

## **Children and Young People Committee**

### **Inquiry into placements of Children in Care in Wales:**

**Submitted: September 2009 by the Deputy Minister for Social Services –  
Gwenda Thomas**

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#### **Purpose**

1. This paper outlines measures taken by the Welsh Assembly Government through policy and guidance to ensure effective placements for children in care. In particular, it considers how policy is translated into practice and how systems and tools are established at a national level to facilitate local authorities and their partners in their commissioning and workforce arrangements to support the placement of children and young people in their care.

#### **Our Vision**

2. The WAG corporate parenting role for children in care is the most profound responsibility of government for a small group of highly vulnerable children who rely on the state for part of their upbringing. Their experiences of their care shape their lives and it is vital that we optimise the life chances for these children who, for reasons not of their making are unable to grow up with their birth parents. We all share the premise that our goals for children in care should be exactly the same as our goals for our own children; we want their childhoods to be secure, healthy and enjoyable and to provide a stable foundation for the rest of their lives.

3. It is therefore imperative that policy, practice and support systems at all levels are highly effective to ensure these children enjoy the same life chance benefits from education opportunities, health and social care as their peers. Placement, care planning and review mechanisms for children in care are subject to a significant legislative framework that is continuously reviewed to meet the challenges we face in our changing society. The Welsh Assembly Government therefore wholeheartedly welcomes the CYP Committee inquiry to provide further independent scrutiny and the opportunity to recommend further improvement.

#### **Legal Framework**

4. The Children Act 1989 (the 89 Act) and the Care Standards Act 2000 form the principal framework for children who are looked after. Annexes 1 and 2 offer a summary of legal requirements and guidance which establish the central principles of a framework for placements and the review of placements and the arrangements for the regulation and support to foster carers and fostering agencies. It is not exhaustive, but offers an overview of the legal and policy systems within which Welsh local authorities and to a lesser extent their partners operate.

5. There are a number of ways in which children can be placed in care. The two main legal routes are under a care order made by a family proceedings court or voluntarily accommodation, in which case parental responsibility for the child is shared by the state and birth parents. The primary duties of local authorities are to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child who is looked after; to plan for both their immediate and long term needs and to place equal weight on the wishes and feelings of the child, their parents and other key people in a child's life. In making a placement, wherever possible it should be with a member of the child's extended family or friends (referred to as kinship care placements) unless this is inconsistent with the child's welfare.

### **Placements of children in Care**

6. Evidence shows that frequent moves between care placements can have a drastic effect on the ability of children and young people to succeed in education, social development and other areas of their life. Despite good progress in recent years (for example the percentage of children with three or more placements during a single year has reduced from 14% to 10% since 2006<sup>1</sup>) there are still many children moving between placements frequently.

7. Building on the solid foundation of the 1989 Act and the principal placement regulations, the Welsh Assembly Government has taken a number of measures to improve placement choice and stability for children who are looked after in Wales. Children First<sup>2</sup> our flagship programme (with additional resources of £250 million over its lifetime) has been a catalyst for progressive improvements in quality of life and outcomes.

8. Central to our reforms for looked after children is our strategic framework *Choice and Stability*<sup>3</sup> which set the Welsh Assembly Government aspirations to improve placement choice and stability and to require local authorities to ensure sufficient services, and to develop a range of quality placements close to home which meet the full range of needs for looked after children.

9. The programme, supported by specific grant, was informed by major research<sup>4</sup> and set a number of improvement measures for local authorities to develop local placement strategies. The framework set a challenge for local authorities to modernise and improve the quality of care, in what had become a mixed market. They were to do so by greater collaboration between sectors to better manage demand, resources and expectations, and to develop a diverse range of quality services to meet the changing patterns of need and circumstances of care.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Government Data Unit, SDR/1272009 ; Statistic , on Adoptions, Outcomes and Placements for Children Looked After by Local Authorities: year ending March 2009

<sup>2</sup> Children First : £250 over 8 years See reference Circulars at

<sup>3</sup> Strategic Framework – Choice and Stability - Developing a Range of Quality Placements for looked after children and young people in Wales ( NaFW, 2004)

<sup>4</sup> Review of the Purpose and Future Shape of Fostering and Residential care Service for Children in Wales ( 2004) ( Roger Clough ( Eskridge Social Research, Matthew Colton (Swansea University) Darlington Social Research, and University of East Anglia

10. At the heart of the programme was our commitment to shape the future of fostering and residential care services through better management, commissioning, and recruitment and retention strategies. Local authorities were expected to grow local foster care provision and to work with their independent and third sector partners in the provision of care for looked after children with greater needs.

### **Children Commissioning Support Resource**

11. The Welsh Assembly Government facilitated the strategic framework for placement choice and stability by supporting the establishment of the Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) in 2006. This was developed in part to respond to the rising pressures on the service where many local authorities directly attributed their overspends in children services to expensive placements in the independent sector. For example, expenditure on looked after children increased by 63.4% to £106.6m over three years to 2004. Half of this increase accounted for less than 7% of placements in residential care arranged under spot purchase. Service costs for placements were spiraling with little evidence of improved outcomes for looked after children and local authorities were calling for the Welsh Assembly Government to support the development of a national system. We took the decision to develop a national resource through CCSR to promote the development of efficient and sustainable approaches to the use of public resources to provide quality placements for looked after children.

12. The purpose of CCSR was in the first instance to map provision across Wales by working with the then Care Standards Inspectorate and providers, and to gain the agreement of providers to provide information on the availability of places to enable local authorities to find suitable placements closer to their home area, a valuable function in itself. The broader aim was and remains to assist local authorities in the development of commissioning skills, collaborative commissioning and market management for placements of LAC. The Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Wales has provided leadership in promoting effective collaborations<sup>5</sup> in three regions of Wales. The CCSR annual report (2008-9)<sup>6</sup> sets out functional (ICT and business) advancement over the past year and areas for improvement. Overall CCSR is proving to be a key resource tool in supporting local authorities in the delivery of their local strategies; and through concerted effort at a number of levels has provided the necessary shift in the pattern of the placement provision available.

13. The development of the system is progressive and it is important that through the CCSR user groups give equal weight is given to the business needs and responsibilities of commissioners and to the role and interests of providers in access to data and in regularly updating CCSR, so that we increase the opportunities for better matching of children to available vacancies. The CCSR also provides a rich information source to stimulating investment in the development of new services. We will support the WLGA and Local Government Data Unit (LGDU), who host the system, in working with all sectors to make the necessary system changes by the autumn to ensure all parties have equal access to information. In addition we intend

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<sup>5</sup> SEWIC, Mid & West Wales Social Service Improvement Collaborative,

<sup>6</sup> CCSR Annual Report on the CCSR Database (Published August 2009, Local Government Data Unit Wales)

to commission an evaluation of CCSR and how it has contributed to local placement strategies and will ensure the evaluation takes into account the evidence of this Committee.

14. It is important to distinguish the purpose of CCSR from the role of placing authorities carried out by social workers. The CCSR supports local authorities' placement strategies it does not, nor was it intended to, replace the need for social workers to make contact and make further enquiries of potential providers to ensure a placement will be suitable. CCSR is however an effective tool to assist the process of finding available provision and better matching it with the child's needs. It also offers a rich source of management information and market intelligence at an all Wales, regional and local level to help identify gaps and trends in service demand and provision available. This informs the need for and potential viability of collaborative approaches to develop and secure sufficient provision within a regional area. This is essential to realising our aspirations of having high quality placements for all children close to home, unless there are safeguarding requirements or other good reasons for distant placements. Annex 3 attached provides a summary of the functionality of CCSR.

15. Further enhancements to CCSR will be made over the coming year. The system will be invaluable to local authorities in implementing the new legal duties arising from the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 in respect of securing sufficient provision for placements of looked after children within their area and statutory notification for those placed out of area. We know from CCSR that there are significant gaps in specialist provision in Wales. We are encouraging local authorities to collaborate with independent sector providers to invest in regional specialist provision to ensure capacity is available where it is needed to keep Welsh children close to their communities. We have been working with the sector to promote better links and to persuade them of the benefits of an All Wales Children's Residential Care Forum. We are pleased that this will be established within Care Forum Wales from the autumn.

## **Foster Carers**

16. Placement choice and support to foster carers has been addressed in a number of ways. Local authorities have increased their provision of in-house locally grown and supported foster carers. Authorities have also developed innovative models such as *Foster Care Plus* for children with high levels of challenging behavior and complex needs and, through schemes like *Support Care*<sup>7</sup> are increasing their pool of foster carers for short term respite breaks for disabled children and children in families at risk of breakdown. Early messages from research we commissioned from LE Wales<sup>8</sup> about foster carers points to the development in the last few years of a very different foster care workforce; one that straddles a broad spectrum from family care at one end to a more professionalised service at the other. It reports over 75% of local authorities have fee structures linked to foster care skills and caring abilities, with some operating reward schemes for loyalty or experience. Over half of authorities are paying retainer fees for highly skilled foster carers providing specialist placements, and all are providing varying level of training and other support.

17. This suggests that linked Welsh Assembly Government initiatives to promote local authorities' support to foster carers and the development of a regulatory

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<sup>7</sup> Support Care Project – WAG Fund Fostering Network Cymru to advance short term foster placements

<sup>8</sup> Foster Care Payments Schedule and Fees Framework (2009) (LE Wales) to be published in autumn 2009

framework to ensure high standards in the approval and matching of placements are starting to have an impact in raising the standard of care for looked after children. Examples include;

- the recognition of foster care as a valued workforce in our social service strategy and Social Care Workforce Development Programme<sup>9</sup> and grant to local authorities to increase the qualifications and skills of social care workforce including foster carers.
- Regulations<sup>10</sup>, guidance and National Minimum Standards for foster care services that emphasise the importance of information sharing in matching placements and the provision of information to foster carers about the child and family history to enable the foster care to protect the child, their own family and other children for whom they may have responsibility.
- Financial Support to Foster Care Network Cymru and the British Association of Adoption & Fostering, both of which play an important role in supporting foster carers across a wide spectrum of information, advice services, training to professionals and foster carers, including a national advice line *Foster Line Cymru* and recruitment such as this year's campaign 'a career that changes lives'

## Strengthening Placements

18. *Towards A Stable Life and a Brighter Future*<sup>11</sup> is our distinctive policy to strengthen the placement and wellbeing of looked after and other vulnerable children and to bring greater accountability for decisions to place children out of the local authority area. This is beginning to reap positive returns (as reported in a number of CSSIW reports<sup>12</sup>). These include placements closer to home and increased attention to a child's health and education. Evidence reported to the Committee indicates 90% uptake of health assessments provided by LAC nurses, in one local authority area<sup>13</sup>. At an all Wales level there has been a marked uptake by looked after children of health assessments (57% in 2006 to 85% in 2008). Similarly the number of children registering with a GP has risen to 96% and those with Personal Education Plans have increased by 10% (52%) on last year.

19. A major challenge is to ensure that we have the highest quality of staff working to the highest standards in the residential care sector in Wales. We have tackled this by introducing a mandatory registration and qualifications framework for managers and care staff who provide specialist care for some of our most vulnerable and challenging children and young people. I commend the sector for their efforts in meeting the challenge as reported in a recent study by the Care Council for Wales<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Workforce Development Programme (SCDWP) WAGC 02/2008 - Social Care Workforce Development Programme for the Personal Social Services 2008- 2009

<sup>10</sup> Fostering Service (Wales) Regulations 2003 and NMS (WAG, 2003)

<sup>11</sup> *Towards A Stable Life and a Brighter Future* : Guidance and Regulations on measures to strengthen arrangements for placement and wellbeing of LAC and responsible Commissioner for Secondary Health care for vulnerable children placed away from home (WAG, June 2007)

<sup>12</sup> Chief Inspectors for Social Serf for Wales Annual report 2008, CSSIW audit of Independent Reviewing Officer Services in Wales (CSSIW, August 2009)

<sup>13</sup> Paper submitted by Dr Heather PAYNE (cyp(3)-09-09(p1\_:9 June 2009 refers

<sup>14</sup> With Care, First Complete Picture of the Residential Child care workforce in Wales ( CCFW, Spring 2009)

We now have over 1,500 working in a sector where all managers and half the care workers have the necessary qualifications and the remainder of the care staff are being supported to achieve their NVQ3 qualification by a fixed date.

## **Information Sharing**

20. Sharing information about people is central to effective care and service provision across the whole service sector. The Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) is the Welsh Assembly Government's framework to enable organisations to share information between them in a lawful and intelligent way.<sup>15</sup> Despite clear direction in regulations and standards for the safe sharing of relevant information with foster carers, the practice is variable across authorities. Foster carers also tell us they feel they are not always fully informed.

