

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Petitions Committee report entitled Supporting care experienced parents: P-06-1161 Routine collection and publication of data of how many babies/children return to their care experienced parents care at the end of a Parent and Child Placement.

A key element of the Welsh Government's vision for the future of children's services in Wales is that we want young people leaving care to feel supported to start to live independently when they are ready and to plan for their future. This future includes when they are ready to start a family themselves.

Our Programme for Government contains 8 commitments, which taken together provide the framework for our vision to radically transform Children's Services through a dedicated Transformation Programme. The delivery of these commitments will effect change across the whole system in Wales and align to our [Children and Young People's Plan](#). This work will consider the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act, to ensure we improve provision for all Children and Young People (CYP) so they can fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances and the publication of the revised Child Poverty Strategy planned for the end of the year. The voice and rights of CYP are the heart of all we do. Both these commitments and the Plan will be delivered over this whole Senedd term.

We know that projects such as Project Unity plays a valuable part in providing emotional and practical help to care experienced mothers and the Welsh Government has been able to provide annual funding of £340,000 for the programme until 2025 reflecting our commitment to supporting care experienced mothers and to keeping families together wherever possible.

In addition, the Welsh Government recognises Baby & Me's use of a multi-disciplinary, relationship-based approach, to work with families in a flexible, trauma informed way to support parents to overcome barriers to successful parenting.

Both of these approaches align with the Welsh Government's wish to see more use of early intervention services where it is appropriate to do so.

I would like to thank the members of the Petitions Committee for their supporting care experienced parents. The Committee's report's recommendations along with the forthcoming report from the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into services for care experienced children will inform the delivery of the Transformation Programme for Children's Services in Wales. I have set out my response to the Report's individual recommendations below.

Detailed responses to the recommendation are set out below:

Recommendation 1.

The Committee recommends that:

Welsh Government should mandate the adoption and monitoring of the corporate parenting good practice charter co-produced by CASCADE and care experienced parents and organisations which support them. All Heads of Social Services have expressed their support for this charter, and it would be a positive step forward for each local authority and other public bodies to adopt the charter to demonstrate their commitment to provide holistic support to care experienced parents.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government supports the corporate parenting good practice charter aimed at “Supporting Parents in and leaving care” co-produced by CASCADE, care experienced parents and organisations which provide support to these parents. We welcome support from Heads of Social Services for the Charter and understand that all local authorities have now signed up and would encourage other public bodies to do so.

The Committee will be aware of the Welsh Government’s commitment to transform children’s services in Wales. Central to this programme is the delivery of eight Programme for Government commitments, one of which is to strengthening public bodies in their role as ‘corporate parent’. A Corporate Parenting Implementation Group whose membership includes local authorities, Voices from Care Cymru, CASCADE, the Children’s Commissioner’s office, the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS), Children in Wales, National Adoption Service, and Public Health Wales as well as care experienced young people themselves. The Group aim has been to deliver a Corporate Parenting Charter for all care experienced children and young people.

This Charter will be published in June initially on a voluntary basis with local authorities and wider public bodies will be encouraged to sign up and become “corporate parents”. Whilst monitoring adoption of the Charter, Welsh Government will be working to strengthen corporate parenting guidance through a revision to the Part 6 Code of Practice for Looked After and Accommodated Children. In addition, work will be undertaken across Government to identify existing guidance which could also be strengthened to support delivery of the Charter by wider public bodies.

The Charter will reinforce the delivery of the Vision of the Care Leavers Summit declaration which is due to be signed on 10 May by the First Minister.

Financial Implications: None, any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 2.

The Committee recommends that:

Welsh Government should ensure that data is routinely collected in relation to how many young people in care or who have left care (up to the age of 21) become pregnant, and how many of their children remain with their parent/s, placed in foster care or with family members or placed for adoption. Learning about the outcomes for families is important to inform our understanding in order to further develop support systems and plan services accordingly. In the interim we welcome the Deputy Minister for Social Services' offer to undertake a snapshot survey of experienced care parents across all local authorities.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government does not currently have in place the data sources to collate data outlined in the Committee's recommendation. The Welsh Government will actively explore availability of the data with the Knowledge & Analytical Service and local authorities. In addition, the Transformation Delivery Group will consider the collation of this data as part of its work on metrics for children's services.

Financial Implications: None, any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 3.

The Committee recommends that:

Welsh Government should continue to support edge of care multi-agency services such as Baby and Me, Jig-So and Reflect which are making a difference in supporting vulnerable parents through trauma informed and strength-based approaches. There should be similar services available throughout Wales.

Response: Accept in principle

Welsh Government accepts and acknowledges the positive work being undertaken by Edge of Care Services such as Baby & Me, Reflect and Jig-So and the benefit that these programmes have on new parents including care experienced young people. The Welsh Government will review the evaluation of these projects when deciding on next steps and future roll out.

Financial Implications: Yes, the continuation of Welsh Government support of these projects will require financial review.

Recommendation 4.

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should update legislation to ensure all care experienced parents have a statutory right to an intensive, wrap around preventative support

service to keep families together regardless of how recent their care experience. It should include specialist parental advocacy to navigate the social care and family courts systems and be modelled on evidence-based services such as Project Unity.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government has, and will continue, to prioritise early intervention and prevention as part of the work of both the Children's Board and the Transformation Programme of Children's Services in Wales. The Welsh Government accepts the recommendation in principle and will consider and explore its asks as part of the delivery of this Programme.

Financial Implications: Yes, such costs would need to be scoped and could be considerable.

Recommendation 5.

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should ensure that every care experienced parent has suitable housing provision. Lack of appropriate housing within their community has a significant impact on keeping families together.

Response: Accept

In order to improve the transition from care into independent living, we will shortly be publishing a refreshed version of the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support framework, which was developed specifically for young people leaving care in Wales. The framework is designed to ensure that care leavers have the flexible support they need so that no care experienced person falls through the cracks.

The accommodation offer for care leavers and young people more generally is a key aspect of our work to ensure everyone in Wales has a decent affordable home. As part of our published [Ending Homelessness Action Plan](#) (EHAP) and overall strategic approach, there are youth-focused housing and support actions.

As part of our existing work, over 20 projects providing new and innovative housing and support approaches to young people are operational across Wales as a result of our investment of over £3.1m in the Youth Homelessness Innovation Fund. Many of these projects are supporting care leavers. These projects are currently undergoing external evaluation to identify good practice in the delivery of support for care leavers.

An Expert Review Panel has been established to review existing homelessness prevention legislation and to develop recommendations for reforms by August 2023. The panel will consider a number of areas including the allocation of housing and the availability of housing for those leaving care.

Financial implications: None, any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 6.

The Committee recommends that:

The Children, Young People and Education Committee should regularly monitor progress against the Programme for Government Commitment to improve children's social care.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government has recently submitted written evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform. The Deputy Minister for Social Services met with the Committee on the 9 March to provide oral evidence and update on delivery of the eight Programme for Government commitments which focus on improving children's services. The Welsh Government awaits the publication of the Committee's final report from the inquiry which is due to be published in May.

In order to ensure, the Welsh Government fully achieves the ambitions of reforming Children Services it has reviewed the Governance structure and put in place a 3-tiered approach to governance to provide the right level of direction and scrutiny:

- A new Ministerial Oversight Board to oversee the Transformation Programme, providing political leadership and direction, and support in delivering the programme.
- The Eliminating Profit from the care of looked after Children Programme board will continue to provide their invaluable expertise as we collectively consider evidence and develop proposals for implementing this high-profile commitment.
- The new Transformation Delivery Group (formally the Oversight Board) has a sharper focus on driving programme implementation and delivery of the Transformation Programme, working in co-production with our partners, with the rights and voice of children and young people at its heart.

The Transformation Programme has a delivery roadmap in place which sets out current anticipated timelines for progress with and delivery of our Children's Services Programme for Government commitments. A copy can be found at **Annex A**.

Financial Implications: None, any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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