissioning with improved referrals enabling better placement matching

3. **Improve outcomes for looked after children.** This means:

- ✓ delivering our Corporate Parenting Strategy
- ✓ working with the independent sector to have a stronger focus on delivering positive outcomes

Section 2: Key Facts

In Flintshire we know that:

| | |
|------------|--|
| People | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ the number of children becoming looked after is increasing➤ there is a prominent issue relating to parental capacity/ability to safely care for their child due to their own mental health, domestic abuse, substance misuse➤ there is a cohort of young people with complex needs who require intensive support but do not have a diagnosable mental illness, and are outside thresholds for CAMHS. This cohort display dysregulated behaviour, emotional and social difficulties |
| Placements | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ we have 77 general foster carers➤ we need more foster carers to support children in the age categories of 10-14 and aged 15+➤ there are 177 registered residential beds across North Wales➤ with sufficient capacity to respond to the bed placement needs of the region➤ however, there are significant challenges in sourcing appropriate local placements for children and young people with complex needs. |
| Quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ we have evidence of good quality local placements |
| Cost | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ costs are increasing as demand increases |

Section 3. Understanding the challenges and solutions

Our analysis shows:

- A need to strengthen targeted/intensive support for children and families on the edge of care
- There are opportunities to side skill our workforce so that young people can access timely therapeutic support, whilst working with BCU to enhance access to assessment and support
- There is a need to enhance Flintshire's fostering service and expand service models
- We need to invest in a model of residential provision that supports good quality assessments to facilitate placement reunification and effective long term placement planning.
- A number of local residential providers have plans for expansion, which presents an opportunity to work in partnership to align the provision to meet local needs
- Children aged 16+ often have complex needs and placement options are limited we need a strategic approach to supporting the accommodation and support needs of young people aged 16-18 and for carer leavers

Section 4: Making It Happen

A focused action plan has been developed to translate the strategic intention into a set of deliverable actions. In summary this plan involves:

| | |
|-----|---|
| 1 | Safely reduce the number of children who need to be looked after |
| 1.1 | Expand our Family Group Conference service to support more families to develop their own solutions, and resilience, to appropriately care for their children |
| 1.2 | Work with Housing to develop new housing and support options for children aged 16+ and for care leavers |
| 1.3 | Work with schools to minimise exclusions |
| 1.4 | Review the scope, focus and operating model of our edge of care services to ensure effective and timely intensive family support |
| 1.5 | Establish a multi-disciplinary team to provide intensive assessment and support to prevent problems from escalating and to support effective community based placements |
| 1.6 | Increase the number of Special Guardianship Order arrangements so that more children are appropriately supported under this framework |
| 2 | Support looked after children in local high quality placements |
| 2.1 | Implement the 'Mockingbird model of foster care to extend the number and type of fostering placements available within area |
| 2.2 | Develop foster carer friendly policies to attract and retain foster carers. Specifically seek approval for a Council Tax reduction scheme for foster carers scheme and a Policy for Adaptations to foster carer homes |
| 2.3 | Work with a partner agency to develop a registered Children's Home to provide short term (up to 12 weeks) intensive support and assessment to de-escalate crisis/emergency situations and develop sustainable permanence plans |
| 2.4 | Work across North Wales to develop a regional Market position statement for residential and fostering provision to realign current independent provision to meet the needs of looked after children in North Wales and to develop provision where there are identified gaps |
| 2.5 | Implement a new referral and matching process for placements so that we are able to make positive commissioning choices |
| 3 | Improve outcomes for looked after children |
| 3.1 | Deliver the 2019/20 Action Plan for our Corporate Parenting Strategy |
| 3.2 | Implement an outcome contract monitoring framework that has been piloted with 2 registered Childrens Homes to enable a clear focus on the quality of provision and the outcomes that are being secured. |

Outcomes

The outcomes that we are seeking to achieve through the delivery of this work are:

- Improved health and well-being
- Better educational achievement and skills attainment
- Improved relationships within family, peers and friends
- Reducing high risk behaviours
- Ensuring young people are ready for independent living

1. Introduction

1.1 Being Looked After

Children Looked After are those children and young people aged between 0 to 19 years who cannot safely remain with their family and are cared for by the Local Authority. Children are accommodated by the Local Authority either through parental agreement or as a result of court proceedings because they are at significant risk of being harmed. A significant proportion of children coming into care have a history of neglect or abuse. In Flintshire, family dysfunction and abuse and neglect are the biggest contributors to children becoming looked after.

Children can enter the care system at different points in their lives and for a variety of reasons. These can range from family breakdown, abuse or neglect, to voluntary arrangements to support children's welfare whilst work is undertaken to rebuild relationships or parenting capacity. There are in the region of 240 looked after children in Flintshire. Whilst the majority live with their parents, foster parents or kinship carers, a small proportion of around 10% have more complex needs and need supportive residential placements.

1.2 The care and support we offer

Flintshire County Council are committed to ensuring safe, high quality support for children on the edge of care services and those we look after, so they are able to develop the skills and resilience to lead fulfilled lives.

Our main aim is to support families to care for their own children, and to prevent them, if safe to do so, from becoming a Child Looked After. This is what the majority of families want and where most children will best achieve their potential. This document is therefore aimed at those children who will only thrive where intervention is needed to prevent a child becoming looked after, or where a placement is needed to meet their assessed needs.

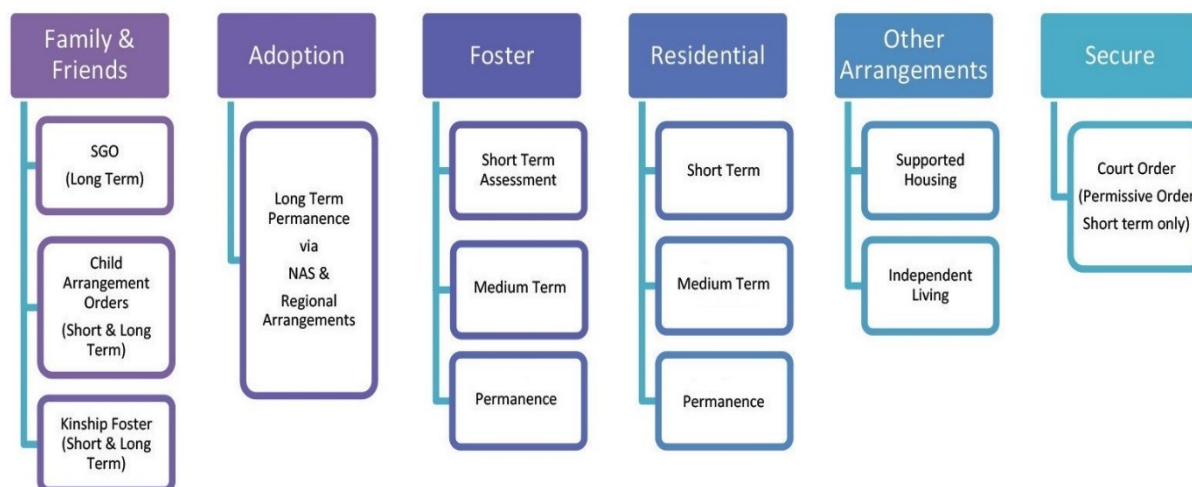
There is a local focus to enable children and young people to stay within their home county where possible, or within the North Wales region. Flintshire is geographically placed next to the border with England, so some children may be placed outside of Wales.

Where placements are commissioned we will seek to support locally based provision wherever possible, and where this is consistent with the needs, circumstances and wishes of the child/young person. Where local based provision is not available we will seek to provide support in North Wales before then considering the rest of Wales and England.

Outcome focused practice is essential to providing appropriate placements for children and to make sure that they are supported in what matters to them. This will be

bolstered by an efficient process to find the best placement at the best time. Appendix 1 sets out the factors that will be considered when making placements.

For the purpose of this strategy, placement types are represented as follows:



1.3 Purpose of the Strategy

This Strategy seeks to enable the Council to work on a local and regional level to:

- better manage the demand for placements through intensive family support/edge of care provision
- to monitor the number of Children Looked After, and where possible, and safe to do so, reduce it.
- provide care closer to home by increasing local placement choice
- ensure high quality care by supporting the market to be more responsive and outcome focused
- operate robust commissioning and contract management arrangements

1.4 The Voice of Children and Young People

Involving and listening to the voice of children and young people is central to our work. Our approach is to understand 'What Matters' to them, ensuring they are part of the decision making process and are kept well informed.

Feedback from 'Young Voices Out Loud' (Flintshire's Children Looked After participation group) indicates that children are able to ask questions to their social worker and that they are generally kept informed and updated with information about their placement. However, we need to improve how we involve young people in placement choices. We also need to ensure that we work with children and young people to improve their experiences in care. This work aligns closely to the need to develop greater placement choice and quality assurance.

More information on the views of our looked after children can be found in Appendix 2.

1.5 The Bigger Picture

1.5.1 How this strategy fits with local priorities

Flintshire County Council has a number of other strategies, groups, plans and programmes which will feed into and support the Placement Strategy. This Strategy compliments the delivery of:

- Looking after you: Flintshire Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan
- Flintshire County Council Plan
- Flintshire County Council Well-being Plan
- Public Service Board and Regional Partnership groups
- Procurement & Commissioning Strategy 2016- 2021
- Foster Carer Retention Schedule and Development Plan
- Flintshire Fostering Friendly Policy
- Flintshire County Council Youth Justice Priority Plan 2017-2020
- Flintshire Fostering Friendly Policy
- 'When I am Ready' framework

1.5.2 The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The work of Children's Social Services is embedded in the [United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). This Strategy supports the rights of children through the delivery of care and support which adopts the following articles:

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Article 3: | All organisations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child |
| Article 9: | Children should not be separated from their parents unless it is for their own good. |
| Article 12: | Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken in to account. |
| Article 19: | Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for, and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them. |
| Article 21: | Children who cannot be looked after by their own family must be looked after properly, by people who respect their religion, culture and language. |
| Article 24: | Children who have any kind of disability should have special care and support so they can lead full and independent lives. |
| Article 28: | Children have the right to an education. |
| Article 31: | All children have a right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of activities. |
| Article 37: | Children who break the law should not be treated cruelly. |
| Article 39: | Children who have been neglected or abused should receive special help to restore their self-respect. |

1.5.3 How this strategy fits with legislation

This Strategy has been informed and adheres to:

- ❖ Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- ❖ [Future Generations Act \(Wales\) 2015](#),
- ❖ [Welsh Language Standards Regulations 2017](#),
- ❖ [Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales Strategy \(2016\)](#).
- ❖ [Crime and Disorder Act 1998](#)

Appendix 3 explains how this strategy links to the legislation. In addition it is important to reflect the links with the '[Children and Young People First' Welsh Government / Youth Justice Board joint strategy \(2014\)](#) which has been developed to improve services for young people from Wales at risk of becoming involved in, or already in the youth justice system.

The [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) is designed to combat modern slavery in the UK and consolidates previous offences relating to trafficking and slavery in England and Wales. This includes Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) where it has been identified that Children Looked After are at particular risk of being exploited eg [County Lines](#).

This strategy should be read in conjunction with '**Looking After You: Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018 – 2023**', which is Flintshire County Council's commitment to providing excellent care for children who become looked after.



Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan Summary.

In 2019/2020 we will:

| Home | Education and Learning |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement 'This is Me' which involves children setting out what they like, and what is important to them, as part of our approach to finding the best possible placement for them ➤ Enhance our Fostering Service by: i) developing the 'Mocking Bird' model of foster care ii) agreeing a Policy to support Foster Carers who need their home adapted to enable them to care ➤ Review our current Contact Service so it can effectively support relationships with appropriate family and friends ➤ Develop a Council approach to preventing youth homelessness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensure looked after children are able to access the support they needed under the Additional Learning Need (ALN) reforms ➤ Work with our Vulnerable Learners Coordinator, and foster carers, to support good school attendance and to minimise exclusions ➤ Speak to look after children, and care leavers, to find out what information and skills they need to support further education and skills for independence. |
| Health and Well-being | Leisure |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hold an event exploring, and educating, children on the 5 ways to well-being ➤ Work with the health board to improve the timeliness of appointments and medical support for looked after children ➤ Provide opportunities for young people (11-18 years) to build self-esteem and positive self-image. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Promote awareness of DEWIS and the Family Information Service with foster carers to promote leisure services in the area. ➤ Help children create a newsletter or on-line platform that will list fun activities events and useful information. |
| Employment Opportunities | Leaving Care |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engage children in our 'Boost' scheme to give children the life skills to access and maintain employment. ➤ Explore work based schemes/experience for care leavers with local business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work with Barnardo's to ensure their housing advice service is accessible to care leavers ➤ Ensure every care leaver has an allocated Personal Advisor. |
| Voice of Looked After Children | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Build trust by ensuring Social Workers introduce themselves to children and explain their roles in a friendly way ➤ Produce a leaflet explaining the role of social workers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work with Young Voices Out Loud, and Voices from Care, to explore innovative ways to engage with looked children and care leavers |

2. The Key Facts

1.1 People

Profile of Children Looked After In Flintshire

At 31st March, 2019 the population of Children Looked After in Flintshire is 241.

The fullest data set available for the purposes of this strategy is up to 31st March 2018 and Welsh Government are using the following data as a starting point to develop expectations for a reduction in the numbers of looked after children. This information is publically available.

Flintshire has a comparatively low rate of looked after children. The years 2015 through to 2018 saw a period of stability with a 5% range in the number of looked after children (averaging between 210 – 220 children during these years). More recently there has been a 10% increase in the number of looked after children rising from 219 children on 31 March 2018 to 241 children on 31 March 2019. Even with this increase Flintshire's comparative rate of looked after children per 10,000 population is 70.8 compared to an All Wales average rate of 102 (as of 31 March 2018).

The main reasons for children and young people entering care at 31st March:

| | 2018 | 2019 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|
| Absent parenting | 6 | 2 |
| Abuse or Neglect | 29 | 28 |
| Family dysfunction | 20 | 38 |
| Disability | 0 | 2 |
| Family in acute stress | 9 | 9 |
| Parental illness or disability | 2 | 2 |
| Socially unacceptable behaviour | 3 | 1 |

Educational Needs of Children Looked After

The following table gives an overview of numbers of Children Looked After and young people within each key stages for 2016–17 accounting for 170 individuals of statutory school age.

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Group 1 - Foundation Phase | 37 |
| Group 2 - Key Stage 2 | 48 |
| Group 3 - Key Stage 3 | 35 |
| Group 4 - Key Stage 4 | 50 |

Many of the children and young people have additional learning needs (ALN) and require targeted support and intervention to enable them to engage with the provision available to them. For the majority of children and young people, this can be accessed within mainstream settings however, for a small minority, specialist provision may be required to ensure their needs are effectively met. The figures

below show that in line with this, the majority of Flintshire Children Looked After attended mainstream provision with around 20% of the cohort requiring specialist or small group provision. The majority of placements are accessed within Flintshire however, 9% of pupils accessed their education in other Welsh counties and a further 11% accessed provision in England.

Type of provision accessed by Flintshire LAC 2016-17

- 79% Mainstream LA Maintained Schools
- 9% Pupil Referral Units
- 10% Non-maintained day/residential school or hospital
- 2% Maintained Special School

Further breakdown of the cohort indicates that 31% were identified as having special educational needs (SEN) with approx. 12% of these having a Statement of SEN; this is significantly higher than the average expected across the whole school population where typically 20% of children and young people have SEN, only 2% of which would have a Statement.

For this cohort, the outcomes were also significantly impacted on by a range of factors such as repeated placement breakdowns, pregnancy, mental health issues, experience of child sexual exploitation and custodial sentences.

Attendance for primary aged Children Looked After was 92.95% and 84.02% for secondary. Whilst below the Local Authority averages of 94.8% and 93.9% respectively, the levels compare well given the very small Children Looked After cohorts in each sector.

There were no permanent exclusions of Children Looked After for 2016-17. During the year, there were 17 fixed-term exclusions, 6 within the Primary Sector, 11 within the Secondary Sector which resulted in a loss of 39 school days. The main reasons for exclusion were physical aggression towards staff or pupils. In all cases, preventative intervention strategies were discussed with the individual, school, Children Looked After Education coordinator and Social Worker to prevent recurrence and escalation. All schools concerned were supportive at these times, demonstrating their ongoing objective to implement their roles as corporate parents.

Youth Justice

Alongside those traditionally thought of as Children Looked After, some young people become Looked After through involvement with the youth justice system. During 2017/18, 12 young people were identified as Children Looked After within the Youth Justice Service with, with 9 young people LAC before becoming involved with the service and 3 young people becoming LAC following intervention. These young people are accommodated in custody, residential homes, secure children's homes or accommodated under a voluntary section 76.

In February 2018, 50 young people were open to Flintshire's Youth Justice Service. 70% have either had previous or current referrals to Social Services for Children, and 20% have been or are a Looked After Child (LAC).

2.2 Placements

2.2.1 National picture

There are a number of factors affecting the make-up of placements for children and young people on a national basis. Research by the WLGA (2017)¹ has identified a number of the pressures currently being experienced by Children's Services in Wales. These include:

- an increasing complexity of cases and increasing numbers becoming looked after negatively impacting on availability of appropriate placements and leading to high costs
- an ageing foster carer population
- increasing costs of residential care
- lack of consistency in outcomes for children
- placements being made away from the child's home local authority
- high costs of external placements

2.2.2 Capacity within the region

In 2018, The North Wales Social Care & Wellbeing Services Improvement Collaborative (NWSC&WSIC) drafted a Market Position Statement for Children & Young People's Residential Care + Fostering + Secure accommodation.

