

## Improving Outcomes for Looked after Children

### Decision sought

This paper sets out work being taken forward across government on Improving Outcomes for Looked after Children.

Cabinet is asked to note this work programme, and agree that additional targeted effort is needed to create a step-change in outcomes for looked after children.

### The Issues

#### The case for change

1. The Programme for Government, **Taking Wales Forward** commits to “*examine ways of ensuring looked after children enjoy the same life chances as other children and if necessary reform the way they are looked after*”. This is reinforced by our national strategy ‘**Prosperity for All**’, with social care as one of the five priority areas, with actions to:
  - *raise the educational attainment and improve the life chances of children in care, adopting a child centred approach, through the collaboration of education, social services and others.*
  - *strengthen edge of care services to provide families with timely support to reduce the numbers needing care provision and provide assistance in the key transitional phase post 16 to access further education, jobs and housing for all those leaving care.*
2. As of March 2016, there were 5,662 looked after children in Wales with numbers remaining static over the last three years. The rate of looked after children is 90 per 10,000 in Wales, compared to 60 per 10,000 in England. Welsh rates of looked after children are higher than England at every point on the deprivation scale. The rates of looked after children vary across local authorities in Wales and whilst they generally correlate to levels of deprivation there are authorities with significant levels of deprivation that have relatively low LAC rates e.g. Newport and Caerphilly (see Annex 1). Evidence indicates a number of factors which help lower these rates including: a clear strategic approach, strong leadership, good multi-disciplinary working and information sharing, and integrated planning around early intervention and prevention services.

- 3 Providing safe, appropriate care for children places a significant cost pressure on local authorities. Almost 19,000 children received support from children's services in 2015/16. The Welsh Judiciary are concerned that the family court system is operating at maximum capacity due to increasing numbers of care applications. To illustrate, care applications (section 31) in 2016-17 saw a 25% increase on the previous year. This upward trend continues. Three quarters of looked after children are accommodated in foster care placements, at an estimated cost to local authorities of around £100m per year. Approximately 5% of looked after children are placed in residential care. The remaining children will have other arrangements such as placements with kinship carers or adoption.

We know that:

- Despite significant improvement since 2013, there is a 37 percentage point gap in the attainment of Level 2 Inclusive (5 GCSEs at Grade A-C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics) between looked after children and the all-pupils category.<sup>1</sup>
- Looked after children were 6 times more likely to be cautioned or convicted of an offence than other children<sup>2</sup>.
- 10% of children in Wales between the ages of 5-16 have a mental health problem but anecdotal evidence indicates this is much higher for looked after children.
- 5% of looked after children were known to have substance abuse problems.
- 43% of care leavers (at age 19) were known to be not in education, training or employment (NEET)<sup>3</sup>. This compares to 18.5 per cent of 19-24 year olds overall.<sup>4</sup>
- Between 20 and 30% of all young homeless people have been in care<sup>5</sup>.

### **A vision for change**

4. In September 2016, the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group was established as a cross-government, cross-sector group to develop an ambitious programme to reduce the number of children coming into care; to improve the quality of life, outcomes and experiences of children who are in care; and to better support care leavers. This work is grounded in the evidence

<sup>1</sup> Raising the Ambitions and Educational Attainment of Children who are Looked after in Wales: one year on – April 2017

<sup>2</sup> In Care, Out of Trouble, Prison Reform Trust – April 2016

<sup>3</sup> Source Welsh Government statistical release Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) issued 26 July 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Source Welsh Government statistical release Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) issued 26 July 2017.

<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/young-people-not-education-employment-training/?lang=en>

<sup>5</sup> PPIW Report - Provision for Young Care Leavers at Risk of Homelessness – June 2015; Centrepoint, 2010; Crisis, 2012

collected by its predecessor, the Looked after Children Strategic Steering Group established by the former Minister for Health and Social Services. The Ministerial Advisory Group's ambitious work programme is attached at Annex 2.

