

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**County Council
18th October 2018**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Rachel Powell, Portfolio Holder for Youth and Culture

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor Roger Williams

What work has Powys County Council undertaken to understand better the large increase in Looked After Children in its care?

Response

Process

Over the last 15 months the Children's social care services have dealt with a large number of children newly referred to the service whose risks met the criteria to be looked after to ensure they were safe. This is not a decision which the local authority makes on its own except where there is a perceived immediate risk to a child and urgent steps have to be taken. This level of protection is time-limited and any emergency action is then considered by the Court to ensure we have met the appropriate threshold. Applications were made to Court who then heard the evidence of concern and agreed applications for Care Orders.

The Regional Safeguarding Board issued a Threshold Document in October 2017 as a tool to support all staff across all agencies to assess the risks to children and when they should refer to Children's services for assessment. This is being applied more consistently.

We have seen a number of large siblings groups of children who have needed to come into our care. Following review of the Care and Support Plans whilst some children were living at home had been living in circumstances which were not acceptable. They were considered to be at risk of harm or neglect. There is now a greater awareness of the impact on growing children and young adults of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and this increased sensitivity amongst our staff and staff in partner agencies has led to a greater awareness of the needs of our vulnerable population resulting in more speedy and appropriate action.

Action by Powys County Council

The Authority has developed the Children Looked After Strategic Framework. This will develop a number of themes and workstreams to safely reduce the numbers of children looked after over the coming years, through placing more children in Powys with our foster carers and local residential providers and bringing children closer to home to help support rehabilitation where that is appropriate.

Children's Services has also developed an Access to Resources Panel which consider packages of support for children on the edge of care or to support children in care to receive the best looked after service or to assist them to return home safely.

We will continue to support families to stay together through developing early help and edge of care services further in co-ordination with our partner agencies, including schools. The benefit of these initiatives will be to ensure that everything will be considered with a family before admitting children to care, (except where emergency action needs to be taken) to ensure that we provide the best possible community and family solutions and supports and ensuring all avenues are explored before children come into care. In this way, we will be sure that only the right children are in care and we can commission the services they require to meet their needs on the short and long term.

A new practice Framework, named Signs of Safety (SOS) will be implemented as part of the future plans for practice here in Powys. This implementation journey has already began during 2018. This approach is based on the ethos that every family has strengths and that children should remain where ever is possible within their own communities. This will require ongoing ambition, in that children can be cared for by their family networks. It is also about creating a learning organisation that will share and carry the risk with practitioners to enable these plans to be effective in practice.