- There are 14 independent suppliers of residential care for children operating 41 settings and 177 registered places ('beds')
- 4 'in-house' Local Authority residential care establishments operating across North Wales offering a total of 41 registered places ('beds');
- There are no secure accommodation facilities located in North Wales.
- Placements by North Wales authorities account for 49% of placements in the Region

In children's services the local care market continues to be developed by fostering close working relationships and dialogue with independent sector providers in North Wales to deliver care and support for local children.

2.2.3 Placements of Flintshire Children Looked After

The profile of Flintshire County Council's Children Looked After on 31st March 2018, by age and placement type.

¹ <https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=1274>

| Row Labels | <1 | 1-4 | 5-9 | 10-15 | 16+ | TOTAL |
|-------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| In LA | 5 | 24 | 41 | 60 | 19 | 149 |
| Supported/independent | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Agency Foster Care | | | 1 | 5 | 1 | 7 |
| Flintshire Foster Care | 5 | 5 | 17 | 24 | 5 | 56 |
| Kinship Care | | 8 | 7 | 16 | 3 | 34 |
| Placed with parent | | 11 | 16 | 7 | 6 | 40 |
| Residential Home | | | | 6 | 3 | 9 |
| Residential School | | | | 2 | | 2 |
| Wales | 3 | 11 | 5 | 15 | 7 | 41 |
| Agency Foster Care | | 1 | | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| Flintshire Foster Care | 2 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 16 |
| Kinship Care | 1 | 1 | 4 | 3 | | 9 |
| Placed with parent | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Prospective adoption | | 3 | | | | 3 |
| Residential Home | | | | 4 | | 4 |
| Supported / Independent | | | | | 2 | 2 |
| England | 1 | 6 | 10 | 9 | 3 | 29 |
| Agency Foster Care | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Flintshire Foster Care | | | 1 | | | 1 |
| Kinship Care | | 2 | 9 | 3 | | 14 |
| Mother & Baby | 1 | | | | 1 | 2 |
| Placed with parent | | 2 | | 1 | | 3 |
| Prospective adoption | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Residential Home | | | | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 9 | 41 | 56 | 84 | 29 | 219 |

A further breakdown of the above information shows:

| | In county | Out of county (Wales) | England | Total (%age of CLA pop.) |
|-------------------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| Foster care | 63 | 22 | 2 | 87 (39.7%) |
| Residential setting | 11 | 4 | 7 | 22 (10 %) |
| Placed with parents | 40 | 1 | 3 | 44 |
| Kinship care | 34 | 9 | 14 | 57 |
| Prospective adoption | | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Mother and Baby | | | 2 | 2 |
| Supported / independent | 1 | 2 | | 3 |
| Total | 149 | 41 | 28 | 219 |

- 39.7% (87 children and young people) of the CLA population are in Foster Care placements.
- Only 27.6 % (24 children and young people) of CLA in Foster Care placements are placed out of county/country.
- 50% (110 children and young people) of the CLA population is family based solutions, with prospective adopters, supportive placements based on need or living independently.

| | 2017-18 | 2018-19 |
|--|---------|---------|
| Children and young people placed with parents through courts | 41 | 46 |
| Children and young people in Special Guardianship Orders | 5 | 6 |

Wherever possible we do look at creative approaches to placements and meeting needs:

Practice Example – Services working together

An individual in her early 20's with no formal diagnosis was referred to the Adult at Risk Team in 2018. The individual had a baby and due to concerns around her ability to care for the baby, Children's Services were involved.

The teams worked together and shared information around this individual and the difficulties she had supporting her baby. The Teams engaged with a private provider who had access to further services and initiated a 'parenting course' for the individual which enabled ongoing monitoring of ability around parenting, but highlighted significant areas that the individual continues to struggle with.

Based on the vulnerability of this individual and her care and support needs an adult placement was identified by the Adult at Risk Team. The adult placement is through a private provider and they were able to provide a mother and baby placement which is a reasonably new service.


A case was put together around the individual's care and support needs (SSWBA 2014; part 4 32 (1)b) and how the placement would also support the individual with the parenting role. This placement enabled the individual to maintain custody of her child. Joint funding was agreed between adult services and children's service to safeguard this vulnerable individual and her baby.

Ongoing monitoring/reviewing has been provided by the Children's Service in partnership with the Adults at Risk Team to ensure both the individual's needs are met and the child's developmental needs are being met.

This case is a long term case for the Adult At Risk Team and for Children's Services, but in terms of joint working it has been excellent and in line with legislation, reflecting the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 philosophy of making provision to improve well-being outcomes for an individual with care and support needs. It has involved co-operation between services and good partnership working (which is ongoing). It has involved 'out of the box ideas' that ensure the individual and her child have the opportunities to maintain their relationship in a safe and supported environment and ensure the individual and her child are at the centre of all care, support and protection plans.

Placement challenges

Areas where there has been difficulty in identifying locally available provision are detailed on the following table (in no particular order):

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>High frequency (8 – 10+ / Annum across the region as a whole)</p> | <p>1. Provision for those: with complex and challenging behavioural and social / learning needs: with attachment issues or trauma; with a risk of absconding / self-harm; with substance misuse issues; with mental health issues; with challenging behaviour because of their disability (Autism + LD); with additional learning needs; with a history of being expelled / previously placed in a Pupil Referral Unit; with a challenging need requiring a place of support / safety whilst they are undergoing health assessment⁽¹⁾; of a younger age (from 7 / 8 / 9 years of age has become more common in recent years), with experience of previous foster care placement breakdowns.</p> <p>⁽¹⁾ Extended waiting lists for health assessments are not uncommon, especially in the area of neurodevelopmental.</p> |
|  | <p>2. Crisis / emergency provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Crisis / emergency (where there are a mixture of causes and a mixture of sources): Birth families / foster carers; arrests; Police Protection Orders; a critical incident; occasionally from another Local Authority; custody; Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children; Unanticipated / unplanned and immediate requirement (where there is a need for the provider to have the ability to undertake a full assessment promptly in partnership with the placing Local Authority). |
| | <p>3. Provision for those stepping down from secure accommodation for children / young people who go missing &/or are an exploitation risk &/or with mental health issues, or provision aimed at preventing the need for stepping up care (including preventing admissions to hospital).</p> |
| | <p>4. Respite / Bridging respite placements⁽¹⁾:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Respite for families supporting children / young people with complex and challenging behavior; – Parents with their own mental health problems who need respite and/or not having their MH needs met – parents with LD also included here. <p>⁽¹⁾ This is recognised as being a multi-disciplinary need and one requiring a multi-disciplinary response (including adult care provision too, as, for example, parents / carers need support on occasion too).</p> |
| | <p>5. Therapeutic⁽¹⁾ provision providing a balanced offering of social / education and health / nursing support.</p> <p>⁽¹⁾ As defined under National Institute for Health & Care Excellence guidelines.</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 6. Dedicated provision for adolescent young people, particularly supporting them through transition to adulthood. Providers within the region are, however, developing their offering in this particular area. |
| | 7. Mother / parent with baby and / or young child. |
| | 8. Specialist provision for those with hearing and visual impairment. Provision is available in England (and within a reasonable travelling distance of North Wales), but, however, this is often some distance from North West Wales, particularly Gwynedd and Isle of Anglesey. |
| Low frequency (Less than 5 / Annum across the region as a whole) | 9. PMLD + degenerative conditions |
| | 10. Those with a learning disability + demand for children with autism |
| | 11. Provision for those with a history of arson or of experimenting with fire |

Areas where the partners will focus future attention:

- Addressing the above;
- Developing early intervention with families and developing the support services working with families (e.g. 'Team Around the Family') at the 'edge of care' to minimise the number of children and young people becoming looked after;
- Developing assessment and matching procedures to promote stability in placements;
- Identifying the best-value options for individuals on the basis of cost and quality (i.e. achieving agreed outcomes); Reviewing existing placements to ensure that best-value is being achieved;
- Rolling out the Quality Monitoring Framework developed by the Regional Commissioning Board. The framework has been developed to supplement, not replace or duplicate, regular LAC reviews by the partners and will focus on themes or areas of interest arising from CIW / OfSTED inspections, observations through contact with providers, feedback from children and young people or their families / carers, etc.;
- Working with the 4Cs through their monthly Issues Concerns & Compliments Reporting (ICC) and on the Annual Quality Performance Assessment (AQPA) activity;
- Supporting the development of foster care provision (both in-house and external) as an alternative to residential care, or as a means of reducing the time spent in residential care, and supporting children / young people to return to their family and home environment within the shortest time-frame;
- Joint-working opportunities with the 4Cs;

- Joint-development of services locally with providers;
- Early engagement with providers to facilitate early dialogue on future vacancies and improved matching;
- Identifying opportunities to develop community based services and early intervention / prevention support services to reduce the need for residential placements or to minimise the time spent in a residential placement;

2.3 Quality

2.3.1 Complaints

Of the 1,926 children and families who received care and support from Children's Services in the year 2017/18, 49 individuals complained about the service they received (2.5%), compared to 46 individuals complaining during 2016/17 (2.5%). All complaints are scrutinised and used to improve both services as part of a 'lessons learned' process.

2.3.2 Quality of Case Files

Case file audits are completed every Quarter for all teams, and moderated by a managers' panel against quantitative and qualitative guidance. 95 files were scored between April 2017 and September 2018, spanning all teams, including Fostering and Youth Justice. 47 files were scored as Good and 17 as very good.

Over the 18 months we have seen an improvement in the quality of files; in the first half of 2017/18 there were no very good files and 4 were judged to be inadequate. In comparison, files audited in the first half of 2018/19 were judged as very good in 14 cases, with only one inadequate. Themes arising from case file audits include missing or incomplete chronologies, supervision records missing from Paris and Part 3 Assessments not completed in full. Remedial actions are noted at the audit panel and tracked.

2.3.3 Review of case files

Reviews are undertaken in line with legislation and Flintshire County Council's File Management & Case Recording Policy.

The Local Authority also reviews an assessment in the following instances:

- where there has been a significant change in identified outcomes, family needs or circumstances;
- transition from childhood to adulthood

The child or young person, family or those acting on their behalf, has the right to request a re-assessment of their needs at any time and these must be acted upon quickly and without delay.

2.3.4 Legal Advice

Social services access formal legal advice through weekly LAMs (Legal Advice Meetings). Social workers provide a briefing note comprising of a brief synopsis of

the situation with a particular family and the issue advice is sought on. Relevant documents and assessments are attached to the briefing note. Social Services and Legal are currently reviewing the processes for these meeting going forward LAMs.

2.3.5 Feedback from Children and Young People

As part of the all Wales qualitative performance data collection Flintshire County Council contacted approximately 340 children and young people in Children's Social Services who have a support plan up to the age of 18. They received a questionnaire which was designed by Welsh Government.

45 questionnaires were returned which accounted for 13% response rate. Of those there were 22 looked after children and 23 young people who were receiving other services. The majority of young people who took part said that they were provided with the right information and advice, felt consulted and involved in decisions, and were shown dignity and respect by our services. Young people praised many aspects of care and support and identified some areas where they wished to see some improvement.

A Participation Officer is based in Children's Services to listen to children's views and support them to be involved in the behind the scenes work of Social Services. This officer is a bridge between you and the professionals and councillors whose job it is to make sure that looked after children have a voice in everything the council does.

The Officer also facilitates a Participation Group. They will also run the participation group. The Young Voices Out Loud' (Flintshire's Children Looked After participation group) is an important and fun way for Children Looked After to know about changes to social services, understand their rights and be able to share their experiences with council staff. Members of the group also attend the Children's Services Forum which brings councillors, staff and children together to discuss current issues.

We support a programme called Bright Spots, which is funded by the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Early in 2018 all of our looked after children aged 4-18 years were asked to participate in an online survey. We wanted to find out how they feel about their support, relationships and opportunities. 61 (36%) responded, and here are some of the key findings:

What we are doing well:

- The majority feel safe and settled in their placements and trust their carers
- More young people (96%) in Flintshire feel they are being taught life skills compared with young people (86%) in other local authorities.
- School is working well for all the youngest children aged 4-7 years.

What we need to improve:

- Making sure that reviews of contact arrangements consider the views of all children.
- Providing opportunities for young people aged 11-18yrs to build self-esteem and positive self-image.
- Considering how young people might be reassured about the support they can expect to receive in the future.

2.4 Managing Risk

Flintshire County Council utilise the [Risk 2 model](#). This Risk Assessment Tool provides a framework for reviewing the critical components of risk in Children's Services. It prompts the worker to consider each of these components in turn, forming a view or judgement about these. It may identify areas where the information is not adequate, available or where the worker remains unclear. This prompts workers to consider follow up actions to obtain further information or use specialist tools to explore specific areas.

A pre-birth risk assessment is also undertaken and areas where the unborn child and young parents are explored. Section 47 investigations are also a key component of identifying and managing risk to children and young people.

A key component of all assessments is looking positively at the protective factors available within the family, such as the child's environment, extended family, and networks.

2.5 Cost

2.5.1 The Costs of Placements

Flintshire County Council's budget for the Looked After Population in 2017/18 was around £7.8 million, with approximately 65% of this being spent on out of county placements. On average, Flintshire County Council spend £21,562 per child looked after (2017-18) compared to a national average spend of £20,970.

| Financial year | Internal Placement Costs (Fostering) | External Placement Costs - Out of County Expenditure |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 2015-16 | 2,474,071 | 3,467,648 |
| 2016-17 | 2,518,637 | 4,328,712 |
| 2017-18 | 2,685,241 | 5,135,514 |

A crude calculation of the cost of placements can be summarised as¹:

| Provider | Average cost of placement per year |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Local authority fostering | £23,327 |
| Independent Fostering Agency | £43,378 |
| Residential Placement | £185,380 |

There are clear financial advantages in ensuring that we maximise the potential of in house fostering provision.

2.5.2 Local Investment

In terms of local investment, Flintshire county Council has committed to the following projects to support Children's Services through the Integrated Care Fund (ICF):

| Project | | £ 2018/19 | £ 2019/20 |
|---------|--|--------------|--------------|
|---------|--|--------------|--------------|

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|----------------|----------|
| Additional Social Work Capacity | To meet the needs of children with complex needs | £45,227 | |
| Diana Service | For additional capacity for meeting the needs of children with complex needs (often with a life limiting illness or condition). Support was provided at home as an alternative to hospital stay (e.g. within Alder Hey) | £15,334 | £13,768 |
| Repatriation and Prevention Service | Third Sector (A4C) contract to meet the needs of children and families. Therapeutic support offered to reduce the risk of family breakdown. | £248,439 | £250,000 |
| Arosfa | Funding to extend the provision for respite services for children with disabilities. However, a capital development is to be complete first | Circa £200,000 | |
| Family Group Conferencing | Extension of the programme to support families facing crisis. | | £31,000 |
| Early Intervention (Edge of Care) | Children services within the local authority are receiving funding to support in activity to support children with complex needs and those at the edge of care | £634,545 | £638,732 |

3 Understanding the challenges and solutions

3.1 Edge of Care Services

Challenges

It is commonly acknowledged that early intervention and prevention services, including therapeutic support, can help families identify areas where they may need additional support, improving relationships and strengthening bonds to enable children and young people to live with their families.

Those who need support may be unaware of the support available or be reluctant to contact services in fear of the outcome. This delay can lead to escalation of the situation to crisis point. Many support services for families are also not available at weekends or out of hours, further contributing to escalation.

What we already do

The Flintshire Parenting Framework (2018) outlines a structure for the further development of parenting programmes and forms part of the wider strategy for early intervention and prevention in Flintshire. This work is overseen by the Parenting in Flintshire multi-agency Strategy Group. The programmes aim to support the development of parenting techniques with parents/carers to strengthen family relationships and family resilience and to reduce family breakdown.

The Early Help Hub is a multi agency early help resource for children and families demonstrating 2 or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Partners include Social Services, Police, Health, Youth Justice, Housing, Flintshire Customer Connects, Education, Family Information Service, Early Years Support, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council (FLVC).

The Targeted Support Team (TST) provide support for families to stabilise relationships, develop their capacity, reducing the need for escalation to more high level services. These interventions involve the Team Around the Family (TAF), Flintshire Meeting Services and the Family Information Service.

Flintshire Meeting Services approach is aimed at keeping families together wherever possible. Families are offered a Family Group Meeting at the earliest opportunity, to prevent them from reaching crisis. Family Group Meetings explore if wider family members or connected persons would be willing to put themselves forward to be assessed to care for the child. Further funding has been made available to strengthen this approach.

Adolescent Strategy Meetings are called to support young people and their families to strengthen bonds and prevent the young person from entering care. The families are supported with up to 196 weeks of intensive family support.

The 'Parent and Child Together Placement' recruitment campaign is beginning to come to fruition. This aims to keep children with their parents in a specially assessed foster care setting.

Flintshire closely scrutinise decisions about whether older young people should be

taken into care and, in particular, what difference can be achieved at this relatively late stage.

The REFLECT Service supports women who have had one or more child/ren removed through care proceedings and are at high risk of having children who will be subject to same experience. Through the delivery of an evidence based model you will support women to avoid pregnancy that could lead to care proceedings and removal of their children in the future. This will support women (and their partners) to achieve positive change in their lives so that they can break this cycle.

