

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL
PORTFOLIO HOLDER DELEGATED DECISION
by
COUNTY COUNCILLOR RACHEL POWELL
PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND CULTURE
June 2019

REPORT AUTHOR: Jan Coles, Head of Children's Services

SUBJECT: Children Looked After Strategic Framework

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Summary

As an authority we strive to do the best for children in need of support and care. The increase in the numbers of children being looked after in Powys has been very significant over a relatively short period of time and exceeds the national increases in Wales. The number of Children Looked After (CLA) for the 30th April 2017 stood at 160 the number as at the 31st May 2019 is 244. The impact that this has had across the Children's Services in terms of financial implications for packages of care and the requirement for increase in staffing to meet demand cannot be underestimated. This increase in demand has on occasions led to a significant reduction in the choices of placements for children resulting in matching difficulties in finding the right carers for children. This has sometimes meant that children have moved carers more frequently until the right or best placement is found.

As the CLA numbers have increased this has coincided with the increase in the number of cases in the Court arena. Placing further demands on Social Workers spending more time working on Legal proceedings and placing further pressure on them to completed tasks in proceedings and maintain a higher level of performance in terms of visits to children and completing assessments.

The growth in the number of CLA across the county has had an impact on staffing and in one area has meant that the Independent Reviewing Officer team has had to have two full time agency staff to cope with the increased workload. We have now advertised for two permanent Independent Reviewing Officer posts, with one applicant pending an offer currently.

A significant amount of well-being officers working time is being spent supervising contacts, with many of these contact sessions involving increased travel time. This impacts not only on their ability to complete day to day tasks in a timely manner working with children to maintain them at home, on their own well-being but also on the team with long periods out of the office resulting in other members of the team picking up additional work.

The increase in the number of CLA in Powys over the last 12 to 15 months has had a huge financial impact in all areas. Children will continue to be looked after by the authority and for those for whom Local Authority care is the most appropriate and necessary action to take, it is imperative that any placement and/or package of care has a positive impact and outcome for the well-being of the child or young person.

2. Proposal

The Powys Children Looked After Strategic Framework has been developed to set out Powys' aspirations, intent and vision for improving outcomes for children who are looked after. It sets out the principal that bringing a child into our care should be a last resort after all other options have been explored. We acknowledge that we must intervene at the earliest opportunity to ensure that children and young people do not suffer harm. We must provide access to quality, evidence-based, early intervention and prevention services to keep children at home safely, wherever it is possible. Where children cannot remain at home it is critical that we act decisively and effectively to improve the lived experience of each individual child or young person.

For those children in our care we need to provide good parenting and specialist support. We need to work with children and young people to coproduce plans which will bring about the changes children need as quickly as possible. We fully recognise that there are a number of key challenges and areas for improvement. This Strategic Framework acts as the overarching strategy to form a strong foundation of information, data and analysis which will inform all of the five themes that sit beneath it.

These are:

- Permanence
- Closer to home and edge of care
- Leaving care
- Sufficient supply of high quality care placements
- Participation and voice

The themes and work within them will link, align and inevitably overlap but by focusing on each area individually, will make implementing the changes more manageable and accelerate the pace of change. Together this work will help to reduce the likely repetition of harmful behaviour in future generations. It is critical that we act decisively and effectively to ensure we use our resources as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Powys has a significant amount of work to do to implement the changes required to meet the aspirations we have for children who are looked after and this framework will enable us to realise and mobilise the work, accelerate this change and secure alternatives to children becoming looked after. Together with the Early Help Strategy, the Children Looked After Strategic Framework will enable Powys Children's Services to achieve our aim with

confidence. Namely, that children in Powys have a safe, robust, effective children's service which:

- Focuses on early intervention and prevention ensuring access to the right support at the right time to keep families together, where possible, and children safe
- Working with families, rather than doing to
- Providing and commissioning a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements for children who are looked after
- Aspires to achieve the best possible outcomes for those children in our care

3. Options Considered / Available

To formally adopt the Children's Services Children Looked After Framework and the Strategies within to support the work being undertaken within Powys Children's Services.

4. Impact Assessment

4.1 Is an impact assessment required? No

The Children Looked After Framework is specifically in relation to Children Looked After in Powys and those young people who have previously been in care.

4.2 If yes is it attached?

5. Corporate Improvement Plan

The Children Looked After Strategic Framework will support the delivery of the Key Priorities set out within the Vision 2025.

6. Other Front Line Services

Does the recommendation impact on other services run by the Council or on behalf of the Council? Legal and Finance

If so please provide their comments
See comments in section 8

7. Communications

Have Communications seen a copy of this report? Yes

Communications to prepare a reactive media statement

8. Support Services (Legal, Finance, Corporate Property, HR, ICT, Business Services)

- 8.1 **Legal** - The content of the report is noted and Legal Services continue to support Children's Services
- 8.2 **Finance** - The Finance Manager notes the content of the CLA framework which will support the improvements within Children Service's and ensure better outcomes for Children and Young People in Care and those leaving care. It is imperative that any placement and/or package of care has a positive impact and outcome for the well-being of the child or young person but also demonstrate value for money.
- 8.3 **Corporate Property** - notes the contents of the report. We understand that there are no implications for our assets."
- 8.4 **HR** (if appropriate) – not received.
- 8.5 **ICT** - The Professional Lead for ICT notes and supports the content of the CLA framework and the Strategies within, which support the work being undertaken within Powys Children's Services.

9. Scrutiny

Has this report been scrutinised? Yes

If Yes what version or date of report has been scrutinised?

Same version as referred to within this report.

What changes have been made since the date of Scrutiny and explain why Scrutiny recommendations have been accepted or rejected?

Report discussed at Health and Social Care Scrutiny and no amendments were required to be made to the Framework.

10. Data Protection

If the proposal involves the processing of personal data then the Data Protection Officer must be consulted and their comments set out below.

11. Statutory Officers

11.1 The Solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer) commented as follows :
" I note the legal comments and have nothing to add to the report."

11.2 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report.

12. Members' Interests

The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report. If the Portfolio Holder has an interest, she should declare it, complete the relevant notification for and refer the matter to Cabinet for decision.

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| Recommendation: | Reason for Recommendation: |
| Powys Children Looked After Strategic Framework as set out in Appendix 1 is approved and adopted | The CLA framework will support the improvements within Children Service's and ensure better outcomes for Children and Young People in Care and those leaving care. |

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| Relevant Policy (ies): | All Children's Services Policies in relation to Children who are looked after | | |
| Within Policy: | Y | Within Budget: | Y |

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| Relevant Local Member(s): | All Members |
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| Person(s) To Implement Decision: | Jan Coles, Head of Children's Services |
| Date By When Decision To Be Implemented: | 30th June 2019 |

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| Is a review of the impact of the decision required? | N |
| If yes, date of review | |
| Person responsible for the review | |
| Date review to be presented to Portfolio Holder/ Cabinet for information or further action | |

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Background Papers used to prepare Report: