



Children on the margins

Response to the CYPE Committee report (December 2024)

21/01/2025

In December 2024, the Children, Young People and Education Committee published the findings of its inquiry into children on the margins (relating to missing children and those experiencing or at risk of criminal exploitation). The report includes 23 recommendations.

This is the Welsh Government's response to the recommendations.

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Introduction

The Inquiry into Children on the Margins has provided an important opportunity to reflect on the work already undertaken in this area and to focus on what we want to achieve in the future.

We have achieved progress in responding to the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. We have brought forward regulation to strengthen the safeguarding, governance and training requirements on independent schools; to require the teaching and learning support staff at independent schools to register with the Education Workforce Council; and, to regulate Special School Residential Services, in a similar manner to care homes for children, as a regulated service under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. .

We will continue to engage with our stakeholders to achieve the best outcomes and protections for all children.

We offer thanks to the Children, Young People and Education Committee for their report and their recommendations in relation to children on the margins. We have set out our response to the recommendations below.

Response to the 23 recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should work with local authorities and police forces to take robust, immediate action to ensure that the data it publishes relating to children missing from care and missing episodes among children receiving care and support (received from local authorities) are accurate and reliable. The Welsh Government should report back to us within 6 months to provide an update on the issues identified by the partnership and action taken.

Response: Accept (subject to discussion on timescale).

The Welsh Government has established a Performance and Improvement Framework for Social Services to guide local authorities in measuring and improving their social care services.

The Performance and Improvement Framework includes data on the total number of reports of children who go missing from care and a total number of children who go missing from care during the year.

In order to improve this data we added a 'missing person measure' to the Children's Census 2023/24 collection to capture the number of times each child/young person have gone missing in the collection year. As this is the first year of the measure being included in the data collection, we acknowledge that further work may be needed to ensure consistent reporting.

Last year the Welsh Government established a 'Safeguarding Children and Young People who are reported Missing from Home or Care' Stakeholder Steering group. The group will map what data is collected, who undertakes collection of it and where the data is reported to. This will enable the group to identify any gaps and develop further actions to address these gaps. This is likely to involve further maturation of measures currently being reported. The group has representation from police forces and specialist officers who have a lead for safeguarding children who go missing from home or care. The group is multi-agency to reflect the multiple agencies who are involved with children who go missing.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should carry out a feasibility study into the development of data release that is as accurate, reliable and as exhaustive as feasibly possible, covering all episodes of children who go missing in Wales. The data should be broken down separately by age, care experience, local authority, primary reason for going missing (if known), and in conjunction with stakeholders, any other factors the Welsh Government considers useful for policy development purposes

Response: Accept in principle

We accept that further work is required to mature the accuracy and reliability of available data. We have outlined actions being undertaken to mature data relating to missing episodes in our response to Recommendation 1. In light of the actions already in hand we do not propose to undertake a feasibility study. The mapping exercise being undertaken by the 'Safeguarding Children and Young People who are reported Missing from Home or Care' stakeholder steering group will inform next steps.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should amend legislation to make the offer of a return interview a statutory requirement following each missing episode. The child should have the right to decide who carries out that interview from among a pool of trusted and competent adults, and robust statutory guidance should be issued for practitioners to set out clearly how return interviews should be conducted to ensure consistency across Wales. As part of this guidance, the Welsh Government should create a form for practitioners to use which states whether the offer of a return interview was accepted or rejected, for ease of sharing this data with relevant stakeholders.

Response: Accept in principle

We recognise the benefits of return home interviews following missing episodes and there are several examples of good practice across Wales. We commissioned research to inform our approach, but it did not reach a consensus on whether return home interviews should be made mandatory and who should conduct them.

Children and young people who are in care already have a statutory right to access an independent advocate, including when they have been reported missing.

Following a roundtable event in 2024 the Welsh Government established the 'Safeguarding Children and Young People who are reported Missing from Home or Care' stakeholder steering group. The group includes representatives from the National Youth Advocacy Service, the Children's Society, Local Authority Children's Services, the Police, the NHS, the 4Cs, Youth Justice policy and practice, the National Independent Safeguarding Board, Regional Safeguarding Boards, pan-Wales groups such as the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board, the Violence Prevention Unit, the NHS Safeguarding Service and officials representing the Welsh Government.

The stakeholder steering group is developing guidance to ensure children receive an offer of a meeting following a missing episode (acknowledging the principles set out in the 'All-Wales Practice Guide - Safeguarding children who go missing from home or care'). The Welsh Government will ensure the guidance explores the benefits and practicalities of creating a form or recording mechanism for practitioners which states whether the offer of a return interview was accepted or rejected.

Considering the activity being undertaken in this area we do not consider it necessary to amend legislation at this juncture.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should write to the UK Government to advocate for a statutory definition of Child Criminal Exploitation as part of its forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill. The Welsh Government should report back to us with the response it receives, which should also include a summary of any relevant inter-governmental discussions that have taken place since September 2024

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government has engaged, and continues to engage, with the UK Government on the approach to Child Criminal Exploitation in the proposed Crime and Policing Bill. We will continue our dialogue with the UK Government, to include the potential for a statutory definition of Child Criminal Exploitation.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should set out its views on the benefits or otherwise of a national strategy to respond to Child Criminal Exploitation in light of the concerns raised in this report about inconsistency of practice across Wales

Response: Accept in principle

We do not consider the development of a national strategy essential to achieve greater consistency in practice. However, we will reflect on this matter and share our views with the Committee. We will continue to engage with our partners in Wales and at the Home Office to discuss ways of improving the sharing and consistency of practice. We are planning a national workshop in March 2025 which will consider approaches and inform future work in Wales.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that

In its forthcoming legislation, the Welsh Government should:

- ensure that care experienced children and young people who are, or who are at risk of becoming, homeless retain a legal priority in relation to other categories of homeless applicant; and
- create a mandatory 'reasonable preference' category for people who are care experienced (regardless of homelessness status) in local authorities' social housing allocation schemes

Response: Accept.

The Welsh Government published a White Paper on ending homelessness in October 2023 and an analysis of responses received to that consultation in April 2024. A Bill is

now in development. We are committed to ensuring the needs of care leavers are prioritised in that work and our officials will continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure the legislation aligns with our corporate parenting aims.

Homelessness services in Wales were over-hauled with all stakeholders during our response to Covid 19. We have sustained this work and practice through the introduction of the 11th category of priority need in 2022 and the future Bill will endeavour to secure this approach.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that

If the Welsh Government is not willing to keep priority need status for care experienced young people, it should carry out and publish within 6 months of the publication of this report a robust assessment of the impacts of removing priority need status on care experienced people

Response: Accept (subject to discussion about timescale).

The abolition of the priority need test is a key facet of the finely calibrated package of reforms put forward within the White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales. Its removal will create a more universal system which delivers our aims of providing person-centred practice that is trauma informed and will end a system which is currently based on exclusion. The proposed legislation will be subject to a range of Impact Assessments which will be published alongside the Bill.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should review the Single Unified Safeguarding Review governance arrangements to ensure that the process:

- includes a clear, efficient and transparent mechanism by which report recommendations are immediately disseminated to every single relevant individual agency across the whole of Wales to implement.
- clearly states whose responsibility it is to make sure that each relevant individual agency is made aware of what they need to do to implement the recommendations.
- clearly states whose responsibility it is to make sure that recommendation is implemented; and
- clearly states what enforcement action will be taken if recommendations are not implemented, who will take that enforcement action, and when and how it will be taken.

Response: Accept.

The Committee's recommendations have been taken forward as part of development of the Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR) in Wales. The SUSR is a new process and was launched in October 2024. A key role of the SUSR is to strengthen accountability around the implementation of recommendations and action plans.

