

Meeting of:	<b>Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Tuesday, 17 September 2019</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Healthy Living and Social Care
Report Title:	Children and Young People Services Annual Placement Review
Purpose of Report:	To outline the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2018/19 and the first quarter of 2019/20 with regard to placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA) and the priority actions for 2019/20.
Report Owner:	Director of Social Services
Responsible Officer:	Head of Children and Young People Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Operational Manager, Accountancy
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision
<p><b>Executive Summary:</b>  This report outlines the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2018/19 and the first quarter of 2019/20 with regard to placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA) and the priority actions for 2019/20.</p> <p>Where children and young people cannot be supported to remain within their immediate families and need to become looked after, the Council will provide a range of suitable placements.</p> <p>Formal kinship fostering arrangements will be explored as the preferred alternative arrangement where it is necessary for the local authority to share parental responsibility or intervene in managing risk and protecting children.</p> <p>Where a child’s needs cannot be adequately met through kinship arrangements, the majority will have their needs met best in a substitute family, preferably with in-house foster carers and, if not, with Independent Fostering Agency carers wherever possible living within the Vale of Glamorgan.</p> <p>Residential care placements are made only where the complexity and challenge of a child or young person’s needs mean they are unable to live within a family setting or where a young person is subject to a Court Ordered Secure Remand.</p>	

## **Recommendations**

That Scrutiny Committee:

1. Consider the content of the report.
2. Receives regular updates through existing reporting arrangements, including the monthly budget programme report and six monthly reports on the Corporate Strategy for Children in Need of Care and Support and the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy.
3. Receives a further Annual Placement Review report in September 2020.
4. That the report is referred to the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

1. To provide Members with an opportunity to exercise oversight of this key statutory function.
2. To ensure Members are kept up to date with the relevant issues associated with children's placements.
3. To ensure Members have a regular opportunity to review the utilisation of placements for children.
4. To ensure that Members can consider these issues in association with children's educational needs.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Resource management in children's social care is inherently problematic. This is particularly the case in the area of children's placements. Local authorities face considerable challenges in managing their overall looked after populations, finding appropriate placements, meeting children's support needs and ensuring the most effective use of placement resources.
- 1.2 The number of children with complex needs is increasing and meeting these needs within appropriate placements places pressure on budgets. This cohort of children relates both to those with challenging and complex behaviour and to those with disabilities. Some individual placements are very expensive. The costs of placements for children with complex needs can exceed £270,000 a year.
- 1.3 For Children and Young People Services, the continuing pressure on placements for CLA is a high priority. This is the Division's most volatile budget and the one most dependent upon levels of service demand which are not within the Council's direct control. Each year, Cabinet endorses the Social Services Budget Programme as the means whereby the Directorate will deliver services within the resources available and meet savings targets. Previously one of the key savings projects being managed as part of the Budget Programme related to residential placements for CLA, with a target of £150k in cashable savings each year

between 2014/15 and 2016/17. This saving was achieved in each of those years but the budget has come under increasing pressure in the last three years.

- 1.4** Given this context, it is essential that the Council has in place a coherent strategy for meeting the needs of children within allocated resources. Approved by Cabinet, the current Corporate Strategy for Children in Need of Care and Support 2016 to 2019 outlines how the Council will meet a number of key objectives, two of which relate directly to CLA. These are:
- To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements that meet the diverse range of children's needs.
  - To give children clearly planned journeys through care which remain focused on achieving care plans, prevent drift, enable them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable placements and exit the care system positively.
- 1.5** The Corporate Strategy is currently subject to review given its timeframe and will be presented to Cabinet later this year following consultation.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1** Officers have analysed the financial position, the demand for placements and spending patterns and their report is attached at Appendix 1. It demonstrates the volatility of the placement budget and the significant impact individual cases can have on overall expenditure. Key influences include the increasing complexity of children's needs; the Welsh Government 'When I am Ready' scheme which extends the time children can remain in foster placements beyond the age of 18, and the use of remand placements where local authorities have become responsible for the cost of looking after children who are not allowed to live at home while they are the subject of criminal proceedings.
- 2.2** With the exception of the increase in placement commitments, the Children and Young People Services Division has made good progress in delivering the actions agreed in Corporate Strategy. Appendix 1 highlights the considerable activity undertaken to date in response to the challenges associated with children's placements and the work streams for the year ahead.