Areas for further development

- To ensure that children do not become looked after if appropriate support can prevent escalation beyond the immediate family's ability to stay together. This edge of care support will also look at commissioning short periods of temporary care where necessary so that appropriate work can take place to facilitate ongoing family reunification.
- To review the method of scrutiny of whether older children should be taken into care and whether it is realistic that significant improvements in protection and outcomes can be achieved through removal. This will ensure that those older young people entering care are appropriately supported as this age bracket includes key transitions for these children, in terms of health, education, social and emotional development. A wide range of service provision and support services are required to support this population

3.2 Foster Care

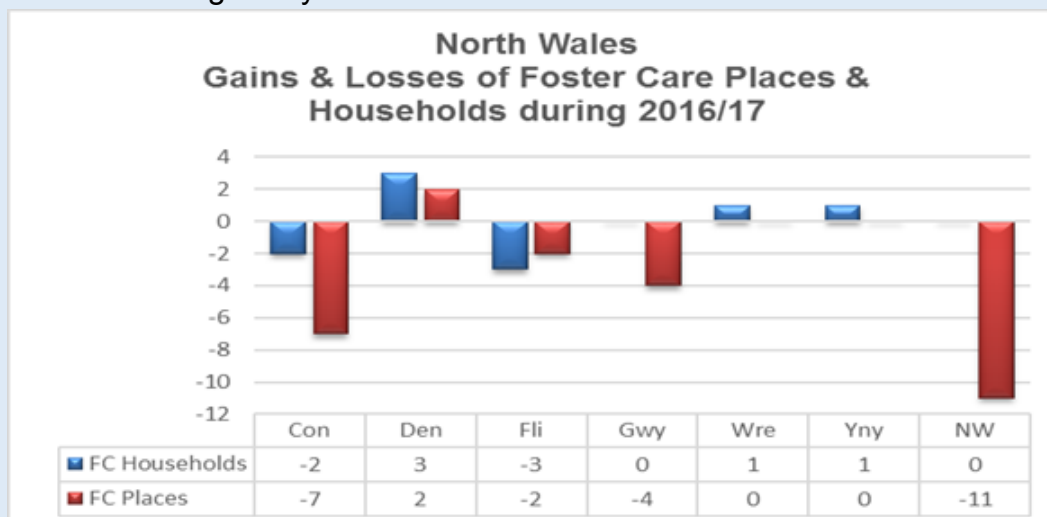
Challenges

There are a number of challenges facing the foster care sector both locally and nationally.

Notably, there is a high demand for foster placements locally and Flintshire County Council are still unable to meet the demand for placements. It is recognised that investment in fostering is a critical interdependent component of reducing and managing the demand for residential placements.

There are challenges in supporting older children and sibling groups and finding foster carers to support this cohort is a challenge. Those children aged 16+ often have complex needs and placement options are also limited.

In the 12 month period 2016/17 there were 41 fostering placements and 27 households lost regionally.



The WLGA's research also highlights a number of other national challenges:

- high staff turnover and vacancy rates;
- the increasing complexity of the work leading to more (experienced) people leaving the profession;
- high profile cases/ scandals;
- increasing complexity of cases and increasing numbers becoming looked after negatively impacting on availability of appropriate placements and leading to high costs;
- an ageing foster carer population;
- placements being made away from the child's home local authority;
- The levels and complexity of referrals at a local level are mirrored at a national level and are impacting negatively on both the availability and cost of placements.

The total number of approved Foster Carers and their locations:

| Total number of approved Foster Carers | In County boundaries | Out of County | Out of Country | Out of UK |
|--|----------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|
| Foster Carers | 63 | 13 | 1 | 1 |
| Kinship Carers | 32 | 6 | 12 | - |
| TOTAL (128) | 95 | 19 | 13 | 1 |

Of the total of 128 carers, 74% are based within Flintshire.

What we already do

Flintshire County Council initially look for family based solutions when sourcing care. Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) expands Parental Responsibility to those who have sought them. The SGO Support Service, supports foster carers with SGOs and the transition in to this new role.

Over the past 5 years, the number of children and young people in 'kinship' or 'connected persons' placements has also double, which has supported the overall capacity of the fostering service.

We also work to reunite families where possible and have put in place a number of supportive systems to enable this. Families are given social work support throughout, and where identified more psychological and therapeutic services are available.

We continue to support a small number of Children Looked After through the establishment of a Repatriation and Prevention Service (RAP) funded through Integrated Care Fund (ICF). The service provides intensive therapeutic support for Children Looked After with support from experienced foster carers. The service is a partnership between the local authority, health, CAMHS and Action for Children. The overall aim of the service is to:

- Reduce out of county placements
- Repatriate young people to Flintshire's care
- Stabilise placements at risk of breakdown.

Flintshire County Council are proud to have a pool of experienced and committed foster carers. Through our successful foster care programme and 'Skills for Care' training, we have been able to grow foster carer numbers.

The [Foster with Flintshire](#) portal has been developed to promote Fostering roles. The site contains a wealth of information, resources and stories from some of Flintshire's current Foster Carers.

Flintshire will be the first Council in Wales to introduce the internationally-endorsed Mockingbird model for foster placements in Flintshire. This model will encourage local communities of foster carers to engage with each other and offer an 'extended family model' of support to Children Looked After, and each other in their caring role. The model will aim to replicate how families can organically support and sustain one another's well-being and will help to encourage Children Looked After to develop greater peer support.

There is currently a surplus of enquiries from those who are interested in fostering babies and/or young children. Given the current population of Children Looked After, the demand is for foster carers who have the skills and experience to support teenagers and sibling groups. We have now targeted our recruitment strategy to address.

Flintshire is supporting foster carers in making necessary adaptations to their home to provide adequate space for children to live and thrive in their care. Grants funding can be used to: adapt or convert an existing room into more useable space, extend a property to create extra room(s) or help towards purchasing a new larger or more suitable property.

Agency staff are used when no options have been identified locally.

Areas for further development

- Increasing foster care provision is a priority area. Flintshire will consider initiatives that might include introducing additional incentives to encourage families to become foster carers (e.g. financial incentives and housing allocation points).

- Flintshire will explore options for a possible hybrid enhanced fostering service and will discuss this with the fostering market. This could include looking at models more akin to “shared lives” services for adults that could be adapted.
- We will seek to commission and develop packages of support for foster carers who are caring for children and young people with complex needs. Adequate training and support for carers is paramount. Appropriate, loving and supportive care is to be provided to those children and young people who have the most complex needs in an environment most similar to a family home. Respite needs to be built into care plans to support the placements.
- Exploration of appropriate training and remuneration for foster carers in order to create capacity to support the needs of high risk individuals, ensure closer proximity to supportive networks (education/peers etc) and reduce cost of out of county placements.
- Look at improving care planning to anticipate and respond to possible placement breakdown.

3.3 Residential Care

Challenges

Despite our commitment to prevention and early intervention, there will always be a small proportion of looked after children who need residential placements, and we want to make sure that these children and young people can remain close to home.

An increasing demand for residential places and a lack of supply in local residential providers has resulted in a ‘providers market’. Providers are able to be more selective of the young people they accept, which may result in those with higher levels of complex needs and behavioural challenges being more difficult to place. This may be due to the skill/expertise of the provider, a concern about how behaviour might impact other residents and the local community, and worries that all of this might impact upon the outcomes of the service.

Alongside the financial pressure, there is also a pressure on staff time. In the event of a bed available, a number of local services may be seeking to secure it, resulting in competition.

This high demand puts pressure on Local Authority finances, with providers able to dictate the cost of the provision.

A focus is needed on initiatives designed to reduce the number of children who are placed out of county from the outset. Our research tells us that while children have been appropriately placed in residential settings based on their presenting needs, there had been few viable alternative approaches available which could have contributed to a de-escalation, eliminating the need for out of county placement.

Our analysis suggests that there is little connection between changes in the proportion of Children Looked After placed out-of-area:

- total number and/or changes in the total number of Children Looked After;
- rate and/or changes to the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 children;
- change in average spend per looked after child; or
- changes in the usage of different types of placement.

What we already do

Flintshire has mapped the current level of high cost, low volume placements for Children Looked After. This is heavily reliant on the independent sector as there is no residential service provision within the local authority area.

The RAP service described in 3.2 aims to reduce the need for out of county care for some young people, and to, where appropriate, bring others back to in-house provision.

A recent change has been made to centralise placement sourcing from Social Workers to within the Brokerage Team, who are experienced in this work. The team report that they may be contacting up to 38 providers to find a placement for one young person.

Flintshire County Council has adopted a market facilitation approach to underpin its current Placement Strategy. Market facilitation moves the market model away from a monopsony (single purchaser/range of suppliers) to a 'marketplace'. Here the role of the Local Authority is to facilitate the development of personalised, effective and sustainable support for people who need it.

Arosfa offers respite/short breaks for children with profound disabilities in a safe and secure environment to support them to remain within their own family setting. This service, which is currently open 324 nights a year at average of 27 nights a month, enables young people to build and improve on independent skills, opportunity to mix with their peers as well as develop their full potential which maximises opportunities for their future.

Areas for further development

- Our priorities will be to continue to improve local placement options for children, and to improve outcomes for looked after children and disabled children.
- Joint venture -12 week residential assessment and support Hub to enable a multi-agency assessment of young people's needs with a view to facilitating family reunification.
- Work is underway to develop the services delivered at Arosfa and we hope to expand the service to include residential beds in the near future.
- We will look to expand residential provision locally and regionally. We will map the local independent residential market and establish a co-productive approach to working with stakeholders. We will investigate the feasibility of establishing new, local authority-run children's home provision, as well as looking to where existing providers have plans to expand. This approach may increase the control that the local authority has over the nature and quality of

provision and link it in with other agencies and programs of support.