We are working with Regional Safeguarding Boards, the National Independent Safeguarding Board and Manchester City Metropolitan University to provide clearer guidance on identifying and implementing learning, and clarity of recommendations and actions.

The work will be embedded in the SUSR training programme and resources for chairs, reviewers and panel members so that learning from reviews can be implemented as quickly and effectively as possible.

To support SUSR Statutory Guidance delivery, we have:

- established a transparent governance structure (the SUSR Support Network) and an internal SUSR Tasking and Co-ordination Group with relevant policy leads to enable recommendations to be efficiently disseminated to relevant agencies.
- established the SUSR Co-ordination Hub, who are managing a tracker of national recommendations and actions coming from reviews, which states responsibility, monitors delivery and will be used to escalate issues up to the SUSR Ministerial Board level when required; and
- developed a SUSR Dashboard which is undergoing testing and will be available to all relevant external partners to transparently monitor SUSR activity across Wales.

We propose to undertake a review at the one-year stage.

Terms of Reference for the first-year review of the SUSR Statutory Guidance are being drafted and will include analysis of governance arrangements. The Terms of Reference will be considered by the Welsh Government SUSR Strategy Group who will oversee the process.

It is anticipated that enforcement action would only arise if all checks and balances failed through use of the SUSR Support Network. Relevant Inspectorates would be notified, and it would be for them to consider what further action may be required, for example a statutory notice of enforcement action.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that

For each of the six Regional Safeguarding Boards and the National Independent Safeguarding Board, the Welsh Government should publish for the 2023-24 financial year:

- actual meeting dates.
- records of which agencies/organisations attended each meeting; and
- meeting agendas and minutes, including actions agreed (redacted as appropriate)

Response: Reject.

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 requires the National Independent Safeguarding Board to make an annual report to the Welsh Ministers. This report must outline the activities undertaken by the NISB, an assessment of the effectiveness of arrangements to safeguard children and adults in Wales and provide recommendations for improving safeguarding practice. The National Independent Safeguarding Board (Wales) (No. 2) Regulations 2015 also stipulate the Board should keep minutes of its meetings (Regulation 4 (5)) and that its annual report should be made publicly available

(Regulation 8 (3)). Regulation 5 (7) of the Safeguarding Boards (Functions and Procedures) (Wales) Regulations 2015 stipulates that Safeguarding Boards must keep minutes of their meetings.

Beyond these requirements there is no legal requirement for the National Independent Safeguarding Board or the Regional Safeguarding Boards to publish the minutes, or other details, of their meetings.

The Committee's recommendation would duplicate existing regulations.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out its assessment of the effectiveness of the six Regional Safeguarding Boards and the National Independent Safeguarding Board in bring together local and national partners across statutory and non-statutory agencies, devolved and otherwise, to deliver tangible improvements in safeguarding practice.

Response: Accept in principle.

Under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 the duties of the National Independent Safeguarding Board are to provide support and advice to the Regional Safeguarding Boards to ensure their effectiveness, to report on the adequacy of safeguarding arrangements and to make recommendations regarding improvements to Welsh Ministers. Regulations require members of the National Independent Safeguarding Board to meet the Chairs of the Regional Safeguarding Boards at least twice a year to inform their work.

Regional Safeguarding Boards (RSB) provide an annual report to the National Independent Safeguarding Board (NISB). These are considered by the NISB and inform their future work plan as well as members providing feedback to individual RSBs on their annual reports and work plans. Members of the NISB sit on RSBs across Wales and this provides a level of consistency for relationships.

The NISB makes an annual report to Welsh Ministers and must make any other report as requested by them. The Chair of the NISB meets the Minister for Children and Social Care twice a year to discuss themes arising from its work and from the work of the RSBs.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should work alongside statutory and non-statutory partners, drawing on existing work such as Cardiff University's Complex Safeguarding Wales Practitioner Toolkit, to develop a set of resources and training materials to improve frontline professionals' awareness of, and response to, criminal exploitation and the other forms of marginalisation explored in this report. These resources and materials should be targeted at professionals working in a range of settings that have direct contact with vulnerable children (such as social services, housing departments, education establishments, health boards, etc.). The Welsh Government should take steps

to ensure that relevant frontline professionals across the statutory sector – including those employed by organisations commissioned by the statutory sector, such as charities - receive that training

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government will continue to work alongside statutory and non-statutory partners, including the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board and Regional Safeguarding Boards, to draw on existing work such as Cardiff University's Complex Safeguarding Wales Practitioner Toolkit to support practice developments.

The Welsh Government is developing online learning on modern slavery. The content of the online learning has been reviewed by members of the Anti-Slavery Wales Training and Awareness Group. The online learning includes content on Child Criminal Exploitation and highlights the Complex Safeguarding Wales Practitioner Toolkit.

Regional Safeguarding Boards (RSB) and Social Care Workforce teams in local authorities, commission and/or deliver multi-agency training on a range of safeguarding topics including sexual and criminal exploitation.

The Welsh Government provides funding of £12,000 annually to each RSB to contribute to their multi-agency safeguarding training programmes and an additional £2,000 annually for the RSBs to deliver a range of activities in National Safeguarding Week (usually held in the third week of November).

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should work alongside health boards, police forces and other relevant statutory and non-statutory agencies to develop a pan-Wales child criminal exploitation risk assessment tool for use by frontline staff, including in healthcare settings. The rollout of the risk assessment tool should be accompanied by the programme of training and awareness raising that we advocate in Recommendation 11

Response: Reject.

We consider existing mechanisms to be fit for purpose and therefore developing an additional tool is not necessary. As outlined in our response to recommendation 11, the Welsh Government will work with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board and Regional Safeguarding Boards on increasing awareness of the Complex Safeguarding Wales Practitioner Toolkit through revising the All-Wales Practice Guide on Safeguarding Children from Child Criminal Exploitation. We are also developing online learning on modern slavery. This includes content on Child Criminal Exploitation.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should explore the feasibility of a Wales-wide safeguarding information sharing platform, such as the West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board tracker, to improve information sharing across Wales

Response: Accept.

The Welsh Government will continue to work with key partners to explore the safeguarding information sharing platforms being utilised across Wales. Across the multi-agency safeguarding landscape there are a range of partners with varying information systems and needs that require careful consideration.

The Welsh Government is sighted on the work being undertaken across Wales including the West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board Tracker, and the Single View of a Child work that Cardiff Council and the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board have been developing. We look forward to understanding the journey of these areas of work and the outcomes achieved following their pilot phases.

Welsh Government officials are also working with stakeholders on progressing the ambition around Connecting Care, which would include the potential for a shared care record. The Connecting Care programme will incorporate the benefits of cloud-based technology, making it easier to connect systems and platforms going forward.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that

In its response to our report, the Welsh Government should set out in detail its understanding of the impact of data protection legislation on multi-agency working in relation to safeguarding vulnerable children to help both statutory and non-statutory bodies understand their data protection obligations when working together to support marginalised children and their families

Response: Accept.

Information sharing is key to good safeguarding practice and relevant partners have a duty to report children at risk under Part 7 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Professionals must share information in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. While GDPR gives people the right to be informed as to how their personal information is being used, it also allows for information to be shared without their consent if there is a lawful basis to do so.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has published [A 10 step guide to sharing information to safeguard children | ICO](#). This helpful guide has a clear message that data protection legislation does not prevent individuals sharing information to safeguard children. The ICO has made a promise that people will not get into trouble if they share information to protect children and young people at risk of serious harm¹ and has published resources to be used to 'myth bust' misconceptions with regard to the sharing of information, under the banner 'Think. Check. Share.'²

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures include 'pointers for practice' which provide guidance based on the latest research and practice developments. This includes [Seven golden rules for information sharing](#). In brief these comprise: GDPR and the Data Protection Act provide a framework for sharing information, the importance of seeking

¹ [ICO work to promote sharing data to safeguard children - Hwb](#)

² [Sharing information to safeguard children: Marketing materials | ICO](#)

consent to share information where safe to do so, the importance of seeking advice and that it is possible to share information without consent where lawful to do so. Decisions to share information in such circumstances must be based on the safety and well-being of people and must be proportionate, relevant and timely and decision-making should be recorded.

The All-Wales Practice guide ‘Safeguarding children who go missing from home or care’³ confirms the importance of information sharing to prevent abuse or serious harm to others and confirms that it is not the intention of data protection legislation to be used as a reason not to do so.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should provide an update on the long-term future of the Wales Police Schools Programme, outlining what, if any, centrally funded provision will replace this vital initiative

Response: Accept.

The priority for the budget in 2024-2025 was to protect funding for frontline public services. The Cabinet was faced with a series of very difficult decisions and as it developed the budget, it considered whether to continue funding non-devolved areas where we have traditionally stepped in to provide funding in the absence of support from the previous UK Government.

The match funding for the programme was provided by the four police forces. We understand the police are currently considering their involvement in schools. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed Powys has agreed to fund a police schools programme, and each police force will consider their approach. There is no central funding planned for a similar initiative.

Welsh Government officials are liaising with Public Health Wales, which is co-producing a toolkit to support schools to design and develop their Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience through identified high-priority health and well-being topics. Welsh Government officials will be working with a range of internal and external stakeholders to examine what existing or alternative provision and resources are available to ensure children have information to allow them to make informed decisions and keep them safe.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out its views on the merits or otherwise of specialist teams within social services departments that work with children who go missing, and/or are sexually and/or criminally exploited.

Response: Accept.

³ [Safeguarding Wales](#)

We recognise and accept the merits of specialist teams as being effective in meeting the needs of children who go missing and are being sexually and/or criminally exploited or who are at risk of being exploited.

We also recognise that there are examples of exceptional practice in some areas in Wales where specialist teams are part of the social services departments. For example, the Safeguarding Adolescents from Exploitation (SAFE) team in Cardiff. Equally, there are benefits to commissioning arrangements that have been developed within regions and local authorities to contract specialist services such as Barnardo's as required.

Key stakeholders have told us they consider that having a specialist team is important, however, they have indicated that all practitioners who have contact with children must have the knowledge and skills to deal with any safeguarding issues that arise, including being able to respond to children who go missing and/or who have been exploited.

Key pieces of research highlight how specialist teams can play a critical role in tackling issues such as sexual and criminal exploitation due to the specialist knowledge held within the teams. Safeguarding issues such as exploitation do not exist in isolation. They are primarily the result of adverse childhood experiences that create vulnerabilities. We will continue to be vigilant in dealing with the issues presented to children, however, will proceed with some caution as there may be the potential that when dealing with issues in isolation may lead to an intense focus on one issue to the exclusion of other important vulnerability factors. Consideration will be given to a more integrated and holistic approach to address the complex nature of child exploitation.

Prevention activity can play a crucial broader role in enabling children to thrive and to help direct them towards fulfilling.

There is a variation across local authorities of the demand they experience therefore this requires local/regional determination that is based on a comprehensive needs assessment.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should update exclusion guidance for schools to reflect the wider risk factors of exploitation, as explored in this report, and ensure all schools are reminded of the potential consequences of exclusion and part-time timetables. Concurrently, the Welsh Government should work with local authorities to develop a bank of examples of where schools have successfully supported vulnerable children to remain in school, sharing those case studies to inform best practice across the sector

Response: Accept.

We have established an exclusions advisory group to support us in undertaking a comprehensive review and re-development of the Exclusion from Schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) guidance. The wider risk factors of exploitation, including reminding schools about the potential consequences of exclusion and part-time timetables, will be considered as part of this work.

We have invited local authorities to participate in the advisory group, and available case studies will be collected as part of this work.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should explore and report back to us within six months on the use of the children missing education database for local authorities to identify and safeguard children who are not in education settings and who may, consequently, be at risk of exploitation

Response: Accept (subject to agreement regarding timescales within this recommendation).

The children missing education (CME) database regulations will be piloted from March 2025 until March 2026 with seven local authorities. A formal evaluation of the arrangements will be undertaken alongside the pilot, to determine the effectiveness of the arrangements in identifying children who are CME, and who consequently could be at risk. Once the evaluation of the pilot has concluded the report will be published on the Welsh Government website and will be made available to the Committee. The evaluation will be commissioned externally and a date for the submission of the report will be agreed with the contractor once this contract has been awarded.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, and having reflected on the impact (or otherwise) of the voluntary Corporate Parenting Charter on the quality and consistency of services for care experienced children and young people, the Welsh Government should set out:

- what consideration it has given to placing its Corporate Parenting Charter on a statutory footing; and
- any further action it intends to take in relation to corporate parenting, and the timelines for doing so

Response: Accept.

We want everyone to have a shared responsibility for corporate parenting across public sector bodies, private sector and the third sector. This incorporates health, education, housing and other bodies that all have a part to contribute to ensure care experienced children and young people flourish and thrive.

The Corporate Parenting Charter has been published on a voluntary basis in order to promote and introduce the Charter and the principles of corporate parenting to organisations beyond local authorities and to facilitate discussions on what they can deliver.

We intend to use the Charter to make real qualitative change for care-experienced children and young people. We want all organisations to truly understand corporate parenting, embrace and embed it, and provide the support needed by care-experienced children and young people to have the same life chances as other young people in Wales.

We intend to strengthen the guidance for local authorities through a dedicated chapter on Corporate Parenting within the Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked after and accommodated children) under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The chapter will set out local authorities' duties in their role as corporate parents and support a strengthened strategic approach to corporate parenting and will be completed before the end of this Senedd term.

We are continuing to explore existing legislative levers to support the Charter and create a consistent approach to corporate parenting in Wales.

All organisations who have signed up to the Charter have received a welcome letter from the First Minister, the Corporate Parent Wales badge and a pledge template to complete. My officials will continue to work with our Corporate Parenting Implementation Group and care-experienced young people will a central role in reviewing the templates and providing feedback on the pledges.

We will be holding our first best practice event for corporate parents in early 2025.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out:

- what support it has provided to local authorities to help them drive/adopt digital innovations that improve communication with children in care; and
- whether it considers that the app used in Denbighshire (or similar platforms used elsewhere) might warrant further investigation, with a view to rolling them out across local authorities nationwide

Response: Accept.

The Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Part 6 Code Practice for Looked After and Accommodated Children, lays out how local authorities should use a range of communication methods - for example, email, phone and text message when in contact with children in care.

The “Big Welcome” is a new web-based bilingual tool launched by Foster Wales and rolled out across all local authorities in Wales last year. It was developed in response to feedback from children in care to fostering services who identified what information they would find helpful such as knowing where they were going to live whilst in foster care.

Through the Big Welcome tool, foster carers can access their profiles and include information about themselves, their family and their home including photographs, to help welcome the child/young person into their home. This helps to reassure, ease anxieties and can help the transition for the child/young person when moving to a new foster carer or coming into care for the first time. As it is web based the information is readily available which is especially useful in emergency placement situations.

We will continue to support local authorities to pioneer the use of innovative technology such as Denbighshire's use of “Mind of My Own” and we will look to identify and share best practice of such apps across Wales.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out clearly what progress it has made in establishing a National Guardianship Service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and how and by when that work will progress.

