

# **Welsh Assembly Government Response to the Children and Young People Committee Inquiry on Arrangements for the Placement of Children into Care**

## **Executive Summary**

This document sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the report and recommendations published by the National Assembly for Wales' Children and Young People Committee on 21 May following its inquiry into the arrangements for the placement of children into care.

The State, as corporate parents for children in care, has an important role to ensure that policies and local systems work in the best interest of our children. The Welsh Assembly Government thanks the Children and Young People Committee for its comprehensive examination of these arrangements and their particular emphasis on the local processes and systems that operate across local authorities, fostering agencies and other services in providing care for looked after children and young people.

The Welsh Assembly Government's detailed response to each of the 33 recommendations identified by the Committee are set out below.

### **Recommendation 1**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government write to all local authorities in Wales, to determine the frequency with which the 'Care Plan and Essential Information Record Part 2' are not completed within 14 days of a child or young person being placed into a Looked After placement, and take appropriate action to address high incidences as required.

**Accept In Principle:** Timely completion of a child care plans is a key strategic priority for the Welsh Assembly Government. As such data on 'the percentage of first placements which begin with a care plan in place' is already collected as a National Strategic Indicator. Local authorities are legally obliged to collect and publish data for the National Strategic Indicators, under the Local Government (Best Value Performance Indicators) (Wales) Order 2008. Compliance in respect of care planning arrangements is monitored through the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) performance and inspection arrangements.

Statutory guidance requires care plans to be made before a child becomes looked after or, in a case of emergency, within 14 days of placement. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) has a key role in reviewing the plan within at least 4 weeks of a child becoming looked after.

We will however write to local authorities and their partners to highlight the findings of the CYP Committee inquiry and to remind them of their statutory duties to children in care. It is our intention that later this year we will consult on new consolidated regulations and guidance (under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) for the placement, care planning and review arrangements for children accommodated and in care, including revised timelines for completion of a care plan within 10 working days from the start of placement.

For more information on children service performance see: <http://www.lgdu-wales.gov.uk>

### **Financial Implications**

Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets. A total of £4.5m has been made available to local authorities [through the Revenue Support Grant] from 2010/11 to implement the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

## **Recommendation 2**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government engages in dialogue with local authorities to ensure they produce regular and detailed intelligence on trends in types of placements and shortage areas, and make such information publicly available.

**Accept:** We are taking a number of measures to improve placement choice and market intelligence to inform planning, commissioning and performance of placements for children in care. These include:

- A new sufficiency duty (section 22G of the Children Act 1989) to require local authorities to take steps to secure sufficient accommodation in their area which meets with the needs of children they are looking after.
- Encouraging local authorities to be active in managing their market and to work with partners to support and maintain a diversity of services to better meet the needs of looked after children. This must include provision of early preventative and intervention services, such as Integrated Family Support Teams (IFST), and flexible approaches such as respite placements to reduce the need for care proceedings.
- Promoting effective relationships between local authorities as commissioners and providers across all sectors to ensure markets can be incentivised to secure a range of placements (universal and specialist) that meet the need of looked after children.
- Publication by the Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) of regular online data including; provider reports, care settings, vacancies and in the medium term, when sufficiency duties are in operation, enhanced market intelligence on placement trends and shortage areas etc.

## **Financial Implications**

Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets. A total of £4.5m has been made available to local authorities [through the Revenue Support Grant] from 2010/11 to implement the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

### **Recommendation 3**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government commissions an evaluation of the effectiveness of the placement process, including the use of the Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) and identifying improvements.

### **Recommendation 4**

We recommend that, as part of enabling the evaluation detailed in Recommendation 3, the Welsh Assembly Government ensure that independent foster care providers are able to feed in comments on the effectiveness of the placement process, including CSSR.

### **Recommendation 5**

We recommend that, as part of enabling the evaluation detailed in Recommendation 3, the Welsh Assembly Government ensure that independent foster care providers are able to comment on the effectiveness of their communications with local authorities, including through, but not limited to, CSSR.

**Accept (3 - 5):** Later this year we will commission an evaluation of CCSR. The evaluation will involve all stakeholders from across the sectors including; the independent, voluntary and public foster care and residential care providers. The evaluation will look at the effectiveness of CCSR as a resource tool to facilitate local authorities' identification and better matching of suitable placements, and its capacity and value in extending use of CCSR for all placements made by local authorities, including those with in-house approved foster carers or residential settings.

### **Financial Implications**

Costs for evaluation will be in the order of £0.1m and will be accommodated within existing budgets.

## **Recommendation 6**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produce statutory guidance outlining that cost should not be used by local authorities to initially short list potential placements for a child. Such guidance should clearly state that cost must only be used by local authorities to differentiate between potential placements that are considered to have mutually suitable intended outcomes for a child.

**Reject:** The needs of the child should always be the determining factor in deciding on the most suitable placement for a child. Local authorities as corporate parents for looked after children have a statutory and morale duty to place children in the most appropriate placement that meets the individuals' needs. Legislation<sup>1</sup> requires local authorities to have regard to safeguards; welfare; educational achievement; ascertain the wishes of the child and family; and give due consideration to religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural background of child before making a placement. The ongoing suitability of a placement, or any placement move, is also a key consideration for the IRO when reviewing a child case.

The new regulations and guidance referred to in Recommendation 1 above will strengthen the arrangements for placements, improve outcomes for children in care and place greater control on the wishes and feelings of a child in the placement decision. Local authorities will be required to give preference to a placement with a relative, friend or other person connected with the child and who is also a local authority foster parent. This reflects our stated policy that "a child's best interest is met with their family, connected family, friend and local community unless there is a risk.

Additional factors which the local authority must take into consideration when deciding the most appropriate placement are:

- allowing the child to live near his/her home;
- not disrupting the child's education or training;
- enabling the child and a looked after sibling to live together;
- meeting the particular needs of disabled children; and
- providing accommodation within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.

## **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets. A total of £4.5m has been made available to local authorities [through the Revenue Support Grant] from 2010/11 to implement the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> The Placement of Children (Wales) Regulations 2007  
([http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2007/wsi\\_20070310\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2007/wsi_20070310_en_1))

### **Recommendation 7**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government provide guidance to local authorities, recommending they provide a pro forma to potential foster carers, with questions they suggest a carer should ask before agreeing to a placement.

**Agree:** A number of fostering providers do this as good practice. We will promote and facilitate the development of good practice tools with the cross sector advisory group on fostering and adoption.

### **Financial Implications**

None - Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets.

### **Recommendation 8**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government takes whatever steps it considers necessary to ensure that Foster Carers are perceived to be professionals in the childcare workforce, including engaging in dialogue with the Care Council for Wales, towards enabling foster carers to come under its remit as a sector Skills Council.

**Accept:** Our 10 year strategy for social services “*Fulfilled Lives - Supportive Communities*”<sup>2</sup> and the *Social Care Workforce Action Plan* recognise that foster carers are a vital element of the workforce and have much to contribute as part of the team. We have also established a national *Social Work and Social Care Workforce Task Group* to look at a range of improvements including recruitment, retention and professionalism of the wider social care workforce that includes foster carers.

We continue to work with the Care Council for Wales on improving skills and capacity of foster carers and are developing a *Fees, Allowance and Skills Framework* with new induction training for fosters carers. The framework is informed by research undertaken by LE Wales and the Hadley centre for Adoption and Fostering Care Studies (University of Bristol). It is our intention that a report of their findings and options will be published later this year along with a consultation on a proposed future Framework for Wales. In the longer term this may include foster carers registration with the Care Council for Wales.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets for “*Fulfilled Lives – Supportive Communities*” our social service strategy.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/publications/socialcare/strategies/fulfilledlives?lang=en>

### **Recommendation 9**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government provide guidance to local authorities, recommending they provide an information sharing checklist and flowchart to their social workers, with questions they suggest a practitioner should ask themselves as to whether to share information with foster carers.

### **Recommendation 10**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government ensure that information sharing checklist, referred to in Recommendation 9, includes reference to appropriate processes for sharing information with children of foster parents.

**Accept In Principle (9 and 10):** Sharing information with foster carers is significant in ensuring the safeguards and welfare of the foster child, the foster carers and other members of the foster carers' family. Existing regulations<sup>3</sup>, national minimum standards<sup>4</sup> and guidance set out local authorities' responsibilities for the provision of information in relation to a child placed or to be placed with foster parents. We have undertaken to write to local authorities about their broader duties for the placement of children including arrangements for foster carers. This will build on the letter sent to local authorities last December to emphasise the importance of information sharing with foster carers.

The regulations and guidance on care planning, placement and case review that we plan to consult on will set out the information which must be provided in the placement plan which will include information about:

- the child's family;
- his/her race, religion and culture including the language spoken at home;
- any disabilities or other special needs;
- the circumstances leading to the child becoming looked after, and the child's previous experiences both before and during the care episode;
- the long term plan for the child and its timeframe; and
- what the objectives are for the specific placement being offered and how these fit within the care plan.

The carer (foster carer) should be given a copy of the care plan when it is completed and be clear about his/her role in implementing it.

The accompanying statutory guidance will state that information on the child's health, educational and emotional and behavioral needs including how these may affect the child day to day should be provided along with appropriate strategies for responding to them. In addition it will stress the importance of identifying any behaviours which have been of concern to a child's previous carer and which have contributed to the breakdown of a previous placement.

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<sup>3</sup> The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 (<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2003/20030237e.htm>)

<sup>4</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/cssiwsite/newcssiw/aboutus/providingsocialcare/childservices/nmschildserv/?lang=en>

We will explore with stakeholders as part of our consultation of new care planning arrangements whether a checklist based on the above would be beneficial.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets. A total of £4.5m has been made available to local authorities [through the Revenue Support Grant] from 2010/11 to implement the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

### **Recommendation 11**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government continues to trial more effective ways of information sharing between government agencies, through engagement with the pioneer areas taking forward the integrated family support services model.

**Accept In Principle:** The current arrangements for information sharing across sectors is the Wales Accord from the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI). Building on these arrangements and the outcomes of a scoping study to look at the existing and potential arrangements for sharing information between professionals working with children and young people, we have set up a national stakeholder forum to develop a common approach across public services nationally to the sharing of personal information. This initial 2-year programme aims to ensure that the most vulnerable citizens receive the best services and practitioners are clear when they can and cannot share information legally and safely. In addition, this is also being addressed by the National Children's Safeguarding Forum,

The approach in Wales will follow two linked elements, to extend use of the WASPI across all of Wales and to establish Information Sharing Communities at a local level that bring together representatives from key agencies to support successful implementation. Plans currently include project-level initiatives around substance misuse, child protection, preventing admissions to hospital and the development of Integrated Family Support Services.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets.

## **Recommendation 12**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government issues statutory guidance to all local authorities, NHS Trusts and Local Health Boards to enable the production of written interagency protocols, dealing with: the gathering of consent for health assessments, the sharing and maintenance of health information and personal documentation for Looked After Children; and the interagency sharing of personal information for the purpose of discharging joint responsibilities.

**Accept in Principle:** We will explore this further as part of our work on developing statutory guidance on promoting the health and well-being of looked after children. We will want to draw on the support of the *Looked After Children Health Exchange* and the *All Wales Looked After Children Nurse Group* to support us in the development of our health and well-being guidance for looked after children.

The Welsh Assembly Government also recognises that the sharing of information is central to effective care and service provision across the whole service sector and has set up a framework (the WASPI) to enable organisations to share information between them in a lawful and intelligent way.

The Information Sharing Programme is considering the most effective ways of ensuring a coherent and shared approach to the use of the WASPI protocol across public services as a whole. This will include training and continuing support in its use as well as a system for monitoring effectiveness and ensuring standards are maintained. It is hoped that it will become an area for inclusion in inspection criteria across all services.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets.

### **Recommendation 13**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government engage with local authorities to ensure that, in producing interagency protocols as detailed in recommendation 12, there are quality monitoring/control/assurance mechanisms in place, including regular interagency review of statistics, performance and outcomes data, an audit against agreed standards of health process and healthcare training.

**Accept In Principle:** Local authorities have distinct duties in relation to the health and well-being of children they look after. Our policy “*Towards A Stable Life and a Brighter Future*”<sup>5</sup> required the appointment of designated Looked After Nurses to work with the child, across agencies and professions to promote and co-ordinate the health needs of looked after children. Monitoring of health improvements of looked after children is considered as part of the CSSIW inspection and local authorities’ performance indicators for example, this provides annual data on the percentage of looked after children who had a health assessment and teeth checked in a year, allocated GP etc. Other monitoring sources include the National Service Framework Self Assessment Audit Tool (SAAT) and duties on the IRO to oversee the care plan for the child including their development and health needs.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Systems currently in place.

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<sup>5</sup><http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/publications/towards/;jsessionid=310PLHyfQfQJdfCwt2C9pGy2NZv05f1tBT1yzP2ZvKvXbyJhrNtW!200562741?lang=en>

**Recommendation 14**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government continue to progress its work on giving Independent Reviewing Officers statutory duties to monitor the implementation of decisions made as part of placement reviews.

**Recommendation 15**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produce guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers, detailing that the location of placement reviews should normally be determined by the child whose looked after placement is being reviewed, with appropriate support.

**Recommendation 16**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produce guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers, detailing that the attendees of placement reviews should normally be determined by the child whose looked after placement is being reviewed, with appropriate support.

**Recommendation 17**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produce guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers, detailing that children and young people's responses to consultation papers, circulated prior to Review meetings, should be read with sufficient time ahead of meetings to influence the location of the review, and its attendees.

**Recommendation 18**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produce guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers, to ensure that consultation papers circulated to children and young people prior to their placement review are suitable to the individual circumstances of the child concerned.

**Accept (14 - 18):** Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) already have statutory duties<sup>6</sup> to monitor local authorities' functions in respect of the placement review and any failure to take proper steps to implement review recommendations. Our intention is to consult on proposals (regulations and guidance) to extend the role of the IRO to include independent oversight of the child's case and to strengthen the arrangements for the review and the child's voice in the process.

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<sup>6</sup> The Review of Children's Cases (Wales) Regulations 2007  
([http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2007/wsi\\_20070307\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2007/wsi_20070307_en_1))

Under the new proposals local authorities will be required to appoint a named IRO for each child. We will reinforce the IROs existing duties to ensure the child's views are taken into account to ensure that the local authority gives due consideration to any views expressed by the child. The IRO will also have the authority to adjourn review meetings if they feel that the process would be unproductive due to, for example, a lack of key documentation or because the child hasn't been consulted about the purpose of the review.

IROs will be required to speak in private with each child prior to each review (at a venue of their choice) so that the IRO personally establishes the child's wishes and feelings about the issues to be covered at the care planning meeting. This requirement is intended to ensure that the child is properly consulted on matters relating to his/her care and is given the time to contribute to the content of the meeting.

Children must also be offered the support of an independent advocate to support them in the review process. This may require the IRO to meet separately with professionals and or the child's parents.

Referral by an IRO of a case to Cafcass Cymru should no longer be seen as a last resort, but can be considered at any time. These changes should further empower IRO to challenge poor practice around the child's case.

### **Financial Implications**

Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets. A total of £4.5m has been made available to local authorities [through the Revenue Support Grant] from 2010/11 to implement the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

## Recommendation 19

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government continue its work towards producing legislation to ensure that everyone working in the field of child welfare, and the future of children, is legally required to listen to their voices.

**Accept:** The Welsh Assembly Government has adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as the basis of all its work for children and young people in Wales. This has been translated with our seven core aims for children and young people, including ensuring children and young people are listened to and treated with respect. The Proposed Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure will embed the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) into law.

Ensuring that the voice of the child is heard is central to the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004, the main legislative basis for child safety and welfare. Ensuring professionals who work with children have the skills in child welfare and listening to children and young people is core to the qualifications, skills and competency framework of the health and social care workforce for children and young people and their families as is the national service framework for children, young people and maternity services<sup>7</sup>, regulations and national standards<sup>8</sup> for regulated settings in children service (child care, fostering and residential family centres and children homes) and our participation agenda. Certain staff, such as Cafcass Cymru officers, hold specific additional individual duties as to the safeguards and welfare of children and young people in family court proceedings.

On a broader level the new national advocacy and advice line (Meic) will ensure all children have access to someone to talk to get their voice heard if they have any welfare of other concerns.

For children who are looked after it is essential they have a strong voice in all decisions that affect their lives in particular their placements and this will be the main thread of the new suite of regulations and guidance on which we will consult.

### Financial Implications

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets. A total of £4.5m has been made available to local authorities [through the Revenue Support Grant] from 2010/11 to implement the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/publications/nsfchildrenyoungpeoplematernity/?lang=en>

<sup>8</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/cssiwsite/newcssiw/aboutus/providingsocialcare/childservices/nmschildserv/?lang=en>

## **Recommendation 20**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produce statutory guidance, detailing that when a placement review is scheduled, the child's advocate is informed with sufficient time to listen to the views of the child or young person about their placement, and assist them in completing responses to the consultation paper.

**Agree in Principle:** Every looked after child has the right<sup>9</sup> to be supported by an advocate and guidance promotes the involvement of the advocate role in the review. Local authorities must have a system in place to provide written, age appropriate information to each looked after child about the function and availability of an advocate and how to request one.

When meeting with the child before every review, the IRO is responsible for making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one. Advocacy is an option available to children whenever they want such support and not just when they want to make a formal complaint. Some children will feel sufficiently confident or articulate to contribute or participate in the review process without additional help. Others may prefer the support of an advocate. This could be a formal appointment from a specialist organisation or might be an adult already in the child's social network. It will be the child's decision on whether or not they wish to be supported by an advocate.

The IRO has a key role in ensuring the child's views are listened to and taken into account. New duties on authorities to appoint a named IRO for each child will assist the child in building a relationship with his/her IRO making it easier for the child to express his/her views and feelings and for the IRO to have a greater knowledge and understanding of the child thereby facilitating the review process. The importance of the relationship between the child, advocate and IRO will be a key feature of the new statutory guidance.

This voice of a child in the process will be further strengthened through our consultation on consolidated regulations and guidance in this area.

## **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets. A total of £4.5m has been made available to local authorities [through the Revenue Support Grant] from 2010/11 to implement the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

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<sup>9</sup> The Advocacy Services and Representations Procedure (Children) (Wales) Regulations 2004 (<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2004/20041448e.htm>)

### **Recommendation 21**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produces statutory guidance to ensure that local authorities normally conduct separate exit interviews with young people leaving the looked after system in Wales; their foster carers; and their foster brothers and sisters.

**Accept:** Changes to the role of the IRO will strengthen the requirement that significant changes to the care plan can only be made at a child's review. This would include any plan for the child not to remain looked after or for a young person to go from a regulated setting such as foster care to a semi independent placement. As part of the review, the local authority will need to take into account the views of the young person, their foster carers and any other significant people.

However, requiring IRO to undertake exit interview with the young person, their carer and the carer's family will bring another dimension to the IRO quality assurance of the service drawing on their experiences of children and young people and feeding views back into service, policy planning and research. We will therefore consult on the proposal as part of the consolidated regulations and new guidance on the role of the IRO.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets. A total of £4.5m has been made available to local authorities [through the Revenue Support Grant] from 2010/11 to implement the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

**Recommendation 22**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government undertakes a major campaign to enable the recruitment of foster carers.

**Reject:** The Welsh Assembly Government supports national campaigns in *Foster Care Fortnight* through its grant to fostering and adoption organisations and Ministerial promotion, attendance at launch events to highlight the important role of foster carers and their valuable contribution to the social care workforce.

Local authorities are responsible for ensuring sufficient provision in the range of accommodation and services for children and the quality of workforce providing care. Government's role is to ensure there is a clear framework of standards and rules on which the quality and professional delivery of care are measured. For example, in the case of foster carers, they must meet national regulations and standards of approval. We have through the Social Service Improvement Agency (SSIA) facilitated the establishment of four regional collaboratives to come together to commission areas of common interest and offer better value in economies of scale for smarter commissioning. For example, the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC) made up of 10 local authorities, provide a regional foster agency that leads on recruitment, training and other support mechanisms for foster carers.

**Financial Implications**

None.

### **Recommendation 23**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government writes to local authorities in Wales to clarify and amend where necessary existing guidance on the authority of foster carers to take day to day parenting decisions, including in relation to overnight stays and school trips.

**Agree:** The Welsh Assembly Government issued statutory guidance<sup>10</sup> on delegated authority to foster carers in 2004 (NAFW Circular 50/2004). This will be restated in regulations and guidance on care planning, placement and review on which we intend to consult.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets. A total of £4.5m has been made available to local authorities [through the Revenue Support Grant] from 2010/11 to implement the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

### **Recommendation 24**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produces guidance to local authorities to ensure that foster care agreements are reviewed on an annual basis.

**Agree.** This will be encouraged within the new guidance to support the care planning, placement and review process. Foster carer approval has to be reviewed annually under *The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003*<sup>11</sup>. As part of these arrangements and the child case review process, we will emphasise the need for local authorities to consider a review of foster care agreement.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets. A total of £4.5m has been made available to local authorities [through the Revenue Support Grant] from 2010/11 to implement the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

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<sup>10</sup> Delegation of Decisions on Overnight Stays for Looked After Children  
(<http://wales.gov.uk/publications/circular/circulars04/NAFWC502004?lang=en>)

<sup>11</sup> The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003  
(<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2003/20030237e.htm#29>)

### **Recommendation 25**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produces guidance to local authorities to enable a level of remuneration to trained foster carers who are temporarily without foster placements.

**Reject:** The payment of retention allowances for foster carers is a matter for the local authority to determine as part of their foster care services. Whilst the Welsh Assembly Government can provide general advice in this regard, we would not wish to be overly prescriptive. It is for the local authority to meet the needs of their looked after children and this will include having a sufficient supply of foster carers.

We will however be consulting on a *Fees, Allowance and Skills Framework*. The proposals build on a comprehensive study of local authorities, foster care agencies, foster carers, their families and children they care for, on what current arrangements are in place across Wales. The framework will set out proposals for setting minimal allowances (with three yearly review points) and encourage local authorities to work towards harmonised approaches to a fees and skills framework.

### **Financial Implications**

None.

## **Recommendation 26**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should involve foster care organisations, foster carers and foster children in developing and expanding the provision and accessibility of a foster care advice line, including phone, email and text services for foster carers.

**Agree In Principle:** The Welsh Assembly Government funds Fostering Network (Cymru) to run Fosterline Wales a dedicated advice line for foster carers, fostering services and anyone interested in fostering. The advice line covers all aspects of fostering and can be contacted on freephone number: 0800 316 7664 between 9.30 and 12.30 Monday to Friday, or by e-mail [fosterlinewales@fostering.net](mailto:fosterlinewales@fostering.net).

Fostering Network provides a regular update on issues raised to inform policy. We will continue to monitor the level of calls made to the helpline to inform any decision regarding expanding provision and ensure that our contractual arrangements ensure that stakeholders are fully involved in developing and quality assuring the Fosterline service.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets.

**Recommendation 27**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government look at ways of challenging media representations and public perceptions of social workers, so that they provide an environment where there is a positive focus on the achievements and contributions made by social workers.

**Recommendation 28**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government continues to engage in dialogue with the Care Council for Wales and local authorities, towards creating and trialling, a Social Work Consultant role. We anticipate such a role would be appropriately remunerated and respected, would include mentoring junior colleagues, but with its main focus being professional work with children and young people.

**Recommendation 29**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government conducts a review of the looked after system, with a view to establishing whether certain forms of information can be entered and recorded by administrative colleagues, rather than social workers themselves.

**Recommendation 30**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government engage with local authorities to ensure that as part of social workers' training they have the opportunity to speak with sons and daughters of foster carer groups.

**Accept In Principle (27 - 30):** Our social care workforce is one of the most valuable assets of the social care service and has a major role in advocating for our most vulnerable in society. The role of social work is particularly complex and challenging and that brings with it unique pressures. It remains a challenge to ensure the social work profession has the profile and recognition they deserve. The media can be a powerful source in promoting the significant task and challenges social workers face in protecting and helping vulnerable people in our society. The profile, how best we enhance and promote professional excellence in social care practice, including a new career framework is central to the work of the national *Social Work and Social Care Workforce Task Group*. The Welsh Assembly Government is working with the Care Council for Wales to further develop career progression in family services.

The Care Council for Wales is currently reviewing the Social Work degree and early work has highlighted the need to ensure social workers are fully aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding others, whatever the nature of their practice learning. The Care Council for Wales (the Council) will ensure that this proposal is included in the review and identify ways of addressing the recommendation.

In terms of the time spent by social workers in process, there is evidence about the complexity of the Integrated Children System (ICS) and we are considering this with the Association of Directors for Social Service Cymru (ADSS) with a view to simplifying systems. We will also want to draw on any learning from the Children System Review in Neath Port Talbot that the Welsh Assembly Government is supporting through the Invest to Save programme.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets for *Fulfilled Lives - Supportive Communities*, our social service strategy.

### **Recommendation 31**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produces guidance, establishing that every NHS Trust and Local Health Board in Wales should have a named doctor for looked after child with the British Association for Adoption and fostering (BAAF)/Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) recommended protected time to offer the necessary clinical consultation and manage the infrastructure of information systems, processes and protocols and interagency liaison, audit and monitoring.

**Agree In Principle:** The NHS and LHB has a clear role in ensuring the timely and effective delivery of health services to looked after children and young people. There are a range of health professionals who promote the health of looked after children.

Public Health Wales are required to have designated doctors and other health professions who have strategic responsibilities for health promotion and child protection for Looked After Children.

Each area is required to have a designated specialist nurse who co-ordinates the holistic care of the looked after child and ensures the LHB are discharging their general and specific health duties in respect of LAC, including completion of statutory health assessment, transfer of health plans, registration with GP and dentist, access to specialist CAMHS etc.

Many LHB areas in varying forms have named doctors who cover a number of roles including health of looked after children where duties may include supporting adoptions by the provision of medical assessment etc. Practice across Wales is variable and as part of our proposals to develop guidance on promoting health of LAC we will explore more formalised system for designated doctors in each LHB area. The Health of LAC Exchange will be an invaluable resource that we will want to engage in developing the health guidance.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets.

### **Recommendation 32**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government produces guidance, establishing that every NHS Trust and Local Health Board in Wales should have specialist nurses for looked after children.

### **Recommendation 33**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government engages with local authorities to ensure that there are effective, auditable mechanisms and clear lines of accountability for the transfer of care, including health care, when a child is placed out of county, and across any internal service boundaries.

**Agree In Principle (32 and 33):** Our policy, *Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future*<sup>12</sup>, underpinned through regulations and statutory guidance, strengthened the arrangements for the placement, health, education and well-being of looked after children. This places duties on local health boards to appoint specialist health practitioners (Clinical Nurse Specialists for looked after children). The Clinical Nurse Specialist is responsible for co-ordinating the child's health care plan and addressing the health needs of looked after children. The policy also provides a number of protocols for sharing information, transfer of a child clinical records etc.

*Towards A Stable Life* also sets out the arrangements for placing children out of area. This firmly places the duties on local authorities and LHBs for of the health and education of children and transfer or medical and other records etc and required local authorities to establish multi-agency panels including obtaining the Head of Service agreement for any child placed out of area . The Responsible Commissioner arrangements clarified the duties on the LHB in respect of responsibility for the child's secondary healthcare.

Shortly, we will issue new guidance on the **Responsible Body Duties** on LHB and this will reinforce their duties in respect of looked after children. Our future consultation on promoting the health of looked after children guidance will also consolidate all of the existing requirements in this respect.

### **Financial Implications**

None. Costs will be accommodated within existing budgets.

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<sup>12</sup><http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/publications/towards/?jsessionid=310PLHyfOfQJdfCwt2C9pGy2NZv05f1tBT1yzP2ZvKvXbyJhrNtW!200562741?lang=en>