## **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1** It is essential we recognise the importance of balancing short term needs with the need to safeguard our ability to also meet long term needs. CLA have their short and long term needs regularly reviewed through statutory CLA reviews. Permanency plans for children are in place by the second CLA review.
- 3.2** Children and Young People Services work to the four integrated objectives of the Corporate Strategy for Children who need Care and Support namely:

- To support families to stay together and reduce the need for children to be looked after, by focusing on services which intervene early and prevent greater need arising across all provision.
  - To manage risk confidently and provide support at the 'edge of care' by making sure that need is accurately assessed, resulting in the right children being accommodated at the right time. This includes supporting families to avoid children becoming accommodated unnecessarily and by supporting sustainable family arrangements within their wider family networks.
  - To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements which meet the diverse range of children's needs.
  - To jointly develop with children and young people a plan for the next stages of their lives which remain focused on achieving care and support plans, prevents drift, enables them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, to have stable placements and to exit the care system positively.
- 3.3** The Council and its partners are committed to involving those in receipt of its services and recognising protected characteristics. In the context of children and young people, this means involving children, young people, their families, their carers and their support networks in co-producing plans that can effectively meet identified needs. It means taking a strength based approach that recognises the resources that exist within families themselves and empowering families to support themselves and to achieve change where this is necessary. It also means involving children and families in decision making, including the need to transparently articulate risks that may prevent the achievement of goals that the child or family are hoping for, and where possible managing risks confidently.
- 3.4** Acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse is central to the work of Children and Young People Services and is the first of our four objectives within the Corporate Strategy. The objective recognises the significance of us being able to collectively provide the right services at the right time and prevent escalation of need.

## **4. Resources and Legal Considerations**

### **Financial**

- 4.1** The Social Services Directorate is committed to achieving a balanced budget. The savings expectations associated with reducing spend on children's placements required £150k in cashable savings each year between 2014/15 and 2016/17 and this was achieved in those previous years. For 2018/19, the overall external placement budget for CLA was overspent by £957,485. This is an increase on the previous year where in 2017/18 the budget was overspent by £556k. The largest overspend in 2018/19 was against CLA Children's Residential Placements of £818,897. This reflects the increasing costs of residential placements and the complexity of young people placed in residential placements, alongside a small increase in the number of young people placed in residential placements. During 2018/19 Welsh Government provided a one-off in year grant of £513,428. The

Directorate allocated this funding to partly offset the overspend of £957,485 on children's placements.

**Employment**

**4.2** There are no employment implications associated with this report.

**Legal (Including Equalities)**

**4.3** There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

**5. Background Papers**

Annual Placement Review – Appendix 1

**Vale of Glamorgan Council  
Children and Young People Services  
Annual Placement Review**

August 2019

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**1. Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to outline the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2018/19 and the first quarter of 2019/20 with regard to placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA) and to outline our plans for 2019/20.

**2. Context**

This area of activity and expenditure is a very challenging and often volatile one in all local authorities. It is difficult to anticipate a number of key factors including:

- how many and which children will become looked after each year;
- the type of placements they will need;
- how many children will cease to be looked after;
- the impact of case law and changes in government regulations.

To plan as effectively as possible, the Management Team in Children and Young People Services continuously analyse external and internal influences to anticipate the likely impact in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Some of the high profile external influences pertinent to this area are as follows:

- **Children with Complex Needs**

In common with other local authorities, the Vale of Glamorgan has experienced an increase in the number of children with especially complex needs and the rising costs associated with meeting these needs within appropriate placements continues to place pressure on budgets. This cohort of children relates both to those with challenging and complex behaviour and to those with disabilities.