3.4 Leaving Care

Challenges

We must ensure that we are able to put support in place for young people as they engage in the adult world of employment, training and education to enable them to pursue their career of choice, housing needs and avoid debt. Alongside this, we must continue to support the young person to achieve well-being, through providing information and support to help them make informed choices to follow a positive life path.

What we already do

- Implementing the 'When I'm ready' scheme
- Barnardos' Housing Advice Project will offer advice and assistance to young people to access emergency, short term and longer term housing options that are secure and sustainable. This includes Care Leavers.
- All Care Leavers continue to have an allocated Personal Advisor (PA) to provide them with practical support and advice to help them live independently.
- Accommodation is made available to Care Leavers e.g. Council stock
- Managing budgets can be very challenging for most people, but particularly so for care leavers who are typically characterized by limited family support networks and who are faced with paying bills at a young age. The Children's Commissioner has highlighted this issue, and we are leading the way in responding to it by agreeing a landmark policy to secure council tax discounts for young people who have left care to live independently. Most care leavers are entitled to some level of reduction on their council tax, and awards have totaled 1.9k to date.
- Implement the [Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales](#) to support young people as they make their individual journeys towards leaving care
- All Care Leavers have a Pathway Plan which considers the young person's health and development, education and training, employment, contact with family and money management. Young people have also given feedback about the pathway plan document that children looked after will receive when they become care leavers, ensuring that the information recorded on this matters to them.
- We have been working hard to improve opportunities for care leavers. BOOST is an acronym for 'Be Optimistic about Opportunities for Support and Training' and was introduced in April 2018. A corporate mentoring scheme for care leavers aged 16 and over, it offers them work experience of one day a week over a twelve week period. This gives the young people

a taste of working in an area of interest, and provides them with mentor support. After completion, the young person has experience for their CV, a reference and an opportunity to practice interview skills, all of which boost their chances of gaining employment. To date we have secured five placements with support from Aura Leisure, Streetscene, Marleyfield Care Home and County Hall, and one young person has gained paid employment.

Areas for further development

- Practical and emotional support from a Personal Advisor (PA), available until care leavers reach 25.
- Support to find secure and stable housing. This includes putting care leavers in 'band 1', the highest band for housing.
- Care Leavers are supported with access to advice and support about money. This includes letting care leavers know what grants can be accessed and the support available to help them manage their finances.
- To improve employment opportunities for care leavers through:
 - Implementing the BOOST Project, a programme of work experience using Council services to provide structured work experience opportunities and mentoring to care leavers, and actively providing corporate parent support.
 - Promoting the Council's apprenticeship scheme to support care leavers.
- Support to access employment, education and training, including financial support for Higher Education and working with a PA to find employment or training that meets the individual's interests.
- Support to make ensure that care leavers do not go on to live in poverty as they become more independent.

These actions are managed as part of the Action Plan accompanying 'Looking After You: Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018 – 2023

3.5 Children Looked After Educational Development and Attainment

Challenges

Despite the support services in place, the educational attainment of Flintshire Children Looked After is low compared to those not Looked After in some key stages, particularly KS4:

- Foundation Phase - Of the cohort of 12, 6 (50%) achieved the Foundation Phase Indicator. Of this group 3 (25%) had a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- Key Stage 2 - In 2016-17 there were 48 learners within KS2, 11 of which were subject to the End of Key Stage assessment at the end of Year 6. Of the 11, 4 (36%) achieved the Core Subject Indicators (CSI). Of this group, 82% were identified as having SEN with 27% of these having a Statement of SEN.

- Key Stage 3 - In 2016 - 17 there were 35 learners within KS3, 5 of which were subject to the end of key stage assessment at the end of Year 9, all of which (100%) achieved the CSI. None of the pupils were identified as having SEN.
- Key Stage 4 - In 2016 - 17 there were 50 learners within KS4, 15 of which were subject to assessment at the end of Year 11. Of the 15, only 14 underwent formal assessment, with 50% achieving a formally recognised qualification, 1 pupil achieving the Level 1 threshold and none of the cohort achieving Level 2 or Level 2 plus. For this group 26% were identified as having SEN, with 7% having a Statement of SEN.

Given the small numbers of Children Looked After, data comparisons can be meaningless and it is important to consider outcomes on an individual basis. Whilst the overall outcomes do not appear to be positive for this particular cohort, it is pleasing to note that of the 15 individuals, 13 of the 15 have overcome the factors affecting their success and have re-engaged in education to improve their outcomes and future prospects.

Cross-border arrangements can provide additional challenge. There are very different practices operating in England and across the authorities in Wales with regard to how funding and services are allocated to Children Looked After. This creates challenges in obtaining parity of service and provision when accessing provision in non-Flintshire establishments. The authority also comes under pressure to meet the additional needs of non-Flintshire Looked After, with the host authority having to provide for pupils with additional needs where a Statement of Special Educational Need is not in place. This can create resourcing issues for schools.

Many key messages are outlined in [‘Exploring the educational experiences and aspirations of Looked After Children and young people \(LACYF\) in Wales’](#) (Cascade 2016).

What we do already

The education of Children Looked After is a high priority in Flintshire and many initiatives have been instigated to improve the outcomes for this group of vulnerable learners.

Senior staff from Social Services and Education & Youth portfolios meet regularly at strategic and operational levels.

Flintshire County Council employ a Children Looked After Education Coordinator, whose role is to maximize the education attainment of Children Looked After, monitor attainment and ensure that the voice of the young person is heard in their own educational development.

The Flintshire Children Looked After Education Coordinator has focused on strengthening the links between Children’s Services and Education Inclusion Service staff to support better outcomes for Children Looked After. Communication between both services has improved and a greater awareness of the educational procedures has been shared as has knowledge of how schools can support their Children Looked After learners via the Children Looked After Pupil Development Grant.

The Children Looked After Strategic Planning Group comprising of a range of professionals who oversee the education of Children Looked After, meet every 6 weeks. Members include representation from the Behaviour Support Service, Primary and Secondary schools, Children's Services, Pupil Referral Units, Education Welfare Service, Education Psychology Service and Independent Reviewing Officers along with the Children Looked After Education Coordinator. All areas of Children Looked After education and welfare are discussed with the aim of improving services and influencing policy and procedure. This group has been acknowledged as a model of good practice by Welsh Government, GwE and external auditors.

The Strategic Planning Group holds the remit to develop plans for use of the Children Looked After Pupil Development Grant in line with the regional funding model set by Welsh Government in 2015-16. GwE has a lead role in supporting a regional policy approach. The Flintshire Children Looked After Education Coordinator is a member of the National and Regional groups, disseminating all relevant information to schools and other professionals as and when required.

Training has been identified as a key priority for all Flintshire staff who support LAC learners. Alongside the wider relationship trauma training, specific training has been provided to 21 key representatives from schools and the Local Authority by 'Touchbase Training' via the University of Brighton; Louise Bomber is nationally recognised in the training of professionals in 'Attachment Theory' and associated best practice. All candidates were offered 15 weeks training at Level 6 to become 'Attachment Leads' within their schools and cluster groups, with a view to sharing and developing good practice across the authority. Flintshire was the first authority in Wales to train staff to level 6 and this has resulted in greater awareness and understanding across schools as a result. A network has been established to disseminate information and share effective practice.

Communication and interaction with a wider range of interventions such as Curriculum enrichment opportunities and personalised support through TRAC has also supported a reduction in the number of Children Looked After learners who become NEET (Not in Education Employment or Training) as individual cases are identified in a timely manner resulting in referrals to appropriate partners/providers. Of the 2016-17 cohort, 2 individuals were classed as NEET on the census date.

GwE have developed a [Regional Plan for Children Looked After and Vulnerable Learners](#)

Flintshire Integrated Youth Provisions Resilience Team works to help young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) build their confidence and resilience.

Staff from Flintshire Portfolio of Pupil Referral Units are undertaking outreach work to support staff in mainstream schools develop skills and methods to work with pupils who would benefit from additional support. The PPRU are also leading on the implementation of the National Nurturing Schools' Programme and the use of the Boxall Profiling Tool.

TRAC and ADTRAC programmes provides a range of additional interventions to

targeted individuals including support for attendance/engagement, access to an alternative curriculum and also individual counselling. Figures are not available on how many of the young people supported are Children Looked After.