21. Poor practice can lead to placement breakdown and pose a risk to the child or other children in the foster carers' family. Differing professional interpretations on what is relevant information may act as a barrier to sharing and we will be consulting on proposals to strengthen this area and to prescribe care plan requirements and a wider package of reforms to support foster carers.

## **Placement of Disabled Children, Children from BME communities and UASC**

22. The Children Act and our policies do not make a distinction or require differing arrangements for children who are disabled, unaccompanied minors and children from BME communities. Other than identifying such children to be particularly vulnerable and that they may have additional needs requiring more specialist services.

23. Many of the looked after disabled population are in short term respite placements to provide breaks for their family. Others with more complex needs are accommodated in residential settings or away from home (for more than three months) in residential schools or are in-patients in health units. The placing local authorities continue to have responsibilities to these children to ensure their safeguards and welfare are promoted. We will introduce proposals next year to require authorities to regularly visit to promote and support (financially or otherwise) parents' visits to these children.

24. For Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC) who are minors, placements are normally made in an emergency situation. In such cases the same legal framework and duties<sup>16</sup> on local authorities apply as for other children who are looked after. In Wales we had at the last count 140 unaccompanied minors looked after and 86 former UASC supported by local authorities under care leaving arrangements. The number and age range, mainly older children of 16 – 17 years, has remained static for the past three years, although we have seen a shift in geographical care area and Cardiff, Monmouth and Wrexham account for four-fifths of the total. We continue to work closely with the Home Office to ensure UASC are treated as children first and to

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<sup>15</sup> The Wales Accord for the Sharing of Personal Information ( WAG, 2005)

<sup>16</sup> See NAFW Circular 23/2005

influence their agenda to ensure that unaccompanied minors are able to maximise their developmental and educational opportunities when accommodated in Wales. We resource a number of national<sup>17</sup>; and local specialist support networks to provide a range of support and advice including on immigration matters for UASC and children from BME communities.

## **Workforce**

25. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to strive towards professional excellence in social care and to do so by ensuring we have a thriving sector that invests in its workforce, is flexible, skilled and works in partnership to take forward the improvement agenda in Wales. Social workers also have an important role in shaping front line services.

26. Through the Care Council for Wales (the 'Council') we have an established framework of workforce standards for social care and the Code of Practice sets out practice standards for all those who work in the sector, with a requirement that social workers (qualified and student) are registered. A skilled and experienced social care workforce is essential to the effective delivery of placement, care management and review of looked after children.

27. There is a shared recognition of the need to ensure the right balance is struck between the process of high quality case management and the practice of direct work with children and families which informs process. While there are improvements in the recruitment and retention of social workers and students, vacancy rates in children's services continue to be a challenge<sup>18</sup>. We have been listening to what social workers and their representative organisation, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) tell us will improve practice and lead to professional excellence for a modernised social care service. The 'Council' will shortly consult on a career pathway for social workers to provide a route for social workers to gain advancement and remain in practice by introducing a new role of consultant social work practitioner. This will be available to people with specified levels of experience who have completed the accredited Post Qualifying social work training. The role will be tested as part of our new policy for Integrated Family Support Teams (IFST), to be pioneered in three areas of Wales from next year. To ensure there is a strong focus on and strategic direction in the modernisation of the social care workforce, I announced plans earlier this summer to establish a National Social Care Workforce Task Group. BASW will play an important role in ensuring the views and experiences of social workers are central to its work.

## **Voice of the Child in decision about their placements**

28. The importance of ascertaining and having regard to the wishes and feelings of children in relation to any decision about placing them in accommodation away from their birth parents is enshrined in primary law, regulations and the rules of the

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<sup>17</sup> Wales Strategic Migration Partnership, Wales Refugee Council

<sup>18</sup> ADSS and Care Council for Wales piloted a project with local authorities to collect data on the demand from employers for newly qualified social workers. The results were tentative but indicated a vacancy rate amongst child care social workers of 11.9%.

court in respect of family proceedings. Local authorities, guardians employed by CAF/CASS CYMRU and the court are bound by these legal duties and extensive guidance and procedures are in place to ensure a child and others who care for the child are heard.

29. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) has specific duties to meet a child before their review and any case conference to discuss their feelings and to monitor the care plan. The IRO should support the child at the review and meeting following the review to ensure that child has understood the process, any decision made and the implications of those decisions. Similarly any change to the care plan should be discussed and if necessary in light of the child's review reassessed.

30. Social workers and other professionals' priorities should be determined by what is in the child's best interest and welfare. In doing this they are required to take into account a range of factors, but to give due regard to the views of child depending on the child's age and understanding. It is important that all children are given clear explanations and have understanding and reassurances on major decisions that affect their life. The importance of their voice in the decisions about their care is embedded in the professional ethos and training of social workers and other professionals; IRO, guardians and advocates.

### **Review of Children Placements**

31. All placements for looked after children must be statutorily reviewed<sup>19</sup> within prescribed timescales. Authorities are required to appoint an IRO to monitor the implementation of the child's plan and to chair the review meeting. The IRO also has powers to refer a case to CAF/CASS CYMRU to take legal action where they consider the local authority has breached a child's Human Rights.

32. As part of CSSIW's<sup>20</sup> recent audit of IRO services, the views<sup>21</sup> of around 100 looked after children and young people on their experience and perception of the IRO service were sought. The report points to a picture of variable practice across Wales;

- 62% felt that in their review meetings that they had a say and their views were taken on board.
- 50% said that the IRO spoke to them prior to the meeting most children and young people felt the IRO was approachable
- 69% said they understood and felt comfortable at the review meeting
- 44% stated that they had a choice over placement
- 61% stated they had a choice over school attended and regarded as most important to them
- 50% of the BME group interviewed stated that their cultural identity was taken into account.

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<sup>19</sup> The Review of Children CASES (Wales) Regulations 2007

<sup>20</sup> CSSIW Audit of the Effectiveness of IRO service in Wales, CSSIW 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Tros Gynal : A report of the consultation held with children and young people on the role and function of Independent Reviewing Officers (2009)

33. Clearly there is considerable work to do to ensure children and young people are fully engaged in the process; decisions about their life, and to improve ways in which professionals can best support looked after children to ensure the environment and opportunities are conducive for children and young people to express their wishes and feelings. The report provides good examples of how this may be better achieved and I will ensure that these are addressed as part of the wider changes we intend to make to strengthen the arrangements for IRO<sup>22</sup>. The report and other indicators (for example 90% of statutory reviews are being completed in time), suggest that we are moving in the right direction, but there is a lot more work to do across a number of core processes to raise quality. Making further improvements in this area will be considered at national workshops in the autumn.

### **Further Developments and Improvements**

34. As mentioned earlier in this paper, as responsible corporate parents it is our duty to continuously examine and improve upon law, systems and practice for looked after children. At a Government level there have been significant policy developments and good indicators to suggest that we are moving in the right direction. However, challenges remain at a number of levels and policies are only successful when effectively implemented in a coherent and consistent way. We have witnessed the challenges faced by local authorities and repeated calls by the Chief Inspector for Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) in his annual reports for an acceleration of improvements in quality and consistent practice across Wales.

35. The Social Service Improvement Agency (SSIA) at WLGA has a pivotal role to play in leadership and in facilitating local authorities to improve practice at a number of levels. Taking leadership in the improvement agenda for the safeguards and welfare of looked after children is also a central role for elected members and Directors of Social Services in fulfilling their corporate responsibilities. To reinforce the importance of these roles we issued two key guidance documents over the summer; *If this Were My Child* and *The Role and Accountabilities for the Director of Social Services*.

36. Improving outcomes for looked after children is very much a priority for Government and we are committed to deliver on our social services strategy<sup>23</sup>. In respect of children, a number of distinct policies like Integrated Family Support Teams (IFST) are already underway and will have a major impact on the future arrangements for children who are placed in care. Our agenda is progressive and we have started to make changes through new powers in the Children and Young Persons Act 2008<sup>24</sup>. For example, we are presently consulting on new arrangements for Independent Review of Determinations for Fostering and Adoption<sup>25</sup>. The CSSIW will report in the autumn on its audit of local authorities and Local Safeguarding Children Boards' arrangements for the safeguards of children and for serious case reviews. We will need to give considerable thought to the findings and the necessary policy changes that may follow.

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<sup>22</sup> Section of CYP Act 2008, provides a range of new powers to strengthen the regulatory framework for IROs,

<sup>23</sup> *Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities* (WAG, 2008)

<sup>24</sup> The Children & Young Persons Act 2008, and EM see [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga\\_20080023\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga_20080023_en_1)

<sup>25</sup> Independent review of Determinations for Fostering and Adoption (WAG, August 2009)

37. Recognising the pressure on the service and the need to ensure any change can be properly implemented, we will consult with local and other stakeholders on the phased implementation of a package of measures to improve arrangements for looked after children. Central to these changes will be to strengthen the core requirements for the placement, care planning and review of looked after children and a new framework for remuneration, training and approval of foster carers.

Gwenda Thomas  
Deputy Minister for Social Services

## Annex 1

### **Central Principles of Placement and review arrangements for looked after children and the regulation of foster agencies/carers and support to foster carers**

#### **The Placement of Children (Wales) Regulations 2007**

These Regulations make provision for the placement of children by local authorities, voluntary organisations and persons carrying on private children's homes in Wales. The placements may be with foster parents, in community homes, voluntary children's homes or private children's homes.

Under the regulations local authorities are required to:

- Make arrangements for the accommodation and maintenance of children, by planning placements which promote their welfare. This includes having regard to the child's health and educational needs;
- Comply with certain procedures where the intention is to place a child outside the local authority area and if necessary make arrangements for the host local authority to carry out some of their functions on their behalf;
- Notify certain people (including health and education) of the arrangements to place a child within specified time periods and request prompt transfer of the child's records;
- Promote contact between the child and certain people (including parents, relatives and friends);
- Make arrangements for the child to undergo a health assessment, register with a GP and to have access to a dentist within set timescales;
- Maintain a register and individual records of every child they place and for voluntary organisations and private children's homes to allow Welsh Family Proceedings officers to have access to these records.

#### **The Review of Children Cases (Wales) Regulations 2007**

The Regulations make provision for review of the arrangements for placement of children in Wales who are looked after by local authorities or accommodated by voluntary organisations or private children's homes.

Under the regulations local authorities are required to:

- review children's placements and appoint independent reviewing officers to undertake reviews in accordance with the Regulations.
- Review are required; within four weeks of the date on which a child becomes looked after and subsequent reviews no more than six months after the previous review or sooner if required for example a break in a child's placement, change of school etc
- set out their arrangements for the way in which reviews are to be conducted, and to seek the views of the child, the child's parents, a child's link worker if the child is accommodated in a children's home. and any other person the

authority considers appropriate for example; a child's LAC nurse or education co-ordinator

- the coordination of reviews and appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to assist in that process, and to have prescribed matters the review must cover i.e. change in a child circumstances, contact arrangements, information for people to be involved in the review, recording of information , arrangements for contact,. Education and health arrangements, where the child is to be placed outside the local authority area etc - for full list see Schedules 1, 2 and 3.
- For the local authority to make arrangements to implement any decision made in the course of or as a result of a review, and to notify the independent reviewing officer of any failure to make such arrangements, or of any significant change of circumstances after the review which might affect the arrangements.
- To require the IRO to monitor the arrangements for reviews and make a written record of the review of a child's case and of associated matters.
- The review arrangements also apply to a child who is provided with accommodation for a series of short breaks.

### **Fostering Service (Wales) Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards**

The fostering Service (Wales) Regulations 2003 in conjunction with the National Minimum Standards provide the framework for the conduct of fostering services. They provide for the first time that independent fostering providers are required to register and be inspected by the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales. Local authority fostering services are also inspected annually. The Standards and Regulations provide the mechanism to ensure that the fostered child and foster carer receive a service that caters to their individual needs and safeguards their welfare

A Code of Practice for Foster Care published in 1999 remains extant it contains advice on the recruitment and assessment of foster carers. It stresses the need for a rigorous assessment of prospective carers to take account of the vulnerability of children and young people needing foster care. It offers specific advice on keeping children safe from harm and on strengthening the approach of local authorities to the recruitment, assessment, supervision and management of foster carers.

#### **Key Principles Include:**

- Each service provider has to have a Statement of Purpose which provides a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the facilities they provide.
- Those involved in managing the fostering service should have the necessary business and management skills to manage work efficiently and effectively.
- Providing Suitable Foster Carers – The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe healthy and nurturing environment. Once approved as a foster carer, the approving fostering service provider and the foster carer will enter into an agreement. The agreement will include matters and obligations for both the foster carer and approving service provider to comply with.

- The service must ensure that children and young people and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality
- Each child or young person placed in foster care must be carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs; these would include their physical emotional and social development. A high priority is given to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person and foster carers are encouraged to help them attain their full potential.
- Each approved foster carer is supervised by a social worker and has adequate access to social work and other professional support, information and advice to enable him to provide consistent, high quality care for the child or young person placed in their home. The service provider must satisfy itself that the welfare of each child placed by it continues to be suitably provided for by the placement.
- Children who are fostered may have been victims of various forms of abuse. It is vital that all those involved in recruitment, assessment and supervision are aware of the different kinds of abuse so they can ensure the children are not put at further risk when placed with families.
- Where foster care is provided as a short term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child. The service provider will have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short term breaks.
- Fostering service provider's policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.
- The fostering service provider will advise staff, others involved with the fostering service, those in receipt of a service or those who have been refused a service, about their right to make representation or complaint.
- The fostering Service (Wales) Regulations 2003 will be amended to make provision for foster carers to apply to an independent review panel for their case to be reviewed where their fostering service provider proposes to turn down their application to be a foster carer, or to revoke or amend the terms of their existing approval. This amendment will come into force in January 2010.

## **Children's Commissioning Support Resource**

Helping council's in Wales commission services for vulnerable children

### **What is Children's Commissioning Support Resource?**

The Children's Commissioning Support Resource (**CCSR**) is a service aimed at supporting the process of finding appropriate care settings for looked after children in Wales. It is a successful joined-up government initiative, with partners including the Welsh Assembly Government, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services in Wales. The service is provided by the Local Government Data Unit and is centred around a real-time database which allows users to match children with provision based on a profile of their requirements.

### **How does CCSR work?**

CCSR works in two main ways: a database of suitable accommodation which LA's can search through. The **CCSR** database holds details of care settings and vacancies from a range of service providers, including residential homes and foster carers. These should be continually updated by the providers, ensuring that **CCSR** provides the most up-to-date information possible.

Placement teams and local authority commissioners can use the database to identify suitable placements for children in their care by entering details of the child's requirements and running a search. The database will return a shortlist of the most suitable placements based on the information provided. A history of searches and their results is kept for future reference which provides management information to assist local authorities and other organisations with commissioning in the future.

CCSR is supporting regional collaborative work between local authorities by providing a consistent process used by all local authorities to base innovative developments on. The 3 regional projects are focused on improving outcomes for children and making the best use of existing resources.

### **What does CCSR do?**

- Allow officers to search for the most appropriate available vacancy in line with a child's needs and care plan
- Allow for supporting documentation to be associated with each Provider e.g. contractual status, inspection reports
- Provide a management information / evidence for use at local and national level
- Allow for better targeted future commissioning for children's services on a regional/partnership basis through use of management information
- Provide a transparent, consistent, national system
- Provides a baseline in Wales from which to grow
- Provide the opportunity to identify problems in the process

### **What CCSR doesn't do**

- CCSR does not hold any personal data on children. It holds only the placements that may meet their needs.
- Ensure the perfect placement for a child will be available

- Provide a complete placement solution. CCSR is a small part of the much larger placement process.

**What else does CCSR provide?**

Apart from maintaining the database, the **CCSR** team provides proactive support to providers and local authorities, including regional initiatives. There is a dedicated **CCSR** helpdesk and training on using the database is provided. Regular management information on the number and type of requirements being searched for and the level of vacancies listed to inform commissioning at both a local and national level are produced. The team is also involved in ensuring that provider pre-placement agreements are up-to-date and available online as part of **CCSR**.

For further information, e-mail [nia.lewis@wlga.gov.uk](mailto:nia.lewis@wlga.gov.uk) or [ccsrenquiries@dataunitwales.gov.uk](mailto:ccsrenquiries@dataunitwales.gov.uk) and ask about **CCSR**.

## Annex 3

**Bibliography of Legislation and Guidance on the Placement of Looked After Children**

Document Title	URL	Date Published
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