5. The vision is to ensure the life chances of looked after children are the same as for other children and a Framework for Action 2017-2020 is being developed for consideration by the Minister for Children and Social Care and ministerial colleagues across government. This Framework will include a 3 year change programme to realise the vision through a whole system approach that builds child, family and community resilience through integrated service planning and provision, with early intervention and prevention at its heart. It recognises the work already delivered and highlights what cross-government work is needed to deliver the step change required to improve outcomes in relation to educational attainment, therapeutic services and care leaver support as highlighted in Prosperity for All.

### **Resources**

- 6 This year, £8m was provided to help drive the 3 year change programme which primarily aims to reduce numbers coming into care. Funding has been allocated to local authorities and includes:

- £5m investment in expanding local authority edge of care services
- £1.625m to support care leavers to successful futures and independent living by providing additional resources to local authority traineeship/work placement schemes and extending the provision of personal advisers up to age 25
- £400k to deliver a Fostering Framework for Wales
- £125k to develop adoption support work, building on the success of the National Adoption Service

- 7 In addition, earlier this year, a £1m St David's Day Fund was launched to provide direct financial support to care leavers so they can access opportunities to help them successfully transition towards independent living.

### **Impact**

- 8 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets the framework within which public bodies in Wales must work together to improve the well-being of Wales, working in an integrated and collaborative way, engaging with people and communities to take account of the long-term and to help prevent problems occurring or getting worse.

- 9 We can deliver the actions in the Strategy and the objectives in the Well-being Act effectively only if all parts of government work together and focus on the areas where government can make a difference.

**Building on achievements to deliver a step change**

- 10 Social care is one of 5 priorities in the national strategy. By identifying all the policies and activities that can support this priority area, through working differently and coordinating resources and efforts, we have an opportunity to pick up the pace of improvement. We can set challenging cross government goals to make a difference to the lives of looked after children, improving their prospects and, in many cases, preventing or minimising the need for further interventions.
- 11 The following sections outline the three areas for action designed to improve the outcomes for looked after children. For each section, the progress made to date, in realising the vision of the strategy, has been documented. Also captured are the developing ideas for areas of cross-governmental work which have been suggested as a basis for moving forward to build on the positive aspects of the current system and the work done so far. This cross-governmental work will, with other proposals, inform the work being done on future steps in the Social Care priority area and the delivery of the other priorities.

***(A) Preventing children entering care and early intervention***

**What we have done**

- 12 Research shows us there is a strong relationship between rates at which children come into care and deprivation in local areas. Tackling poverty and building community resilience with services aimed at keeping families together helps to reduce the numbers of children entering care. Local authorities will benefit from over £76 million in funding for Flying Start and £38 million for Families First in this financial year, with the opportunity for further integration of services going forward.
- 13 Integrated edge of care services help families stay together at times of crisis. For example, during 2015/16 over 700 families were engaged by Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS) teams. However, demand continues to outstrip capacity. This year we have provided an additional £5m to strengthen local authority support for vulnerable families whose children are at risk of entering the care system. As part of this, an assessment of edge of care services is being undertaken to identify effective approaches to family support and strategies for managing risk. £850k has also been provided to roll out the Reflect project across Wales to reduce the number of children being taken into care by breaking the cycle of repeat pregnancies and recurrent care proceedings. From 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 the number of children starting to be looked after and in

need of care was 2,055. These investments have the potential to prevent around 330 children annually from entering the care system.

**Step change work going forward**

- 14 The Early Years are a critical time in terms of child development and outcomes, especially for those living in deprivation, which is why they feature as a cross-cutting theme in Prosperity for All.
- 15 Scoping work is being taken forward by my officials working with officials from health and education to develop an integrated Early Years system that ensures families and parents get the right support, at the right time, from the right service. We must learn from what works, including the Team Around the Family approach and take a whole system approach to early intervention and prevention so that we achieve a step-change in reducing the number of children coming into care.

**(B) Improving Outcomes for children already in care**

**What we have done**

- 16 Stable placements are crucial to providing children in care with a feeling of belonging and security – and this is key to educational attainment. We know that children who grow up in care do not do as well in school as many of their peers. Our joint 3 year education and social services plan *'Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales'*, published in January 2016, aims to strengthen arrangements to support the education of children who are looked after. The plan recognises that social and education services have to work more closely together to improve the life chances of the looked after child. *Education in Wales: Our national mission* published by the Cabinet Secretary for Education in September commits to strengthening partnership working to deliver better outcomes for looked after children.
- 17 While it is encouraging that at Key Stage 4 (summer 2016) 23% of looked after children in Wales achieved Level 2 Inclusive, a 10% increase from 2013, there is much still to do. The Cabinet Secretary for Education has therefore continued the Pupil Development Grant for the rest of this Assembly term. Through these grant arrangements, regional education consortia receive £4 million a year to provide educational support to looked after children, resulting in a far greater understanding of the barriers facing looked after learners and ways in which those barriers can be removed.
- 18 We are learning from other countries' successes, for example we are piloting a social pedagogy project, led by The Fostering Network in partnership with Cwm Taf Social Services and Wellbeing Partnership Board. This innovative European approach helps all those involved in the lives of fostered children and young

people to understand and respond to developing education and life skills in a holistic way. We are implementing a Fostering Framework for Wales that will help us increase the number of foster carers and provided better training and support. Finally, we are commissioning work to build a profile of children's residential care in Wales and explore different models of residential care.

- 19 Stable placements also enhance children's emotional well-being and resilience. Typically, adopted and looked after children have a greater incidence of poor mental and emotional health due to their life experiences. Providing the right level of support, including therapeutic support helps reduce the potential emotional trauma that could be caused by the impact of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and other disadvantages. As part of the mental health school in-reach pilots we are currently exploring how the needs of vulnerable children, including those who are looked after, can be addressed.
- 20 The Cabinet Secretary for Education and the former Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children contributed £400k this year towards the ACE Support Hub. In addition, for children who need emotional support but may not need a specialist CAMHS, the Welsh Government is investing £125k to develop adoption support services which help adopted children who need a form of emotional support but may not need the specialist service provided by CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service).

#### **Step change work going forward**

- 21 Improving outcomes for looked after children requires all public services to take ownership of their respective corporate parenting responsibilities – working collectively to safeguard and promote the life chances of looked after children. Improving educational attainment and providing better integrated support is critical.
- 22 We need to identify what will accelerate improved outcomes for looked after children, including their educational attainment across all key stages, by, for example, reducing the 37% gap in key stage 4. Better placement stability, specialised training for foster carers and specific educational interventions are all required. We need to learn from other countries' educational successes for looked after children and consider how we can adapt them to benefit children in Wales including reviewing models of care.
- 23 Work is required to build on good practice and what we know works to develop a more integrated system of support which identifies, tackles and repairs the impact of ACEs and other disadvantages as early as possible in a life course. Such holistic support would help parents and children including those within the care system, whether in residential or foster care and those families who would

benefit from post adoption support or support within special guardianship arrangements.

***(C) Supporting care leavers to successful futures and independent living***

**What we have done**

- 24 Care leavers are expected to become independent and self-sufficient much earlier than their non-care peers, accelerating their transition to adulthood. A successful transition to independence will depend on the young person's care experience and the support provided during transition itself. As a result, the £1m St David's Day Fund has been established to provide direct financial support to care leavers so they can access opportunities to help them successfully transition towards independent living.
- 25 The Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) aims to reduce the numbers of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Local authorities are working closely with Careers Wales, youth services, schools, colleges, work based learning providers and other partners to ensure those most at risk of becoming NEET or who are already NEET are identified and provided with the support they need to help them become economically active. We will continue to work with local authorities to ensure systems are embedded and partnership working continues to be strengthened for the benefit of all young people, including looked after children and care leavers. We have provided £625k funding to local authorities to establish or enhance 'family business' schemes, offering training and job opportunities to care leavers in their many areas of employment.
- 26 The Diamond Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales recommended that those with experience of care should receive the maximum level of maintenance support to attend higher education. The Welsh Government has committed to legislating to enable those who have been in a care setting to receive the maximum level of maintenance grant from 2018/19.
- 27 We know that care leavers are at particular risk of becoming homeless. The Ending Youth Homelessness campaign has commissioned research from the Welsh Centre for Public Policy on this issue. This research will help us identify to what extent placement breakdowns lead to homelessness and what can be done to prevent homelessness where placements break down. An allocation of £83,000 has been made to Llamau to take forward the End Youth Homelessness Cymru (EYHC) partnership. The campaign group includes young people and aims to:

- Create a system in Wales where young people are not rough sleeping or sofa surfing for 12- 18 months before help is available.
- Develop a Wales wide strategy for young people to address their needs and divert them away from homelessness.

28 In October 2016, Welsh Government published its Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway and the Care Leavers Accommodation Framework to support vulnerable young people to find suitable and appropriate accommodation. As part of that work, we have introduced new monitoring requirements on the use of Bed and Breakfast to ensure that bed and breakfast accommodation is used only as a last resort for care leavers. We have protected the Supporting People programme in the 2018/19 2019/20 budget. This should allow existing service levels to be maintained. However, reports indicate that access to supported housing does not match demand from care leavers.

29 The former Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children wrote to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) asking local authorities to consider granting dispensation from paying council tax for all care leavers between the ages of 18-25. Following the recent publication of Local Authority Approaches to Council Tax Debt Recovery in Wales, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government has agreed to write to local authorities in the near future regarding the wider issue of supporting vulnerable households with their council tax liability and intends to refer to the use of their discretionary powers to exempt care leavers between the ages of 18-25 from paying council tax, regardless of their circumstances.

#### **Step change work going forward**

30 Ensuring that care leavers have supported accommodation as a platform for independent living and being in employment, education or employment is critical.

31 Housing and social care officials are working with the End Youth Homelessness Campaign to better understand the demand gap for supported accommodation for care leavers and identify cross cutting solutions to meet that gap. They are also implementing the Welsh Positive Pathway and Care Leavers Framework to prevent looked after children whose placements have broken down from becoming homeless.

#### **Finance Requirements and Governance Implications**

32 The Ministerial Advisory Group's work programme has an annual budget of £125k. The budget is held within the Services for Children BEL (0410). The funding is used to take forward work strands within the Improving Outcomes for Children work programme. This Cabinet Paper is not seeking additional funding.

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- 33 On 1 March 2017, a £1m St David's Day Fund for Care Leavers was launched. The fund provides financial assistance directly to care leavers to help them advance towards adulthood and independence. The fund has been allocated to local authorities to use flexibly thereby meeting individual's specific needs. The £1m St David's Day Fund is located within the Services for Children BEL (0410). From 2019/20 onwards, the fund will be considered for inclusion in the proposed new Early Intervention, Prevention and Support grant.
- 34 In 2017/18, as a result of the additional consequential funding in the UK Government's Spring Budget, an additional £8m was allocated to the programme. This is part of the larger £20m provision allocated to social care. This year, funding has been distributed to the 22 local authorities via a Welsh Government grant. The funding sits within the Sustainable Social Services BEL (0920) and will move to RSG in 2018-19.
- 35 The EPS Operations Team is content that this MA complies with Interim Finance Notice 01/2015 (EPS/CS/368/17), as are Strategic Budgeting (SB 0292/5), Local Government Finance Policy (LGF/068/17) and HSS Finance (GH 2017/6356). It has also been cleared by Knowledge and Analytical Services (43/2017).

#### **Research and / or Statistics**

- 36 This paper has been approved and cleared by Knowledge & Analytical services. The clearance number is 43/2017.

#### **Communications and publication**

- 37 Officials advise this Cabinet Paper is exempted from publication under Section 35(1)(a) (Formulation of Government Policy) and Section 36 (Prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- 38 Cabinet Members will wish to be aware that the Public Accounts Committee is undertaking an inquiry into care experienced young people. The Committee has announced that this inquiry will take place in stages until 2020. The Committee has initially identified four areas which are outlined below:
- Expenditure and value for money of public services for care experienced children and young people;
  - The effectiveness of local authority corporate parenting arrangements;
  - Value for money and the effectiveness of current arrangements for care placements;
  - Value for money of the Pupil Development Grant for care experienced children.

**Recommendation:****Cabinet is asked to:**

- i. Note the progress of the work being taken forward across government on improving outcomes for Looked after Children.**
- ii. Agree the targeted effort that is needed to see a step change in outcomes for looked after children.**

**Cross Government Working**

The following Departments have been consulted on the contents of this paper.

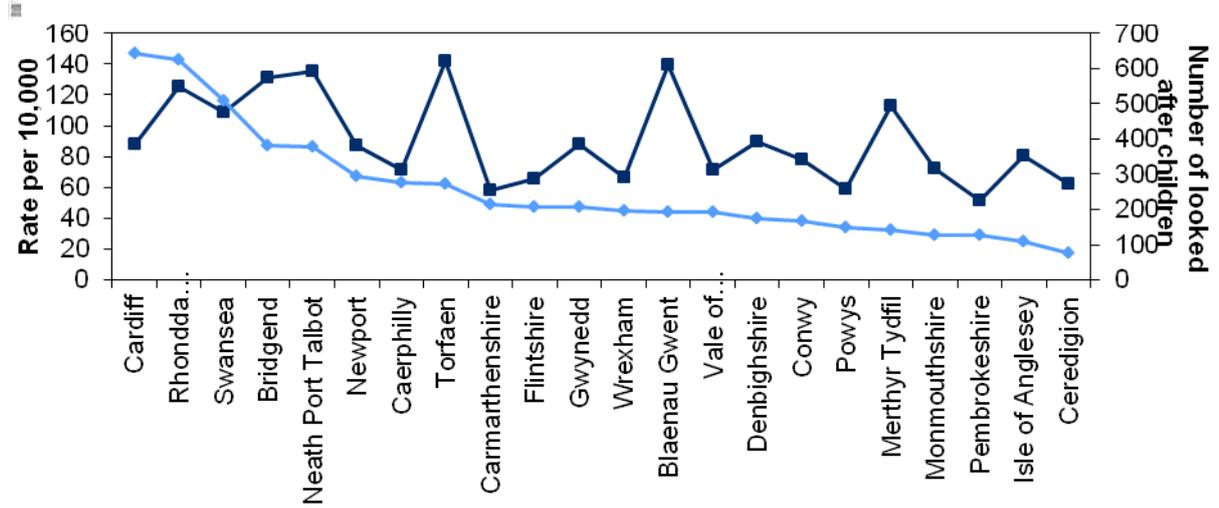
- Communities and Tackling Poverty
- Education Directorate
- Housing and Regeneration
- Local Government
- Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning
- Strategic Budgeting
- Knowledge and Analytical Services

**Vaughan Gething AM, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services**  
**Huw Irranca-Davies AM, Minister for Children and Social Care**  
**November 2017**

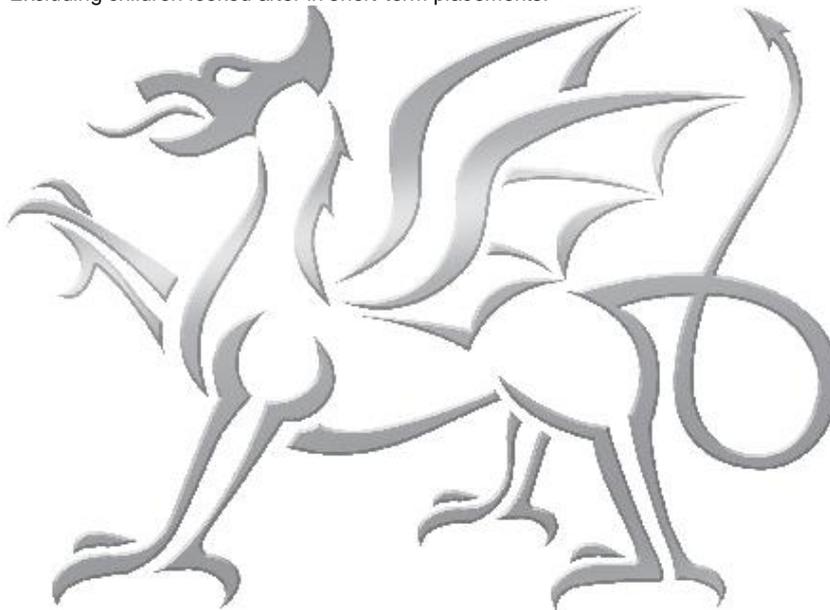
**Drafted by** - Natalie Avery/Henry Vaile – Improving Outcomes for Children branch.  
SSID

**Approved by** – Jo Jordan, Director of Mental Health, NHS Governance and Corporate Services & Andrew Goodall, Director General for Health and Social Services.

**Chart: Children looked after per 10,000 population aged under 18 by local authority, 31 March 2016**



(a) Excluding children looked after in short-term placements.



**Improving Outcomes for Children – Areas for advice to Cabinet Secretary**  
**Phase 2 Summary MAG Work Programme**

<b>Workstream 1 – Professional Practice</b>	<b>Workstream 2 – Assessment of Risk and Edge of Care Services</b>	<b>Workstream 3 – Permanency Planning and Building Stable Placements</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop National Practice Standards for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO).</li> <li>• Work with the LAC Reviewing Officers Network Group to develop annual work plan and line of accountability.</li> <li>• Update CAF/CASS IRO Protocol and guidance note</li> <li>• Develop National Practice Standards for Independent Visitors (IVs).</li> <li>• Develop Welsh research on the rate of referrals to child protection services- that contributes to the development of effective social policy interventions in respect of child inequalities and poverty.</li> <li>• Undertake research on placement outcomes for children looked after following Section 31 orders.</li> <li>• Support Implementation of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy for Children and Young People.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake an assessment of Edge of Care Services across all 22 local authorities, identifying key themes of effective family support and strategies for managing risk.</li> <li>• Develop a 'Pause Pilot' in Wales to support mothers who have repeatedly had children taken into the care system and prevent further incidences.</li> <li>• Implement measures to reduce the number of looked after children entering the youth justice system.</li> <li>• Undertake research to identify the number of children who have parents with a learning disability who no longer live at home and the reasons behind their change of status.</li> <li>• Explore the approaches and tools used for assessing and identifying risk to help ensure a consistent approach across children's services.</li> <li>• Examine whether Regional Safeguarding Boards have effective mechanisms for proportionate, multi-agency, intelligence-led risk and need screening assessments and planning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the National Fostering Framework (NFF).</li> <li>• Revise and extend Corporate Parenting guidance so that all public services are aware of their corporate responsibilities for looked after children.</li> <li>• Review Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and develop new regulations and a code of practice for consultation.</li> <li>• Develop a co-ordinated approach to improving outcomes for children and young people in residential care.</li> <li>• Deliver a social pedagogy pilot in Wales that will test and evaluate social pedagogy principles in a foster care environment.</li> <li>• Develop an active offer for care leavers to help support care leavers make a successful transition to independent living.</li> <li>• Develop a national model of adoption support to ensure better support for children within their adoptive families and a more consistent service across Wales.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver pilot of Bright Spots Survey to measure looked after children’s well-being and help influence improvements in the way local services are delivered.</li> <li>• Establish the key issues which should be considered in improving workforce development plans so staff who engage in direct, outcome-focused work with children and young people are fully equipped to do so .</li> <li>• Explore the protocols in place with other public service professionals to ensure the provision of appropriate support for children and young people and to promote shared models of integrated practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the effectiveness of service plans produced in response to the Population Needs Assessments, required under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and undertaken in each region of Wales.</li> <li>• Review the formal quality assurance frameworks in place within local authorities for bring key information together in one place, to provide an overview of activity across children’s social services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children resettled in Wales are properly supported and integrated into communities in Wales.</li> <li>• Examine the placement/ commissioning strategies in place within local authorities to establish how effective they are in securing an appropriate range of placements which are good quality and value and respond to children’s needs.</li> </ul>
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