Areas for further development

- To avoid disruptions, social services and education departments should consider ways in which the child continues to attend the same school even if residential placement changes happen.
- Work with GwE and other North Wales authorities to revise the arrangements for the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) and cross-border working to ensure consistency of approach in access to service, provision and additionality offered through the PDG.
- On-going workshops and networking events continue to 'up-skill' staff and develop awareness to all school staff of the needs of children who have difficulties in making positive relationships due to past distress. Child Mental Health and Trauma is a key area of focus which has been identified by Flintshire staff, with the aim to better understand the need of the child and better support the staff who engage with them.
- Roll out the use of Boxall Profiling to all schools to identify individual needs and appropriate intervention strategies. Licenses for the Boxall Profile Assessment Tool are purchased for all schools to enable them to assess the social emotional and behavioral difficulties for children and young people.
- The National Nurturing Schools Programme is to be piloted locally. This programme allows staff to develop personally and professionally whilst embedding a nurturing culture throughout their schools, enhancing teaching and learning, promoting healthy outcomes for children and young people. This is achieved by focusing on emotional needs and development as well as academic learning in a whole school environment.

3.6 Secure Accommodation

Challenges

There are challenges that there are currently no secure accommodation facilities in North Wales, necessitating placement outside of the area, removing children from their families and cares

It is a challenge to find suitable placements for young people following a sentence and reliance is on the Social Services brokerage systems.

What we already do

The Youth Justice Plan 2017-2020 incorporates wider initiatives and priorities including responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Integrated

Offender Management (IOM), Youth to Adult (Y2A) transitions and the Youth Justice Board's Enhanced Case Management (ECM), trauma informed practice and Participation Strategy. The Plan has been developed with the Executive Management Board, Partner Agencies and following consultation with YJS Managers and Practitioners.

The Youth Justice Service and the Executive Management Board is keen to develop its understanding of the current cohort of young people entering the Youth Justice System through a Young People's Audit.

Changes in the Executive Board membership have now ensured that there is an appropriate representative from Social Services for Children from Senior Manager and Chief Officer level. In addition, Operations Managers from the Youth Justice Service and Social Services for Children meet regularly to review working arrangements between the two teams.

Multi-agency panels are in place

- Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Panel
- Resettlement and Reintegration Panel

Flintshire Youth Justice Service continues to respond to the needs of young people during and following their release from custody. The Flintshire Resettlement and Reintegration Panel continues to meet bi monthly to review transition arrangements and adherence to national strategies including *National Pathway for Homelessness Services to Children, Young People and Adults in the Secure Estate* and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

Flintshire Youth Justice Service will also be working with Flintshire Social Services for Children to review current service level agreements in this area.

The YJS continues to support the Flintshire Social Services for Children Early Help Hub and has ensured staff are trained on the model

Flintshire Youth Justice Service continues undertake a schedule of case file audits and has participated in a joint audit with Social Services for Children.

Areas for further development - *These action are managed and reported under The Youth Justice Plan 2017-2020*

- Undertake a review and needs assessment of the current accommodation available for young people involved in the criminal justice system.
- Continue to promote closer multi-agency working and review with Social Services for Children and ensure a designated resource is in place.
- Continue to promote closer multi-agency working and review with Social Services for Children and ensure a designated resource is in place.
- The Youth Justice Service to commit to further training to improve access between YJS and Social Services for Children electronic case management systems to improve the sharing of information

- Increase opportunities for young people to provide feedback on their experiences of Youth Custody.

3.7 Partnership Working

Challenges

Flintshire County Council are ensuring that we link with in with regional developments and not duplicating any work locally.

What we already do

- The help available for children who need support with mental and emotional health is consistently being raised as a concern. Across North Wales there is high demand for specialist Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), with the volume of referrals exceeding the service's capacity to respond. The situation is compounded by the high proportion of referrals relating to young people who have emotional, behavioral and mental health issues, with a particular increase in children experiencing issues with attachment and self-harm. These needs fall outside the threshold for specialist mental health support from CAMHS and, regionally, there is a clear recognition that there should be appropriate therapeutic support for these children and their families.

North Wales Councils and the Health Board have secured funding from the Welsh Government to develop integrated services in registered settings, termed as 'assessment and support hubs'. These will support those young people who have emotional, behavioural and mental health issues but do not have a diagnosable mental health disorder. These young people are at high risk of entering statutory care services, residential schools or the criminal justice system, and the new service will give them and their families intensive, targeted support. The service will be established in 2019/20.

- Flintshire County Council have signed up to the National Fostering Framework which is working to refresh the national framework for the selection of residential provision.
- Flintshire County Council is also a member of the North Wales Regional Commissioning Board which has developed a work programme to achieve the following outcomes across the region:
 - Formalised Commissioning Partnership arrangements across the region.
 - Value for money support options available for Children Looked After and Young People, with increased capacity in preferred models of support, able to meet existing and projected unmet need.
 - That Contract and Quality Management is efficient and effective and is joined up as far as possible across Health & Social Care

- The North Wales Social Care and Well-being Services Improvement Collaborative are drafting a 'Market Position Statement for Children & Young People's Residential Care + Fostering +Secure accommodation'. This document will give a regional overview of the market across the region.
- Flintshire County Council are hosting a Regional Fostering Manager role. This role will develop and enhance the existing regional approach to fostering and will act as a strong link between national and local work. The work programme for this post will continue to develop over the next 2 years.
- Flintshire County Council work closely with [North Wales Adoption Service](#) with the aim to make the adoption process more efficient and more effective through widening the pool of adopters for the children in North Wales.
- Flintshire County Council are working with Health services to develop a strategic response to the 'A Healthier Wales' plan developed by Welsh Government.
- Flintshire County Council works with Action for Children under a Collaboration Agreement. The services delivered include short breaks and respite to children and families with disabilities through their specialist facility 'Arosfa'. Foster Carers are also receiving training so they are able to provide short breaks for families of children with disabilities. Further to this Action for Children deliver the RAP service and Flintshire Family Project.
- Flintshire County Council also works in partnership with Universal Assist to deliver supporting housing arrangements to young people who are preparing to leave care.
- A regional options appraisal is being undertaken from which a business case/s will be developed for effective models which achieve positive outcomes for Children Looked After and young care leavers.
- Flintshire County Council work as part of the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's). 4C's is a partnership of authorities across Wales who work together to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people and achieve value for money through working together collaboratively.
- The 4Cs manage the 'All Wales Framework Agreement Relating to the Provision of Foster Care Services for Children and Young People', of which Flintshire is a have joined.
- Ongoing consultation with stakeholders continues via the joint Education and Social Services Programme Board which has approved a project to review Out of County Placement commissioning.
- Flintshire County Council are researching new sustainable care models.
- Performance is measured closely through regular audits of systems and panel meetings and LAC reviews. Flintshire Participation Group of young people have been the drivers of the remodeling of LAC reviews to ensure young people are the focus of their own reviews.

- Flintshire County Council's Participation Group is an important component of Children's Services, enabling Children Looked After to influence developments in the portfolio and link in with the Children's Services Forum.

Areas for further development

- To bring together both commissioners and practitioners to create an understanding of the strengths, knowledge, barriers and opportunities. This will also ensure that all partners have a holistic view of the individual's needs.
- To work jointly with neighboring authorities around commissioning from independent sector providers, enabling greater control over the specification and quality of services.
- Strengthening consultation with young people. For example Flintshire will look at the area of consultation with Children Looked After about their placement. Focusing on ways that help identify areas for improvement for Children Looked After as a whole but also to provide earlier warning of any potential placement breakdown and respond proactively and pre-emptively.

4. Making it Happen - Action Plan

| | |
|-----|--|
| 1 | Safely reduce the number of children who need to be looked after |
| 1.1 | Expand our Family Group Conference service to support more families to develop their own solutions, and resilience, to appropriately care for their children |
| 1.2 | Work with Housing to develop new housing and support options for children aged 16+ and for care leavers |
| 1.3 | Work with schools to minimise exclusions |
| 1.4 | Review the scope, focus and operating model of our edge of care services to ensure effective and timely intensive family support |
| 1.5 | Establish a multi-disciplinary team to provide intensive assessment and support to prevent problems from escalating and to support effective community based placements |
| 1.6 | Increase the number of Special Guardianship Order arrangements so that more children are appropriately supported under this framework |
| 2 | Support looked after children in local high quality placements |
| 2.1 | Implement the 'Mockingbird model of foster care to extend the number and type of fostering placements available within area |
| 2.2 | Develop foster carer friendly policies to attract and retain foster carers. Specifically seek approval for a Council Tax reduction scheme for foster carers scheme and a Policy for Adaptations to foster carer homes |
| 2.3 | Work with a partner agency to develop a registered Children's Home to provide short term (up to 12 weeks) intensive support and assessment to de-escalate crisis/emergency situations and develop sustainable permanence plans |
| 2.4 | Work across North Wales to develop a regional Market position statement for residential and fostering provision to realign current independent provision to |

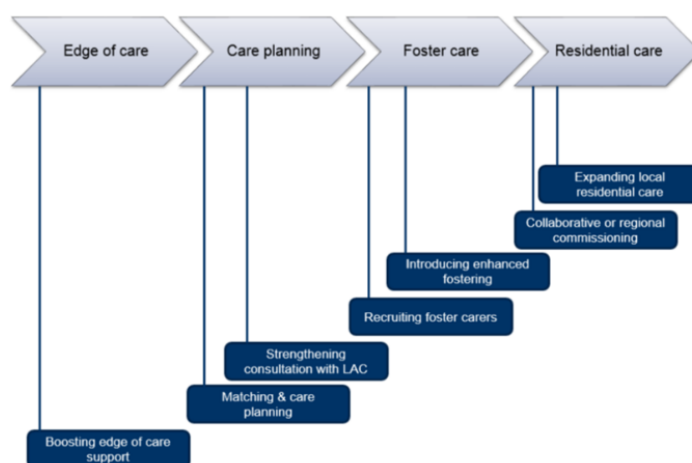
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| | meet the needs of looked after children in North Wales and to develop provision where there are identified gaps |
| 2.5 | Implement a new referral and matching process for placements so that we are able to make positive commissioning choices |
| 3 | Improve outcomes for looked after children |
| 3.1 | Deliver the 2019/20 Action Plan for our Corporate Parenting Strategy |
| 3.2 | Implement an outcome contract monitoring framework that has been piloted with 2 registered Childrens Homes to enable a clear focus on the quality of provision and the outcomes that are being secured. |

Appendix 1 – Placement Considerations

The following factors are always considered by Flintshire County Council when making placements;

- Is the placement in the best interests of the child?
- Can the placement meet the needs of the child as set out in their care and support plan, and subsequent pathway plan?
- Does the placement support continuity in the child's education or training?
- Does the placement enable the child to live together with any siblings who are also being looked after by the local authority?
- That the placement will support positive contact arrangements with family and known support network;
- That arrangements are made to spend time with friends and maintain sporting, social and leisure pursuits.
- If a child is placed outside of immediate family members, is the placement within a reasonable proximity to immediate family, with safety considered at all times.
- It is also vital that Flintshire County Council consider;
- The views, wishes and feelings of the child (in accordance with the child's age and understanding);
- The views, wishes and feelings of parents or other person with parental responsibility (as appropriate);
- The child's religious persuasion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background
- The child's sexuality and gender identity;
- Does the child have any additional needs or sensory impairment, including any emotional, behavioural and mental health needs?

The challenges in effectively managing demand and providing effective, appropriate support to meet the needs of children and families is clearly articulated in the recent 'Care Crisis Review'. The Review reflects that there is no single fix or 'silver bullet' to managing demand but there are core components that can, collectively, reduce the need for Residential Care. Research undertaken by Cordis Bright across 13 London local authorities in 2017 has summarised this continuum of support as having the following characteristics



Appendix 2 - What Children & Young People Say

Feedback from Flintshire's Children Looked After participation group indicates that children are able to ask questions to their social worker and that they are generally kept informed and updated with information about their placement. Work still needs to be done however on informing children how their placement was sourced and how the decision was made that their placement is best suited to meet their needs. This is something Flintshire will be working towards as part of this strategy to ensure that children are kept central through the process and are able to voice their thoughts and identify their own needs throughout the placement sourcing process.

Children Looked After in Flintshire have also participated in responding to National Outcomes Framework questionnaires which identified 87% of respondents were happy in their placements and over 91% were happy with the people that they lived with. Over 82% also reported that they feel they belong in the area in which they live.

Children did note that there are areas of improvement for Flintshire which included a child working with fewer social workers and to continue to encourage and successfully facilitate contact with family members.

The Bright Spots survey: Your Life, Your Care - A survey of the views of Children Looked After and young people aged 4-18yrs in Flintshire echoes many of these sentiments.

coram Voice **University of BRISTOL**

Your Life, Your Care: 11-18 year olds survey findings

In February and March 2018, we asked you some questions about what life is like for you to understand how we can make it better. We asked lots of children in care the same questions. This is what you all told us and what we want to do because of what you said.

YOU SAID

What was good?

- Almost all of you felt safe where you live and said your carers noticed how you were feeling.
- Almost all of you thought your carers were interested in what you were doing at school or college.
- All of you who gave an answer trusted your carers.
- Most of you said you have a really good friend.
- Most of you, including all of the girls, felt included in the decisions made about your life.

What was bad?

- Several of you wanted more contact with your family, especially your mum, brothers and sisters.
- More than a third of you had had three or more social workers in the last 12 months..
- School could be better for lots of you.
- More than a third of you said no one had explained why you were in care or that you wanted to know more.
- Nearly a third of you felt unhappy and some of you worried about the future.
- A third of boys felt social workers made decisions without including them.

The survey noted that in Flintshire children and young people felt embarrassed by adults drawing attention to their care status more frequently than young people (14%) in other Welsh local authorities. Although half of young people had high well-being in all areas, more looked after young people (11-18yrs) were dissatisfied with their lives and not as happy or optimistic about their futures as other young people

living in Wales. Some of the 'Bright spots' that were noted included being allowed and supported to have pets, that children had trusting relationships with their carers and that more young people felt they were being taught independence skills: 96% in Flintshire compared to 86% of Children Looked After in other Welsh LAs.

Interviewees as part of a report on Flintshire's Early Help Hub have stated that due to the increase in close Multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working through the Hub, this approach has provided greater, and more apt, support that can achieve outcomes in a timely manner for children in Flintshire. This inter-agency approach which includes Flintshire Children's Services, North Wales Police, Third Sector representation, Team Around the Family, Education, Youth Justice and information provided by the Family Information Service, means that should a child need a placement, a wide team of agencies are aware of their needs, their journey through services so far, and what matters to the child.

A new monitoring tool for residential placements has been developed that will better capture the views of children in those placements. Flintshire will also be drawing on Consultation and feedback groups that the 4C's initiative use to inform their future practice.

Flintshire also intend to hold 'meet the commissioner' events to develop strong relationships with providers in the area and to gather their feedback to inform future working.

Appendix 3 - Underpinning Legislation

1. Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

In keeping with the duty and aim of promoting the upbringing of a child by their family, there is a clear emphasis in the Act that, unless it is not consistent with the child's well-being, arrangements must be made for the child who needs accommodation to live with a parent or a person with parental responsibility or residence/child arrangement order. Where this is not possible, preference should be given to placement with a relative, friend or other person connected to the child or young person.

If neither of these is possible, a range of sufficient alternative provision should be available within the Local Authority, including foster carers and children's homes, supported lodgings and secure accommodation.

Particular areas of the Act to observe are:

- [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 Part 6 Code of Practice \(Looked After and Accommodated Children\)](#)
- [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 Part 11 Code of Practice \(Miscellaneous and General\)](#) – covering Children in youth detention accommodation, prison or bail accommodation in England and Wales.

Flintshire County Council will ensure that there is sufficient accommodation for all types of children who are looked after under Section 79 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (the Act).

The Local Authority has a duty to ensure the placement is made within the local authority's own area (section 81(9) of the Act), unless it is not reasonably practical to do so or there are overriding reasons for placing a child out of area, the primary overriding reason being safeguarding.

2. The Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015

Under the [Future Generations Act \(Wales\) 2015](#), Flintshire County Council has a duty to take into account the well-being of individuals when creating sustainability plans. The well-being goals of the Act will inform how sufficient alternative accommodation will be sourced, taking into account its effect on the wellbeing of the individual as well as its wider impact on sustainability in Wales.

3. Welsh Language Standards Regulations 2017

As a Welsh Local Authority, we must also comply with the [Welsh Language Standards Regulations 2017](#), and will take into account individuals preferred language for communication and correspondence when seeking placements.

4. Education Legislation

The [Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales Strategy \(2016\)](#) gives an overview of legislation and the landscape in Wales as to education and Children Looked After.

This is a joint strategy between the Welsh Government's Department for Education and Public Services and the Health and Social Services Group to ensure that all those whose work, responsibilities and lives bring them into contact with children who are looked after work with us to raise the educational ambitions and aspirations of children in care.

5. Youth Justice Legislation

The [Crime and Disorder Act 1998](#) requires Local Authorities to have a Youth Justice Plan which is annually updated to set out how Youth Justice Services will be delivered locally within the available resources.

Through the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012) children can be remanded to Local Authority accommodation, becoming a Child Looked After, regardless of whether they had been known to Social Services previously.

The [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014 Part 11 Code of Practice \(Miscellaneous and General\)](#) outlines the Local Authority's responsibilities for children with care and support needs in youth detention accommodation, prison, approved premises or bail accommodation.

The '[Children and Young People First](#)' [Welsh Government / Youth Justice Board joint strategy \(2014\)](#) has been developed to improve services for young people from Wales at risk of becoming involved in, or already in the youth justice system.

The [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) is designed to combat modern slavery in the UK and consolidates previous offences relating to trafficking and slavery in England and Wales. This includes Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) where it has been identified that Children Looked After are at particular risk of being exploited eg [County Lines](#).

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<http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s68120/Response%20from%20ADSS%20Cymru%20WLG%20and%20National%20Adoption%20Service%20-%20October%202017.pdf>

N Adoption service – regional work. CAMHS issues.