



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

# National Inspection Safeguarding and Care Planning of looked after children and care leavers, who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours

## Inspection of Newport City Council

August 2014



## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of inspection findings in respect of:  
Safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour, within Newport City Council.
- 1.2. The inspection was carried out as part of Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) national thematic inspection programme. The methodology for the review included three and a half days fieldwork in each local authority across Wales, between January and May 2014.
- 1.3. The aim of the national inspection was to assess the quality of care planning across Wales and whether it effectively:
  - Supports and protects looked after children and care leavers;
  - Identifies and manages the vulnerabilities and risky behaviour of looked after children and care leavers;
  - Promotes rights based practice and the voice of the child;
  - Promotes improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers;
  - Promotes compliance with policy and guidance
- 1.4. Findings from the individual local authority inspections will inform a CSSIW national overview report to be published later this year.

## 2. THE INSPECTION

- 2.1 The inspection focused on the work undertaken with looked after children over eleven years of age and care leavers who were identified as being vulnerable and/or involved in risky behaviours, against defined criteria.
- 2.2 It is important to recognise that given this focus the case sample reviewed in each local authority encompassed some of the most challenging and complex case management issues and represented only a small cohort of each authority's wider looked after children and care leaving population.
- 2.3 As well as inspecting cases in respect of the assessment, care planning and review systems the inspection also considered the extent to which the corporate parenting, management and partnership arrangements acted to promote improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. Also how organisational structures including, workforce, resources, advocacy and quality assurance mechanisms impacted on the quality of care planning.

The inspection considered these areas against the following five questions.

A summary of our findings is presented below

#### QUESTION 1

Did the authority effectively discharge its corporate parenting roles and responsibilities promoting the stability, welfare and safety of looked after children and care leavers?

#### POSITIVES

- Children's services were recognised as a corporate priority. The authority had a corporate parenting strategy that articulated the authority's commitment to looked after children and care leavers in form of 5 pledges reflecting the 7 core aims. The strategy emphasised collaborative working and senior officers reported progress against their area of responsibility to a Member led Corporate Parenting forum. The authority had established a Children in Care Council aimed at enabling young people to directly influence the strategic and corporate parenting agenda and work was ongoing to ensure effective links into the forum remain.
- The authority had systems in place that supported officers and member's oversight of compliance in respect of the authority's statutory responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers. Senior officers were well informed about the vulnerability of individual looked after children. Mechanisms such as a resources panel supported oversight of service demands and placement issues, significant work had been undertaken across agencies in relation to managing risk for missing children and young people. A multi agency Brighter Futures Panel managed requests for out of authority arrangements and all out of authority placements needed the agreement of the Head of Children's Services.
- The overall structural arrangement located children's social services within a corporate directorate –people. The scope of the arrangement included adult social services and education and was described as facilitating direction across service functions. The work undertaken across children's social services, education and schools aimed at ensuring children did not incur any educational penalty as a consequence of being 'looked after'. However, it was recognised that the responsiveness of some individual schools to the needs of looked after children remained an issue, in one case example the schools actions were viewed as unilateral and disregarding of the care plan.
- The regional South East Wales Safeguarding Children's board had been in place since April 2013 and had developed a comprehensive strategic plan. Priorities had been agreed with 'Adolescents who exhibit harmful behaviors' planned as a focus for 2014/15. This development includes significant key

actions which could be expanded to include risky behaviors in addition to those of child exploitation and missing young people.

- Children's services workforce issues remained a priority for the authority. The organisational structure in children's services had recently undergone changes, reconfiguring and transferring responsibility for care proceedings from the looked after children teams to the child protection teams. This change was undertaken primarily to improve the authority's responsiveness to the expectations resulting from the public law outline. However, it also provided an opportunity to define the responsibilities of the lac and 16 plus service.
- The authority reported that all looked after children were allocated to a qualified social worker. Staff in the looked after children teams described current case loads as manageable. Concerns were raised that other parts of children's services remained under pressure and reliant on newly qualified or relatively inexperienced social work staff.

#### AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Elected members had recognised the significance of both their safeguarding and corporate parenting role but needed to provide greater challenge to ensure that they are achieving best outcomes for looked after children and care leavers, including the most vulnerable and challenging. Members need to further assure themselves regarding the extent to which strategic aims were being effectively owned and translated into action across the local authority and also by partner agencies.
- The authorities systems did not routinely capture a profile of the looked after children and care-leaving populations assessed needs or detailed thematic information regarding vulnerability and risk. This information is essential if the authority is to evaluate the effectiveness of its placement, permanency and prevention strategies to predict future resource needs.
- Given the known age profile of the looked after children population Children's social services were working with the council's strategic housing team to strengthen young people's access to services for example the 16+ team provided the single point of access for young people presenting as homeless. Despite good operational relationships, including some valued independent provider accommodation, the availability of appropriate 'move 'on housing remained a gap in service that impacted on planning and outcomes for young people. Issues were also identified regarding access to services for those vulnerable young people who did not meet adult service thresholds.
- Children's services had a number of panels in place developed to prevent drift and determine access to targeted services. Staff viewed these as supportive

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but the interrelationship between the panels needed greater clarity. It would be important to ensure 'referral to a panel' did not become the plan or act to delay decision making. The information presented to these panels could contribute to a more detailed profile of presenting need.

- Despite some good operational engagement the resilience of the authority's relationship with health services appeared overly dependent on children's social services providing funding and resources to assess and meet the therapeutic needs of looked after children and care leavers.

## QUESTION 2

Were care and pathway plans informed by relevant assessments, including explicit risk assessments, which supported a comprehensive response to the needs and experiences of children and young people?

### POSITIVES

- Referral and information sharing processes between professionals were understood and operational relationships between staff helped support communication. Social workers and their managers generally had a good understanding of the young people they worked with including knowledge of presenting vulnerabilities. However, some workers had only recently become involved and were not experienced in working with looked after children or in managing risk.
- The authority had actively sought to increase the number of foster carers able to meet the complex needs of young people, however, despite some success; this remained an area of challenge.
- There was recognition of a long standing disconnect between the access threshold applied by the CAMHS service and the presenting emotional resilience needs of looked after children and care leavers. The authority had been proactive in trying to compensate for shortfalls in the availability of therapeutic services and had recently established a Matching Placement Support Team. The function of this team included delivering a multi-agency therapeutic service to support looked after children and their carers. It was too early to evaluate the impact of the arrangements on placement resilience.
- Care leavers were generally positive about the support they received from their personal advisors, although they did not always understanding the difference in roles and planning mechanisms. Care leavers found the practical focus of pathway plans helpful but experienced decision making in relation to financial and resource issues as slow and inconsistent.

- The work of the Looked After Children Educational Support Service (LACES) was valued including their ability to directly negotiate and resolve issues within schools. Educational attainment was promoted, for example, additional tuition was provided for young people not meeting their educational targets. School stability was a priority and considerable efforts were made to maintain school placements despite placement disruption, however this needs to be carefully balanced for example, with the young persons need to establish secure community links. Despite some positive initiatives the authority's stated educational ambition for looked after children was not well reflected in the cases reviewed.
- Health assessments were generally compliant and the looked after children health service was active in providing primary health, healthy eating and sexual health advice to young people and their carers. However, issues remained regarding a lack of therapeutic service for young people, who although not coming to the attention of the multi agency forums would benefit from support particularly in relation to self esteem issues.

#### AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The care plans, seen, of those young people who remain looked after for longer periods were not routinely informed by a relevant shared written assessment.
- Although staff recognised and were active in relation to identifying risk, such issues often appeared to be managed as separate processes or episodes. A range of risk assessments tools were available and used but the resulting actions were not always clearly recorded. In some cases particularly where there had been changes in staff and placements it was difficult to determine how issues had been resolved.
- The quality of care plans seen were variable. Most included broad overarching statements but did not articulate the objectives and how the desired outcomes for the young person were to be achieved.
- The authorities file and electronic systems did not support overview of assessment and care planning processes and documentation for example pathway plans were difficult to find.
- Issues were raised regarding the quality and impact of therapeutic interventions provided by some out of authority placement and the need for greater quality assurance mechanisms.

### QUESTION 3

Were operational systems and procedures in place that ensured responsive coordinated action was taken to mitigate risk and achieve safe continuity of care?

#### POSITIVES

- Staff had access to key policies and there were well-developed information systems in place to support oversight of compliance in respect of statutory child protection procedures.
- Child protection processes were being used appropriately to manage risk for this group of young people.
- Workers were clear that safeguarding was a priority and reported that a range of training was available to support them in their child protection and safeguarding practice including where the risks resulted from the young persons own “risky behaviour.
- The authority’s structural arrangements meant that services for looked after children and care leavers were locate within specialist teams. Staff were positive that this afforded better opportunities to make more sustainable working relationships with young people. However, there was little evidence of social workers undertaking planned direct work, social workers may need opportunity’s to develop their skills and confidence in this area.
- A mentoring system has been established to support newly qualified workers. Some experienced staff who had changed roles might also benefit from such support.
- Information sharing between children’s social services and the police was well developed and considerable work had been taken forward by the authority and the regional South East Wales Safeguarding Children’s board in relation to such issues as child sexual exploitation. The missing children’s service, which included the five Gwent authorities, had significant potential to improve the outcomes for vulnerable looked after young people. The service was undergoing evaluation at the time of the inspection having been in place since April 2013.
- The authority appropriately commission specialist assessments and interventions from third sector providers as required, for example, in relation to drug and alcohol issues.
- The frequency of supervision was formally monitored through performance

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management systems; however, the quality of the supervision records was variable and often lacked challenge.

#### AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Although statutory child protection procedures and thresholds were generally well understood the management pathway for looked after young people and care leavers exhibiting 'risky' behaviours needed greater clarity.
- Risk assessments and on-going risk management arrangements particularly when involving more than one agency needed to be more effectively recorded, and shared. The assessment and management of risk particularly when involving more than one agency needed to be more effectively recorded and shared. The progress made in mitigating risk was not always evaluated or recorded. It was not apparent the extent to which young people were directly involved in the process.
- Managers were described as approachable and staff reported that there was oversight of cases within the service. However contingency planning, including in relation to risk management, was not well evidenced.
- Although the authority had a strong commitment to training, staff reported that case pressures did not always enable them to attend training.

#### QUESTION 4

Did Independent Reviews and quality assurance arrangements promote safe care and best outcomes for young people?

#### POSITIVES

- The authority's independent reviewing arrangements were compliant with guidance. Reviews were generally timely and convened as needed to reflect the presenting circumstances of the young person. IROs complete a monitoring form following reviews.
- Staffing within the IRO team has been stable and this had supported oversight and knowledge of the looked after children population. IROs routinely met with the young person prior to or following the review and in some instances, given staff changes; the IRO had provided a level of continuity.
- The IROs were linked to specific teams with the aim of providing support and advice for staff including training on specific topics through a series of 'lunchtime bites'.

- Young people told us that they were encouraged to attend their reviews and there was evidence that advocates were available to support or represent young person's views at such meetings.

#### AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Looked after children reviews generally appeared overly focused on the immediate needs of the young person and gave insufficient weight to securing better outcomes over the longer term.
- The IROs were not confident that the significance of their role was always understood or that they were routinely made aware of changes or events that potentially impacted on the relevance of the care plan. The IROs role in monitoring cases between reviews was unclear.
- Although some staff experienced reviews as providing challenge, this was not always evident and IROs were concerned regarding their ability to exert the necessary influence, for example, through the IRO management alert system. Lack of progress against the care plan, even in the most complex cases, needs to be effectively challenged. Any blockages to care plan objectives particularly in relation to placement stability and leaving care arrangements should be pro actively monitored and escalated if they cannot be resolved within appropriate timescales.
- Young people, even when provided with the support of an advocate, often-experienced reviews negatively describing the process as repetitive, embarrassing and acting to reinforce that they were 'different'
- The authorities understanding and oversight of it's looked after children population would benefit from strengthening and better coordinated of its quality assurance systems.

#### QUESTION 5

Did care and pathway planning effectively capture and promote the rights and voice of the child?

#### POSITIVES

- 'Children in Care Council' had been established and work had progressed to increase its membership and representation. The 'Children in Care Council' had been involved in such activity as updating the information packs provided to all looked after children and young people.
- The authority had independent advocacy arrangements in place, there was evidence that advocacy was discussed at Looked After Children reviews.

Independent reviewing officers were viewed as championing the advocacy service however there was variation in the number of referrals reported from across teams. All young people seen during the inspection were aware of advocacy and those who had used it were mainly positive about the service if not the outcome.

- Despite some mixed views children and young people generally experienced professionals as persistent in their efforts to engage them and to try to ensure their voices were heard.
- Children's services described positive working relationships with the authority's leisure services and opportunities were available for young people to participate in sporting and leisure activities, for example, through the provision of leisure cards.

#### AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Some young people said they liked their social worker and there was a view that they 'did their best'. However, general feedback from young people was that they didn't see their social worker enough, found them hard to contact and slow to return calls. Care leavers were able to compare this level of service with what they felt was the better communication and responsiveness they currently experienced from their personal advisors.
- Young people felt they had little choice or ability to exert influence around placements or accommodation. Despite some positive experiences care leavers often described feelings of isolation. Young people highlighted the significant impact changes of social workers and placement had on their ability to form trusting relationships and some young people described their involvement in 'risky behaviors' as a means of exerting control. Young people also raised issues regarding speed of consent and inconsistent funding decisions.
- Although the authority had developed work experience schemes that gave preferential treatment to looked after children and care leavers the plans to provide wider ranging opportunities such as apprenticeships remained aspirational.