Children and young people with challenging and complex behaviours often cannot be maintained within foster placements and require admission into residential care. In certain circumstances these placements will be specialist (for example, where a child is displaying sexually harmful behaviour) and/or require the provision of additional staffing to manage risks associated with the child's behaviour. Placements of this type can cost over £270,000 a year.

There is evidence of increasing demand for support for older disabled children and young people. Families often manage to cope when children are younger but some of them find it increasingly difficult to do so as their children grow and may become more challenging or aggressive. Some disabled young people require 24 hour care and support which can be met only in a residential school setting, usually until they reach the age of 19. This represents a significant long-term pressure on resources in coming years as the average annual cost of such provision is on average £120,000 per year (ranging from a respite placement cost of £18,500 to a 52 week specialist placement cost of £270,000 per year).

- **The Welsh Government's 'When I Am Ready' scheme**

The 'When I Am Ready – Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers' scheme aims to promote better support by extending a young person's transition to adulthood within a supportive family and household environment. Young people are now able to remain with their foster carer beyond the age of 18 until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, or until they feel able to leave for independent living before that age. Since the scheme was implemented in April 2016 26 young people have been in 'When I Am Ready' placements in the Vale of Glamorgan. This year we expect a further three to remain in 'When I Am Ready' placements. This scheme will continue to have an impact upon the Fostering Service as children remain in placements for longer. This will increase the overall demand for foster care placements, to provide for the same number of CLA. The Council will also have to address the need to recruit and retain foster carers who are capable and authorised to foster children from birth to the age of 21.

- **Remand Placements**

Following the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, local authorities became responsible for the costs of young people under the age of 18 who are remanded into Young Offenders Institutions (YOI), Secure Children's Homes (SCH) and Secure Training Centres (STC). Before April 2013, the Ministry of Justice paid for all YOI remands and two thirds of SCH and STC remands. The costs of a remand placement are £165 per night for a YOI, £572 per night for a SCH and £545 per night for a STC. If a young person is considered vulnerable, it is most likely they will be remanded to a SCH or STC. It is difficult for us to predict how many young people may be remanded into custody or for how long.

### **3. Aim and Objectives**

Approved by Cabinet on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 2016, the current Corporate Strategy for Children in Need of Care and Support identifies how the social care needs of children, young people and their families will be met within the resources available to the Council during the period 2016 to 2019. This Strategy is currently subject to review given its timeframe and will be presented to Cabinet later this year following consultation.

The scope of this Strategy covers four key objectives. These are:

- a. To support families to stay together and reduce the need for children to be looked after, by ensuring a focus on early intervention and preventative action across all service provision for children.
- b. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the 'edge of care' by making sure that need is accurately assessed, resulting in the right children being accommodated at the right time. This includes supporting families to avoid children becoming accommodated unnecessarily and by making private arrangements within their wider family networks.
- c. To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements that meet the diverse range of children's needs.
- d. To give children clearly planned journeys through care which remain focused on achieving care plans, prevent drift, enable them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable placements and exit the care system positively.

These objectives are underpinned by the following key principles:

- i) The responsibility for meeting the needs of children and young people looked after or at risk of becoming looked after rests across all services for children, including statutory and independent providers.
- ii) The majority of children are most likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own families.
- iii) Preventative services and early intervention to support children in need and their families should be provided to give them every chance to stay together.
- iv) Where children cannot be supported within their immediate family, families will be supported to make private arrangements within their wider family and friendship networks and, where necessary, to make these arrangements permanent through the use of Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders.
- v) Formal kinship fostering arrangements will be explored as the preferred alternative arrangement where it is necessary for the local authority to share parental responsibility or intervene in managing risk and protecting children
- vi) Where a child's needs cannot be adequately met through the arrangements described in principles iv and v, the majority will have their needs met best in a substitute family, preferably with in-house foster carers and, if not, with Independent Fostering Agency carers wherever possible living within the Vale of Glamorgan.
- vii) Residential care placements will be made only where the complexity and challenge of a child or young person's needs mean they are unable to live



within a family setting or where a young person is subject to a Court Ordered Secure Remand.

- viii) Placements should be local to enable children and young people to remain in their communities, maintain their networks and minimise disruption in their lives.
- ix) Placement requests should be defined in terms of the child/young person's needs. It is the role of the Placement Panel to agree that a child should become looked after and consider the most appropriate type of placement to meet these needs, with due consideration given to the available resources.
- x) All CLA of statutory school age should receive appropriate education provision regardless of their placement and ability to access school. Providing appropriate support to enable engagement in education is just as important as finding suitable care placements for Looked After Children.
- xi) Placements should support a positive transition to independence, adulthood, education, employment, training, and where applicable, resettlement back into the community from custodial settings.

#### 4. Placement Profile

- Activity Update

The following table provides information about the number and nature of placements on a quarterly basis during 2018/19 and the first quarter of 2019/20.

Quarter Starting	Total CLA	Residential Care	Internally Provided Foster Care	Friends and Family Foster Care	Externally Provided Foster Care	Other
Mar -18	244	13	78	110 65 kinship 45 PWP	33	10 3 adoption 6 hostel/independent living 1 secure unit
Jul-18	249	13	78	120 72 kinship 48 pwp	33	5 2 adoption 2 Hostel/independent living 1 secure
Nov-18	261	14	84	116 69 kinship 47 pwp	39	8 3 adoption 3 hostels/ independent living 1 Secure 1 Secure Remand
Mar-19	282	15	84	130 70 kinship 60 pwp	42	11 3 adoption 2 hostels/independent living 2 secure unit 3 Remand YOI 1 Parent and Child Assessment Unit
Jul-19	280	15	73	133 70 kinship 63 pwp	45	14 7 adoption 3 hostels/independent living 2 secure unit 2 Parent and Child Assessment Unit

- (1) Friends and Family Foster Care (also known as Kinship Care) refers to circumstances where a family friend or relative has come forward and offered to care for a CLA, and they have undergone rigorous checks and an assessment of their suitability to do so. The friends or relatives are approved as foster carers via the Local Authority Fostering Panel. We can see from the table above and previous figures that there has been a significant increase in kinship care from 29<sup>th</sup> in March 2015 to 70 kinship carers as at 27<sup>th</sup> July 2019. However, there are early signs to suggest these figures are beginning to stabilise and may decrease in the next year linked to the local authorities' efforts to support family care without the need for a child/ren to be looked after.

- (2) Placement with Parents refers to circumstances where a CLA is subject of a Care Order and is placed with one or both parents with a degree of delegation of parental responsibility for decisions about the day to day care of the child, whilst parental responsibility is shared with the local authority to ensure the child's welfare and safety. These arrangements are subject to checks and formal placement agreements, and are sanctioned by the Court and the Local Authority. There has been an increase in Placement with Parents from 13 in March 2015 to 63 in July 2019.
- (3) There has been a small reduction in the number of children placed in internal foster placements between March and July 2019 which reflects individual plans for those children, for example plans for permanence via adoption, rehabilitation to family, or in some cases placement breakdown necessitating an alternative placement outside of internal resources.

The CLA population reduced significantly between April 2011 and April 2013 with a 12% drop. Between April 2013 and March 2016 the population remained relatively stable at between 180 - 200 children/young people with some variation throughout the years. The CLA population over the past three years has steadily increased from 193 in March 2016 to 282 in March 2019, an increase of 89, with the largest increase seen in family and friends placements. This reflects a national upward trend in kinship placements where children placed with family and friends and subject to an Order of the Court require the approval of family and friends as foster carers. Although the Order defines the child as looked after by the local authority, and overall the rise in kinship placements has contributed significantly to the overall increase in the number of looked after children, it is important to acknowledge that these arrangements enable to child to remain within their wider family.

The table below provides the currently available national data on the actual numbers of CLA in neighbouring authorities over the last five years up until March 2018.

	<b>Cardiff</b>	<b>Merthyr Tydfil</b>	<b>Rhondda Cynon Taff</b>	<b>Vale of Glamorgan</b>
<b>CLA @ 31.3.18</b>	830	156	676	244
<b>CLA @ 31.3.17</b>	720	145	690	224
<b>CLA @ 31.3.16</b>	645	140	625	193
<b>CLA @ 31.3.15</b>	650	165	620	190
<b>CLA @ 31.3.14</b>	610	175	650	185
<b>CLA @ 31.3.13</b>	557	181	621	184
Rate /10,000	84	140	130	68

The All Wales average rate of children looked after per 10,000 population was 89 at March 31<sup>st</sup> 2015 (range 46-155). The Vale of Glamorgan figure was 70, the 9<sup>th</sup> lowest of the 22 authorities. At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 our rate per 10,000 population was 103.5. The All Wales figure is awaited.

The majority of CLA in the Vale of Glamorgan are in foster care provided by in-house carers and family and friends (kinship carers). The breakdown of the CLA population confirms the Council's strategy to return children to placements within Wales and, where possible, within the boundary of the Vale of Glamorgan. Of the six children who currently remain out of Wales, three are placed with relatives, one is in a specialist residential school, two are in residential care homes and one is in a secure unit. Where children are placed with relatives the local authority will not be seeking to return them to the Vale of Glamorgan and similarly the child placed in the residential school is now located near to his mother. It is hoped the two young people in residential care homes can be successfully returned to the area once appropriate accommodation is identified. These planned changes can have an impact on the percentage of children who have three or more placements in a year, however, this figure has decreased slightly from 12% to 9% for the last year.

There has been an increase in the number of children placed in externally provided foster care from 33 in 2017/18 to 42 in 2018/19. This continues to be a target for reduction in future years.

The number of children requiring residential care has increased slightly during 2018/19. There were on average 15 children whose additional complex needs required this type of provision during the year. We are aware of the increasing complexity of need amongst the children we are currently supporting. In addition to this we have seen an increase in the numbers of young people remanded via criminal proceedings during the last year we have had five young people remanded at different times and three young people into the first quarter of 2019/20. Within the current cohort there are two young people subject to Secure Orders who are placed in secure units.

- **Placement Budget**

<u>Placement Description</u>	<u>Budget 18/19</u>	<u>Actual Spend 18/19</u>	<u>Variance 18/19</u>	<u>Budget 19/20</u>
Joint Budget - CLA Childrens Residential Placements	2,255,278	3,074,175	-818,897	2,755,278
Non CLA Childrens Residential Placements	25,250	12,247	13,003	25,250
LA Joint Agreements - 4C's	19,681		19,681	19,681
Secure / Remand	74,149	98,579	-24,430	74,149
Childrens External Placement - IFA	1,499,747	1,646,589	-146,842	1,499,747
	<b>3,874,105</b>	<b>4,831,590</b>	<b>-957,485</b>	<b>4,374,105</b>

The table above relates to the external placement budget and provides information regarding budget and actual spend. For 2018/19, the overall external

placement budget for CLA was overspent by £997,583. This is an increase on the previous the year where in 2017/18 the budget was overspent by £565,000. The largest overspend is against CLA Children’s Residential Placements of £786,539.

As previously stated, remand placements remain an unpredictable area. During the last year, we have had five children on remand either in a secure unit or YOI for differing periods. The average costs of such placements can be in excess of £5,300 per week.

During 2018/19, two young people left residential care and four young people entered residential care. Of the four new young people requiring residential care, all had experienced a series of foster placements breakdowns.

As of July 2019, we have 15 young people in residential care, two young people in secure units and two children in parent and child assessment units, all at a projected cost of £4,028,531 for the year.

**5. 2018/19 Activity Undertaken**

During 2018/19, a number of initiatives have been implemented to address the key issues/objectives in this area.

**External Placement Audit**

Actions undertaken	An audit by the Multi-Agency Placement Panel of all children (53) placed externally in November 2018, either in residential care or with independent fostering agencies, with a remit to confirm suitability of placement and where alternative provisions may be appropriate.
Impact: Service	Two children being considered for a move within Wales, one child identified for a potential move to supported independent living.
Impact: Financial	Potential savings if two children identified for consideration are suitable for a move within Wales to local residential provision of £1,000 per week.  Potential savings for one child to move to supported independent living of £4,200 per week

Lessons Learnt	<p>Outcomes from the Audit have been monitored via the Permanency Panel. Another External Placement audit has been arranged for September 2019.</p> <p>Increasing the availability of lower cost placements within Wales and the Vale of Glamorgan, and matching children to these placements, where this is appropriate to meet their needs, have the potential to significantly reduce costs. These reductions, however, will only have an impact on the overall budget if we can successfully manage the number of new placements coming in, use alternatives to care where this is appropriate and maximise our use of internal resources where accommodation is required.</p>
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### Internal Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy

Actions undertaken	<p>The Fostering Service recruited a Marketing and Recruitment Officer in April 2019. A new Recruitment Strategy for 2019 -2021 has been developed targeting new foster carers and IFA foster carers. A rebranding exercise is underway and a launch of the new brand is planned for October 2019.</p> <p>We have implemented the Fostering Recruitment Best Practice Guide and we are closely monitoring our performance against these standards. We are engaged in the National Fostering Framework (NFF) which is one of the four major key work streams within the programme which has been established by the strategic steering group set up by Welsh Government with the task of improving outcomes for children. The aims of the NFF is to improve permanency planning for children and quality of placement provision, consistent use of best practice models for recruitment and supporting carers and an increase in collaboration and cooperation by all key stakeholders.</p>
Impact: Service	<p>From 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2018, we have approved four new mainstream foster carers and are currently assessing a further five. We have approved ten new kinship carers. Therefore, whilst we did not meet our target of eight new mainstream carers, we significantly increased the numbers of kinship carers, supporting children to remain within their wider families.</p>

Impact: Financial	The costs associated with internal and external foster care placements vary according to the needs of the individual looked after child. In addition, the skills of the foster carer and the number of children placed with them will cause the payment to internal foster carers to vary. However the cost differential between external and internal provision equates to £391.60 per week/£20,363 per annum per placement on average. Therefore, a reduction in our use of external placements by increasing our internal provision will provide savings. We plan to reduce external placements by four during 2019/20 resulting in a saving of £120k.
Lessons Learnt	Growth within the Fostering Service will support us to meet the demands of our CLA population in future years. Alongside our own foster carer recruitment project, we continue to work with the NFF looking at possible collaboration for regional marketing and recruitment.

### Joint Budget

Actions undertaken	Establishment of a joint budget between Children and Young People Services and Learning and Skills to meet the education and social care costs of residential placements for children with highly complex needs who are looked after by the Council. It was endorsed by Cabinet as a pilot scheme for one year from 1 <sup>st</sup> July 2013 and a report recommending continuation was presented to Cabinet on 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2014 and approved.
Impact: Service	Prior to the joint budget, the process for determining the allocation of costs to each funder could be difficult and time consuming. These arrangements for agreeing contributions to the overall cost of specific placements did not assist effective planning for the children concerned. Under the new arrangements, where a child has been identified as being eligible for funding from the joint budget, all the costs of caring for the child and meeting their needs are charged to that budget.
Impact: Financial	The joint budget for 2018/19 was £2.253 million. The budget holder is the Head of Children and Young People Services, who takes responsibility for monitoring and reporting the position of the budget. The budget overspent during 2018/19 by £786,539. The budget set for 2019/20 is set at £2.755 million.

Lessons Learnt	Establishment of the joint budget has been successful in removing the need to determine funding arrangements on an ad hoc basis. There is a need for rigorous management of the budget, to ensure there are no overspends. The relevant Directors and the Head of Finance will monitor the budget on a quarterly basis.
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### Revocation of Care Orders

Actions undertaken	<p>Permanency Panel takes responsibility for reviewing all cases prior to their second CLA review (i.e. within four months). The specific focus of the revocation work stream is to examine the potential for the discharge of Care Orders for CLA to more appropriate /less intrusive Orders which still protect and safeguard the child's welfare.</p> <p>Eight successful applications were made to the Court to revoke Care Orders and institute Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) during 2018/19 in respect of eight children. Two to a former foster carer and six to kinship carers.</p>
Impact: Service	<p>These children are no longer looked after and they are able to lead more normal lives, without high levels of state intervention. Monthly statutory social work visits are no longer required, nor the statutory review of their cases by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), freeing staff capacity for other essential work.</p>
Impact: Financial	<p>Six were approved as kinship carers prior to the granting of the SGO. For those in receipt of fostering allowance before the looked after status of the children ended, they are now in receipt of SGO allowances at the same rate, less child benefit payments which they are now entitled to claim directly. (Rates vary from £136-£170 per week according to the age of the child).</p> <p>For the two children who were previously looked after by a foster carer this will equate to a net saving of approximately £3,500-£4,000 per annum.</p> <p>The most significant 'saving' is in qualified staff time, which is easily absorbed by existing and new demands for Social Services intervention with children and families assessed as in need of support.</p>



Lessons Learnt	SGO applications are now given much more consideration as a means of achieving permanence for children unable to live with their birth families. This policy position will continue to be applied where it appropriately meets the needs of the child.
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The above actions describe how the Service is seeking to deliver overall objectives within this area of work. The result is more robust processes to manage a volatile area of demand and associated expenditure.

The Division will continue to build on these actions (whilst maintaining and enhancing them) in order to continue to manage service demands.

## 6. **Opportunities**

The following opportunities have been identified based on an overall analysis and in order to manage associated risks and issues.

In line with the overall objectives for this work stream, the following activities are underway:

- To reduce the use of independent fostering agencies for placements through the foster carer recruitment project which includes a target of eight newly recruited foster carers and a reduction of four independent foster placements during 2019/20.
- To minimise movement into residential care; limiting the numbers coming in and the length of stay.
- To utilise local residential provision to return CLA to local lower cost residential placements where possible and to step children down from residential to foster care where appropriate.
- To continue to address the overall CLA population with a particular focus on the increase in kinship placements and placements with parents, through the use of revocation of Care Orders and use of Special Guardianship Orders. This CLA reduction work stream coincides with the objectives of the First Minister and the Children Looked After Reduction Expectations delivered by Welsh Government to reduce the overall CLA population in Wales.
- To work in partnership with Health to offer increased therapeutic support to CLA and foster carers to promote placement stability and prevent placements breaking down and leading to more costly placements.

These actions will continue to involve the use of regional arrangements where appropriate, for example, working with the NFF project, the national commissioning arrangements and other local authorities to secure affordable placement opportunities. The Service is also working within the Reshaping Services agenda and looking at ways of responding to challenges and opportunities presented by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. This work is underway and will continue to consider new and innovative ways of

working that align with the aims and objectives of the Reshaping Services agenda.

These activities will continue to be reported to elected members as part of existing reporting arrangements, including the monthly budget programme report and update reports regarding the Corporate Strategy for Children who need Care and Support, and the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy.