



ADSS Cymru

Yn arwain Gwasanaethau
Cymdeithasol yng Nghymru
Leading Social Services in Wales



CLILC • WLGA

WLGA and ADSS Cymru Position Statement on Children's Services

Key Facts and Figures



There are about 630,000 children and young people living in Wales.

This includes:

- Nearly 16,000 children receiving care and support from Welsh Councils
- Just under 6,000 who are looked after by Welsh Councils

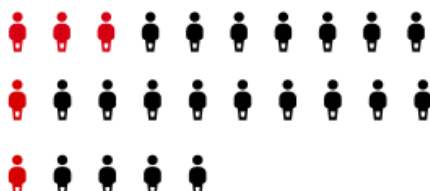


Every day last year:

- 78 children and families received advice or assistance from Councils
- 106 assessments were carried out
- 23 care and support plans were put in place



Every 4 hours a child or young person was brought into care in Wales last year



3 in 10 children in Wales are living in poverty

1 in 10 children in Wales will have a diagnosable mental health condition

Around 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse

15%

increase in children looked after since 2010, with a 5% increase on last year

149%

increase in the number of court applications to remove children into care over the last nine years

12%

increase in children on child protection register between 2010-16

22%

reduction in Council funding since 2010 impacting on a wide range of preventative services vital in supporting children and families

30%

real terms increase in expenditure on LAC services by LA's since 2010

£3,500

the average cost per week of placing a child in residential services

Nearly **16,000** children received care and support from local authorities in Wales last year. Just under **6,000** children were 'looked after' by local authorities, a figure that has increased by nearly a quarter over 10 years. Over the same period Council's expenditure on Children's Services has increased to meet the increasing demand, with a real term increase of 30% spend on Looked After Children's Services. This comes despite Council's core grant funding reducing by **22%** after adjusting for inflation. If you take schools out, core funding has fallen by **35%**.

Rapidly increasing and complex needs, along with constrained funding is placing significant pressure on children's social care services. Councils and social care staff have coped extremely well up to now despite the exceptional pressures, however this is not sustainable in the face of further budget cuts.

With a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the well-being of looked after children and support some of our most vulnerable in our communities, Councils have committed to providing as much resource as possible to safeguard and support children and their families continuing to deliver vital services. But this commitment leaves some challenging choices elsewhere and it is important that decision makers recognise the current situation and the impact that it is having.

Key Messages



- ⇒ **Over the last decade the number of children in the care system in Wales has increased significantly.** The reasons why children become looked after and their needs while in the care system are complex and multifactorial.
- ⇒ **Recent years have seen an increase in expenditure on Children's Services at a time when Councils overall budgets have been cut.** This demonstrates the commitment that has been made by local authorities to meet the demands being placed on services by the rising numbers of looked after children. However, this is becoming unsustainable, with most local authorities now anticipating significant overspends on their children's services.
- ⇒ **Services for the care and protection of vulnerable children are now, in many areas, being pushed to breaking point.** The huge financial pressures councils are under, coupled with the spike in demand for child protection support, mean that the limited money councils have available is increasingly being taken up with the provision of urgent help for children and families already at crisis point, leaving very little to invest in early intervention. Hence a spiral of uninterrupted and increasing need for services is driving a mounting complexity of challenges for the most vulnerable children.

Pressures on Children's Services

WLGA and ADSS Cymru have identified four key areas where significant pressures are being experienced in relation to children's services in Wales:

- 1) **External demands and complexities** The on-going introduction of welfare reforms and a decade of austerity has amplified the pressures on families. Increased public awareness and reporting of potential abuse, the impact of poverty and deprivation on families and a lack of funding to help families early on before problems escalate all contribute to this. There is an increased awareness and understanding of issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and an increase in the number of initiatives that are aimed at early identification and intervention such as the evidence based work in respect of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Flying Start and Families First.
- 2) **Placements** The increasing complexity of cases and the growing numbers of children coming into care are negatively impacting on both the availability of appropriate placements and the cost of placements. An ageing foster carer population and the increasing costs of providing residential care has a significant impact on the sector.
- 3) **Legislation and work with the Courts** The last few years have seen a substantial increase in the number of care applications that have been made, with a significant increase in the number of children subject to care proceedings. Increasing expectations from legal judgements create a challenging environment.
- 4) **Workforce** Child and family social work is challenged by high turnover and vacancy rates and a reliance on agency staff, with demand for permanent, experienced workers outstripping supply.



Urgent action is required to reduce the number of families relying on the children's social care system for support and so we are calling on Welsh Government to:

- ⇒ Urgently address the growing funding gap being seen in Children's Services and reinforce our shared commitment to improving the life chances of children and young people.
- ⇒ Use the recent announcement of additional consequential funding coming into Wales to identify new, non-ring-fenced money, that allows local authorities flexibility to best meet local demand and needs, focussed on improving outcomes for children, young people and their families and helping to ensure that children who leave the looked after system have properly planned and supported exits so that they also achieve their outcomes. Recent funding made available for Children's Services from Welsh Government has only been for specific pieces of work and to support new initiatives rather than to be able to meet increasing demand and current pressures.
- ⇒ Establish a new Preventative Care Fund for Wales. There is a need for a strategy of investment focused upon achieving a coherent preventative approach to improving children's outcomes. A Preventative Care Fund, focussed throughout the life-course, would enable some double running of new investment in preventative services alongside 'business as usual' in the current system until savings are realised and reinvested back into the system. This would help to stem the decline of local preventative services and provide a way to make some significant investment into new and existing preventative services.
- ⇒ Ensure that the funding currently provided for children's mental health and wellbeing services is used to best effect. Supporting us in tackling mental health issues and building resilient, emotionally and mentally healthy children and young people and making this a national priority.

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