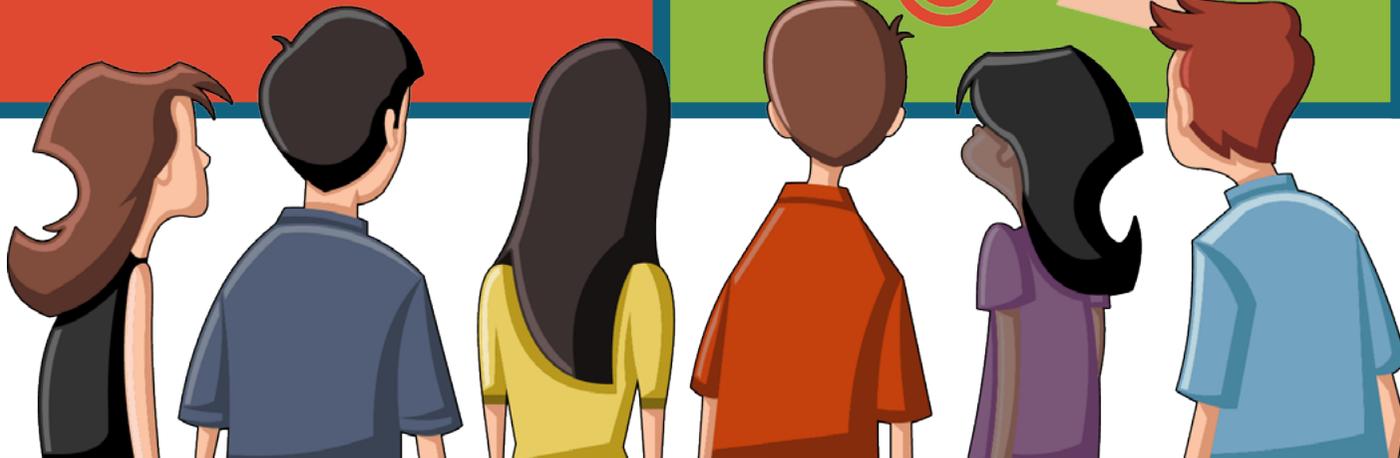
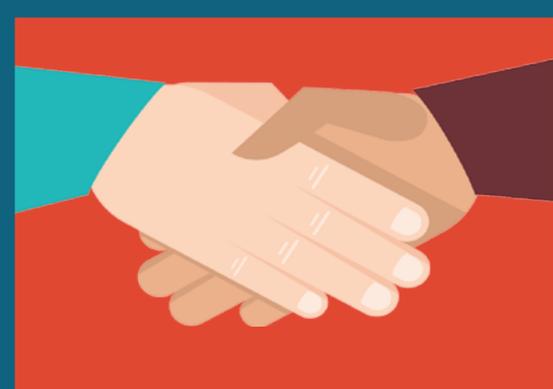


National Inspection of services that support looked after children and care leavers



 **AGGCC
CSSIW**

Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Introduction

Children and young people that are looked after and those leaving care need the best support possible. Support that works well, keeps them safe and helps them reach their goals.

To make sure that local authorities are doing everything they need to, they are inspected and checked.

Explain:

A child is '**looked after**' when a local authority (council) takes on the role and responsibility of a parent so they are kept safe and have their needs met.

We call this being a **corporate parent**.

Local authorities all have a **Corporate Parenting Board**. This group of County Councillors and professionals help local authorities make decisions and plans.

"I am happy, my foster carer is lovely and I know I cannot live with my mum but me and my brother are OK ... School is fine but still I would rather that things were different and I wasn't in care".

(looked after child)

We are the **Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)**.

We check on all care and social services in Wales to make sure they are safe for everyone including looked after children and young people.



We inspect places like:

care homes nurses agencies
children's homes day-care for under 8's
fostering and adoption agencies special schools
boarding schools

This report tells you about the things we found when we inspected all local authorities in Wales.



Our method

“I didn’t like being in care but it was the best thing for me, as if I hadn’t gone into care I don’t think I would have any sort of life now. I am at university and I am doing OK but I still worry about my family.”

(Care leaver)

We looked at the support given to the looked after children, over the age of 11 and care leavers who are seen as vulnerable or involved in risky behaviour.

- **Wales has 22 local authorities and we looked at all of them**
- **We collected information and reports from 220 cases**
- **We looked closer at 66 of these**
- **We listened to the views of children young people and carers**
- **We included the views of professionals who worked for the local authorities and other organisations.**

Young people were involved all the way through.

- **171 looked after children and young people took part**
- **129 care leavers took part**
- **178 returned survey responses.**

Risky behaviour includes doing things like staying out late, running away from carers, using drugs, drinking too much alcohol or hanging-out with the wrong groups of people.

What is a ‘**case**’?

Each person that is looked after has a ‘**case file**’ with everything in it.

The 4 areas we looked at:

1. **Roles and responsibilities**
2. **Care and planning pathways**
3. **Safeguarding**
4. **Reviews**



1. Roles and responsibilities:

Local authorities as parents:

- Most local authorities understand their responsibilities.
- All local authorities are working to develop good plans that help them step in earlier to stop children becoming looked after.
- Plans for children and young people already being looked after aren't always good enough.
- Every local authority has a Corporate Parenting Board but these need to be stronger in what they do.
- Services need to work better together to support looked after children and care leavers.
- Local authorities need to do more to help young people avoid being made vulnerable and at risk, including through their own behaviour.

Everyone working together:

- Health boards need to work with local authorities to support looked after children and young people's emotional and mental health needs.
- There's support in education but schools need to do more to help looked after children reach their potential.
- There should be more ways to help young people leaving care find somewhere to live and support them.

Placements and finding a home:

- Most local authorities work hard to give children and young people a choice in where they live but there still aren't enough foster parents.

"I said I wanted a single carer, they took that into consideration and my foster carer is single.... It's easier."

(Looked after child)

"They didn't listen to me, I was placed (out of county) and made the best relationship of my life but they still moved me back."

(Looked after child)



Advocacy Services:

These help you when you need someone be on your side and support you to be heard.

- All local authorities have advocacy services and make sure young people know about them.
- Young people who had used advocacy said it was a positive thing.
- Many Corporate Parenting Boards get feedback from advocacy services and use this in planning.
- First language Welsh-speaking Children placed in care outside Wales need to be able to get advocacy in Welsh.

Participation:

Being involved in decisions that affect you.

- Local authorities have worked hard to find ways to involve children and young people but sometimes it's difficult for everyone to have their say.
- Young people leaving care thought that local authorities could use their experience to help other looked after children.

“My social worker is lovely and has helped me a lot. She is always late and sometimes doesn't make it at all. She is so busy and has too many children to see”.

(Looked after child)

The workforce (staff):

- Local authorities find, employ and train staff but there still aren't enough experienced social workers and managers in children's social services.
- Young people wanted to have more time with their social worker but felt they were too busy.

Safeguarding Children Boards:

This is a group of professionals from different services that work together to keep all children and young people safe.

- Safeguarding Children Boards and Corporate Parenting Boards need to connect in more ways and find better ways to share information.



2. Care and planning pathways:

Every looked after child and young person has a care plan and a pathway that sets out the support they get and who is giving it.

Assessments:

- Assessments aren't updated often enough which means they're not as useful when deciding what support is needed.

Care plans:

- Most looked after children and young people have a care plan.
- Care plans need to be of better quality to show which services are needed.
- Care plans don't always show the positive support given or show the difference it's made.
- Children and young people need to have more say in their plan.

Pathways and support for young people leaving care:

Change can be difficult so every looked after child and young person leaving care has a personal advisor that helps plan support, listen to their concerns and give advice.

- Not all young people leaving care have a good enough plan to support them.
- Most young people leaving care have positive things to say about their personal advisors.

Information and case records:

- Records need to be kept to a better standard across Wales.
- Some social work visits and reports aren't easy to find on local authorities' electronic systems.

“Personal advisors are just interested in you as a person. They really want to help you and it's easy to talk to them!”

(Care leaver)

“My personal advisor is great but they can't make the decisions I need and they have to wait for answers the same as I do.”

(Care leaver)



Staying safe from harm:

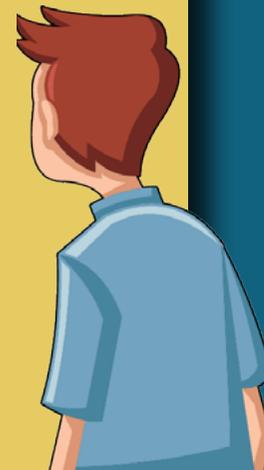
- Staff are aware of the importance of having plans in place to manage and stop young people becoming at risk.
- Young people need help to understand risks and how staff are looking to manage those risks.
- Staff need to better record how the plan made a difference for the child.
- All services need to share information better to keep young people safe from harm.

Support for emotional and mental health:

- Health services need to do more to help looked after children with their emotional needs.
- Many children and young people can't get the support they need from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) at the time they need it and for as long as they need it.
- More emotional and mental health support is needed across Wales for looked after children, young people and care leavers.

“My personal advisor is brilliant and really helped me sort out my move to college, and she is prepared to do all sorts of stuff. She has come with me for interviews and that she is so supportive, gave me confidence.”

(Care leaver)



3. Safeguarding

Keeping looked after children and young people safe is really important.

Child protection:

- Systems work well and help people step in and take action when needed.
- Staff are well trained in helping looked after children with different needs stay safe.
- Child protection systems need to connect better with other plans to manage risk and care.

4 Reviews

The support and care plan for each child is looked at and reviewed to make sure it's on track and helping.

Guidelines for reviews:

- Most reviews happened when they needed to.
- Most professionals know reviews are important but can't go to every meeting.
- It needs to be clear that decisions and plans made at the end of the review are not always final decisions. Some decisions need to be agreed elsewhere.
- Young people said they didn't always find reviews the best way to plan for them because it made them feel different.

Review reports:

- Reports need to be kept up-to-date so events are not missed out that could help care plans.
- Notes from review meetings aren't always given out quickly or written in a way that helps people understand decisions and take them forward.
- Young people didn't always receive a copy of their review, and some didn't want them.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

Each local authority has an IRO that checks how services work for looked after children and young people and those leaving care.

- IROs work differently across Wales.
- They need to be better at challenging plans that aren't working.
- IRO's need to make sure children and young people are listened to.

How well reviews work:

- Young people said workers encouraged them to go to their reviews and were told about advocacy services.
- Many young people said they didn't want to go to reviews because they didn't think they helped them.
- The biggest message was that young people thought there should be a better way of planning for them. They wanted to have more of a voice in things that affected them.

"I really like my IRO, she really knows me well. She makes my review easy. I know she will try her best to get people to listen to what I say."

(Looked after child)



Conclusion

Thanks for reading this.

We hope the findings from this report will make a real difference in the lives of looked after children and young people and those leaving care.

If you want to read the full report you can find it on the [Care and Social Services Inspectorate website](#).

“I always go to my looked after child (LAC) reviews, I like it because I get praised”

(Looked after child)

“I hate (LAC) reviews; it’s always about what I’m not doing.”

(Looked after child)