Response: Accept

Under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) have the same rights and entitlements as looked after children who are born in Wales and the UK, regardless of their immigration status. They are included in any policy or service that is implemented to support children looked after; this includes access to health, and education services.

Welsh Government officials have met Scottish Government officials to gain an understanding of the Scottish Guardianship model including its scope, funding mechanism, and support components.

There are differences between the legislation in Wales and Scotland. Legislation in Wales provides a statutory entitlement to independent advocacy support for all children and young people in care, and a personal advisor for all young people when they turn 16. These duties are not replicated in Scottish legislation. Instead, the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 provides that Scottish Ministers are under a duty to provide a guardian for every eligible child, and that relevant authorities will be under a duty to refer any eligible child to a guardian.

My officials have also met representatives of the Children's Legal Centre Wales, the Children's Society, the Bevan Foundation and the British Red Cross to discuss their joint briefing relating to the introduction of a Guardianship scheme in Wales. Welsh Government officials have requested that further consideration is given to the statutory entitlements already on offer for UASC in Wales and how a Guardianship Scheme could add value to these. A further paper is in the process of being developed and will be submitted to Welsh Government during the early part of 2025.

Alongside the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership, my officials held a workshop with all local authorities in Wales to gain an understanding of the various support that is being provided to UASC as part of their statutory responsibilities, alongside additional support that is being offered to this cohort.

We will undertake a more detailed mapping exercise of the services currently on offer through our statutory provision, determine the gaps in support available to UASC, alongside considering the additionality that aspects of a Guardianship Scheme could provide. This will be used to inform the nature of any Scheme in the future.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should take immediate action to better understand the nature and scale of exploitation of neurodivergent children and children with learning

disabilities, with a view to working alongside relevant agencies to develop a more effective response to safeguarding these groups of children.

Response: Accept in principle.

We agree the importance of data to enable us to better understand the experience of different groups of people to provide evidence to inform policy and delivery. We recognise there are gaps in the availability of robust and reliable data and that further work is required in conjunction with the UK Government, police, and others to support the development of more sophisticated data.

We recognise there is substantial evidence highlighting that children and young people with additional learning needs are at increased risk of being exploited. My officials will work to raise awareness of these risks amongst practitioners in the sector.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should acknowledge:

- the fundamental and inherent links between poverty and the abuse and exploitation of children;
- that, despite the most powerful levers for addressing poverty lying elsewhere, it does have powers to provide support and to safeguard children who are made vulnerable as a result of poverty and should rightly be held to account for its successes and failures in doing so.

Response: Accept.

We know that parents living in poverty do an amazing job of caring for their children despite the challenges which they face daily. It is important not to imply that all children living in poverty will be experiencing abuse or neglect. However, there is a substantial evidence base regarding the impact poverty has on children and how living in poverty can increase the risk of experiencing abuse, neglect and other harms. Children who live in poverty are likely to have one or more Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Our Child Poverty Strategy acknowledges the evidence on links between poverty and risk of child abuse and neglect, reflecting the relationship between issues like domestic abuse, poor mental health and substance misuse, increased risk of harm to children and increased risk of family poverty. The Strategy sets out our ambitions for the longer term and outlines how we will work across Government and with our partners to maximise the impact of the levers available to us, including our convening powers. It provides a framework through which we can deliver policies and programmes that support the outcomes we want for our children and young people now and in the future.

Services need to work together to safeguard children, empower families and communities through both early intervention and to support them to deal with issues when they are at crisis point. Objective 5 in the strategy specifically targets collaboration with partners stating we will ensure that effective cross-government working at the national level enables strong collaboration at the regional and local level.

Our Child Poverty Strategy includes an objective to support child and family wellbeing and make sure that work across the Welsh Government delivers for children living in poverty and the priority to build communities with accessible, joined up services to meet community needs.