

Meeting of:	Live Well Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Tuesday, 13 January 2026
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Live Well Scrutiny Committee
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 2024/25 with regards to placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA) and the priority actions for 2025/26.
Report Owner:	Director of Social Services
Responsible Officer:	Operational Manager – Children Looked After
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Head of Children and Young People Services Operational Manager, Accountancy
Policy Framework:	This report is consistent with the Policy Framework and Budget
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This report outlines the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2024/25 regarding placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA), the priority actions for 2025/26 and progress against those actions. • Where children and young people cannot be supported to remain within their immediate families and need to become looked after, the Council seeks to provide a range of suitable placements. • 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. • 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. • 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. 	

Recommendations

1. T H A T the contents of both the covering and appended report (Appendix 1) be acknowledged.
2. T H A T a further Annual Placement Review report be presented to Scrutiny Committee in January 2027.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To provide Members with an opportunity to exercise oversight of the key statutory function.
2. To ensure Members are aware of any changes on an annual basis.

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 children 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 cost of placements for children with complex needs can exceed £400k a year.
- 1.3 In Children and Young People Services, the major financial issue is the continuing pressure on placements for children looked after. This is a volatile budget and the one most dependent upon levels of service demand which are not within the Council's direct control. Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the Cost-of-Living Crisis, demand across all areas of key activity has increased significantly.
- 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. The Corporate Strategy for Children in Need of Care and Support 2024 to 2028 outlines how the Council will meet a number of key objectives, two of which relate directly to children looked after. These are:
 - To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high-quality services that meet the diverse range of children's needs.
 - To give children clearly planned journeys through care.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 Officers have analysed the financial position, the demand for placements and spending patterns and a report is attached at Appendix 1. It demonstrates the

volatility of the placement budget and the significant impact individual children's needs can have on overall expenditure.

- 2.2** Key influences include the increasing complexity of children's needs; the Welsh Government "When I am Ready" policy which extends the time children can remain in foster placements beyond the age of 18; the use of remand placements where local authorities have become responsible for the costs of looking after children who are not allowed to live at home while they are the subject of criminal proceedings; the increased complexity following the COVID-19 pandemic, and cost of living crisis; the UK Government's National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and the Welsh Government's Eliminate agenda.
- 2.3** With the exception of the increase in placement commitments, the Children and Young People Services Division has made good progress in delivering the actions in the current Corporate Strategy. Appendix 1 highlights the considerable activity undertaken to date in response to the challenges associated with children's placements, the workstreams for current year and progress thus far.

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. Children looked after have their short and long term needs regularly reviewed through Children Looked After reviews. Permanency plans for children are in place by the second Children Looked After 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 services which meet the diverse range of children's needs.
 - **To give children clearly planned journeys through care** which remains 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, 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** Children and Young People Services work collaboratively with a range of services to meet the needs of children looked after. The children's Placement Panel is a multi-agency panel made of members from Social Services, Education and Health. The Panel's role is to consider if threshold for care is met, ensuring all alternatives are robustly considered. They will also consider any requests where a higher tariff placement is sought, i.e. any move from internal to external fostering or fostering to residential care and oversee plans for rehabilitation.
- 3.5** 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, recognising the significance of us being able to collectively provide the right services at the right time and prevent escalation of need.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** There are no Climate Change and Nature Implications as a direct result of this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** The Social Services Directorate is committed to achieving a balanced budget. For 2024/25, the overall external placement budget for children looked after was overspent by £3,507,868. This year in 2025/26, as at 01.12.25, we are forecasting an overspend of £853,649. This reflects the increasing costs of residential placements and the complexity of young people placed in residential placements and the number of young people placed in independent fostering placements.

Employment

- 5.2** There are no employment implications associated with this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

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

6. Background Papers

Previous Annual Placement Review reports to Healthy Living & Social Care Scrutiny Committee; 3rd December 2024; 5th November 2023; 6th December 2022.

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

December 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to outline the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2024/25 with regard to placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA), to outline our plans for 2025/26 and progress against those plans thus far.

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 enter care each year;
- what type of placements they will need;
- how many children will cease to be looked after (this could be through the discharge of Care Orders, children returning home, or young people turning 18 years old);
- the impact of case law and changes in government regulations.

To plan as effectively as possible, the service continuously analyses 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 sometimes cannot continue to be supported within foster placements and require admission to 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 £400k 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 the children grow and may become more challenging or aggressive. Some young people with disabilities 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 demand on resources in coming years as the average annual cost of such provision is on average £250,000 per year (ranging from £150,500 – £450,000 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 21st birthday, or until they feel able to leave for independent living before that age. Since the scheme was implemented in April 2016, we have had 125 young people in 'When I Am Ready' placements. This year we have had our highest numbers in 'When I Am Ready' placements. As of the end of November 2025 we have 20 young people in 'When I Am Ready' placements. 17 of these young people are placed with Vale of Glamorgan foster carers and 3 with IFA foster carers.

This scheme will continue to have an impact upon the Fostering Service as children remain in placements for longer, as this makes up part of the overall demand for foster care placements. It is a priority for the Council to recruit and retain foster carers who are able 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 £353 per night for a YOI, £968 per night for a SCH and £941 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. Two young people have been remanded in 2025/26 so far and one was in 2024/25.

- **Increased complexity post COVID-19 Pandemic and the Cost-of-Living Crisis**

Since the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, we have experienced significant increases in demand across all areas of key activity. This is a common picture across Wales and a nationally recognised challenge.

The complexity of issues has also increased, including higher and worsening levels of neglect, family crises, and more issues affecting the emotional wellbeing and mental health of both children and their significant adults.

Whilst we have passed through the pandemic, we are seeing an enduring impact, including the appearance of delayed trauma for children and families. The impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis is also significantly impacting families, adding to the complexity of needs and increasing required levels of support. In addition, the increased use of social media is linked to concerns regarding the impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing, as well as its role in areas of safeguarding.

- **National Transfer Scheme**

From December 2021, the Home Office has mandated Local Authorities across the UK to receive Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). The majority of these children arrive in Kent after crossing the English Channel. Once these children have been processed in Kent and allocated to a Local Authority, we have five days to receive them and identify a placement for them.

Many UASC we receive are aged between 16-17 years but are "age disputed" which makes them difficult to place alongside other children in foster care. Therefore, the majority UASC received by the Vale of Glamorgan are placed in 24 hour supported accommodation at an average cost of £2,000 per week.

Since December 2021, the Vale of Glamorgan has received 45 UASC through the National Transfer Scheme. We are expecting a further 3 UASC in the next

three cycles in 2025/26. As of the end of November 2025 we are supporting 20 UASC who are children looked after and 19 who are care leavers.

- **Welsh Government's Policy Commitment to Eliminate Profit**

Welsh Government have made a policy commitment that public money invested in the care of children looked after does not profit individuals or corporate entities. It became law when the Health and Social Care (Wales) Act was passed in March 2025, with the following implications:

- From 1 April 2026 – no new for-profit providers of restricted children's services (care home, fostering and secure accommodation services) are able to register in Wales.
- From 1 April 2027 – no additional beds or foster carers able to be added by existing for-profit providers of a children's care home, secure accommodation service or fostering service.
- 1 April 2030 – no new placements of children within existing for-profit children's care homes, fostering and secure accommodation service providers by English placing authorities except in exceptional circumstances specified in regulations. No new placements from Welsh placing authorities unless there is Ministerial approval.
- The Eliminate agenda creates an inherent requirement for all local authorities to have clear sufficiency plans in place to enable us to move away from externally commissioned care.

There are clear challenges in how this will be achieved, and national discussions remain focused on this expectation and the growth in local provision that will be required, including the level of Welsh Government funding that each local authority will need beyond what has already been committed if this level of growth is to be achieved. The detailed eliminate plan we submitted to Welsh Government for funding for three years requested 4.8 million. The grant awarded to us for three years was 2.6 million.

3. Aim and Objectives

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 and our key partners during the period 2024 to 2028.

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 services that meet the diverse range of children's needs.
- d. To give children clearly planned journeys through care.

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 Child Arrangement 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) All Looked After Children 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.
- x) 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 below table provides information about the number and nature of placements during 2024/25 and the three quarters of 2025/26.

Month Starting	Total CLA	Residential Care	Internally Provided Foster Care	Friends and Family Foster Care	Externally Provided Foster Care	Other
Mar -23	321	14	69	149 104 kinship 45 PWP	68	21 12 adoption 9 hostel/independent living 0 secure unit
Mar-24	344	18	60	156 110 kinship 46 PWP	90	20 7 adoption 11 hostel/independent living 2 secure
Dec-24	357	20	65	159 112 kinship 47 PWP	85	28 8 adoption 19 hostels/independent living 1 secure
Mar-25	368	20	65	171 123 kinship	85	27 7 adoption

				48 PWP		19 hostels/independent living 1 secure
June-25	360	21	58	168 115 kinship 53 PWP	84	29 9 adoption 19 hostels/independent living 0 secure 1 hospital setting
Sept- 25	361	24	59	165 115 kinship 50 PWP	84	29 5 adoption 21 hostels/independent living 2 secure/remand 1 hospital setting
Nov-25	371	20	66	167 113 kinship 54 PWP	84	34 7 adoption 23 hostels/independent living 3 secure/remand 1 hospital setting

- (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 looked after child, 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 that the number of kinship fostering arrangements has slightly decreased since March 2025. However, Friends and Family Foster Care is where the majority of children looked after are placed. Keeping children within their own family network is a priority and ensures better outcomes for children.
- (2) Placement with Parents refers to circumstances where a child looked after is subject of a Care Order 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 a slight increase in Placement with Parents arrangements over the past 18 months.

The CLA population increased between 2016 and 2019 from 193 to 282, an increase of 89. However, between March 2019 and March 2020 the CLA population decreased by 23 from 282 to 259. During the past five years (March 2020 – March 2025), we have seen another significant increase in the CLA population by 109.

This increase correlates with the increased demands we have seen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Cost-of-Living Crisis. The largest increase is seen in internal (mainstream and kinship) and external foster placements. This reflects a national upward trend in demand for foster placements and decreasing capacity.

The table below provides data on the actual numbers of children looked after in neighbouring authorities over the last five years. At the time of writing, figures for 2025 were unavailable (taken from statwales.gov).

CLA @	Cardiff	Merthyr Tydfil	Rhondda Cynon Taff	Vale of Glamorgan
31.3.24	1040	195	635	344
31.3.23	1057	173	626	322
31.3.22	1040	177	655	289
31.3.21	990	195	695	285
31.3.20	940	205	710	259
31.3.19	870	200	645	282

The majority of children looked after 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 6 children who currently remain out of Wales, 1 is placed in a young offender’s institute, 1 in a hospital setting, 1 in a specialist school, 2 with IFAs and 1 with family. It is hoped 2 of these young people can be returned to the area once appropriate accommodation is identified.

There has been a decrease in the number of children placed in externally provided foster care from 90 in March 2024 to 84 in November 2025. This number has remained stable over the past 12 months. However, there continues to be an increasing demand on foster care both locally and nationally. We will continue to prioritise the reduction of IFA use in future years.

The number of children requiring residential care has remained relatively stable over the past 18 months. There were on average 20 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 costs for residential placements increase significantly. Positively, 7 children are placed locally with our third sector not for profit partners.

- **Placement Budget**

<u>Placement Description</u>	<u>Budget 24/25</u>	<u>Actual Spend 24/25</u>	<u>Variance 24/25</u>	<u>Budget 25/26</u>
Joint Budget - CLA Childrens Residential Placements	3,228,278	6,007,400	-2,779,122	5,617,907
Non CLA Childrens Residential Respite Placements	25,250	0	25,250	25,250
LA Joint Agreements - 4C's	19,681	38,056	-18,375	19,681
Secure / Remand	222,510	552,922	-330,412	222,510
Remand YOI 16-18	55,046	0	55,046	55,046
Childrens External Placement - IFA	4,433,115	4,597,999	-164,884	4,789,966
YJ Grant	-16,866	0	-16,866	-16,866
WG Grant SW Workforce23/24	-540,265	-625,735	85,470	-540,265
Reserve to fund IFA	0	0	0	0
Future years Savings Target Residential Placements 2024/25	-450,000	0	0	9,606
Other Income -Internal and LA's Bodies Grant, UHB income	0	-311,578	86,025	0
Totals	6,976,749	10,259,064	-3,507,868	10,182,835

The table relates to the external placement budget and provides information regarding budget and actual spend.

For 2024/25, the overall external placement budget for children looked after was overspent by £3,507,868. The current external placements budget is forecasting to overspend this year (2025/26) by £853,649k.

As of the end of November 2025, we have 20 young people in residential care (2 in residential schools and 18 in children's homes). We have 2 young people in young offenders' institutes and 1 young person in a secure unit. We have 84 young people in IFA (external fostering) placements.

5. 2023/24 Activity Undertaken

During 2024/25, a number of initiatives were 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 placed externally during the year, 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	3 children being considered for a planned move from residential into independent living. 3 children identified to move from IFAs to adoption.
Impact: Financial	<p>Potential savings if 3 children identified for planned move into independent living of £4,350 per week for 12 weeks £52,200 x 3 = £156,600.</p> <p>Potential savings for 3 children to move to adoption of £867 per week for 12 weeks £10,404 x 3 = £31,212.</p>
Lessons Learnt	<p>Outcomes from the Audit have been monitored via the Placement Panel. Another external placement audit has been arranged for Feb/Mar 2026.</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, has 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>

Internal Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy

Actions undertaken	The Vale of Glamorgan is now part of Foster Wales along with the other 21 Local Authorities in Wales and our regional partner is Cardiff City Council. Together with Cardiff and Foster Wales we have completed several recruitment activities. Local recruitment campaigns have coincided with the National campaigns and have focused on local foster carers. Further recruitment activity is planned for the year ahead and currently there is a third media campaign with local and national TV and radio advertisements.
Impact: Service	From 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, we have approved 9 new mainstream foster carers, and 22 kinship foster carers. During the same period we deregistered 3 mainstream foster carers and 10 kinship carers. So far this year up to November 2025, we have approved 3 new mainstream foster carers and have a further 6 in assessment and are on target to recruit 9 by year end. The number of kinship assessments continue to increase, and we have approved 13 new kinship carers this year up to November 2025.
Impact: Financial	The costs associated with internal and external foster care placements vary according to the needs of the individual child looked after. 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.
Lessons Learnt	Growth within the Fostering Service will support us to meet the demands of the looked after population in future years. Alongside our own foster carer recruitment project, we continue to work with the Foster Wales looking at possible collaboration for regional marketing and recruitment.

Developing Local Residential Provision

Actions undertaken	<p>Partnerships with Action for Children and Llamau to develop local residential homes.</p> <p>Three homes are now open, one 4 bedded Action for Children home, one two bedded Llamau home and a 3 bedded supported accommodation home. We are due to open a further 2 bedded home with Llamau in late December or early January 2025/26.</p> <p>During 2026/27, we plan to open a further one, 2 bedded home in partnership with Llamau and a further two three bedded supported accommodation homes. This will take the total number of children's residential beds available in the Vale of Glamorgan to 10 and supported accommodation beds to 9.</p>
Impact: Service	<p>These homes will assist us in placing children locally and returning children to their local area where this is in their best interests.</p>
Impact: Financial	<p>It is forecast that the placement costs for these homes will be less than purchasing from the independent sector. In addition, there will be savings on social workers time and transport costs. However, in the short term we are having to incur costs during the registration of these homes and transitioning and matching children to the available placements.</p>
Lessons Learnt	<p>The need for increased local provision, set up costs and revenue. It has been identified that we will require a further one 2 bedded specialist/emergency residential unit in the next two years</p>

Joint Budget

Actions undertaken	<p>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 1st July 2013 and a report recommending continuation was presented to Cabinet on 30th June 2014 and approved.</p>
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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 2024/25 was £3.228 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 2024/25 and is forecast to overspend by £853k this financial year (2025/26).
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.

CLA Reduction Project Board

Actions undertaken	<p>Since 2019, the service has set annual reduction intentions which were previously monitored by WG. The aim is to safely reduce the CLA population by discharging Care Orders, increasing the number of Adoption Orders, increasing the number of non-Care Order outcomes in care proceedings and preventing children from becoming looked after.</p> <p>For the initial two-year period we achieved our intentions and safely reduced the number of CLA from 282 in March 2019 to 259 in March 2020.</p> <p>Significantly in the context of COVID-19 and its associated impact for families, demand increased across all service areas and the numbers of children returned to pre pandemic levels in March 2021 (285).</p> <p>Positively, the increase between March 2021 and 2022 was minimal (289), albeit not decreased, but we experienced real challenges in 2022/23 and the population of CLA increased further to 322 children. This trend has continued and as of March 2025 we</p>
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	<p>have 368 CLA. Decisions to receive children into care are not taken lightly and relate wholly to the need to safeguard their welfare. Alternatives to care are robustly considered in our multi agency placement panel and always pursued where this is possible.</p> <p>Whilst it's clear to see that more children have required intervention to keep them safe, over the past four years we have still achieved 28 discharges of Care Orders, 34 Adoption Orders, 17 non-Care Order outcomes in care proceedings and 24 children stepped down from pre-proceedings. Without these achievements, the CLA population would be considerably higher.</p> <p>The service is alert to the need to maintain progress in the above areas, at the same time as seeking to reduce the numbers of children being received into care where it is safe to do so.</p>
Impact: Service	<p>These children are no longer looked after and 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>12 of the discharges of Care Orders were as a result of either mainstream or kinship foster carers obtaining SGO's. 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 £160-£210 per week according to the age of the child.</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	<p>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. This supports the service's focus on discharging Care Orders where it is safe and appropriate. We continue to plan the discharges of Care Orders where appropriate to do so.</p>

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.

In the coming years, the service will build on these actions (whilst maintaining and enhancing them) in order to continue to manage service demands.

6. Actions in 2025/26

The following actions were identified based on the service's analysis and are important to manage the associated risks and issues. In line with the overall objectives for this workstream, the following activities are underway:

- To reduce the use of independent fostering placements by increasing the availability of in-house placements, which includes a target of eight newly recruited foster carers per year.
- To develop an emergency fostering scheme including the approval of peripatetic foster carers, enabling children to be cared for on a one-to-one basis where their needs cannot be met in a foster home. Our pool of peripatetic carers is increasing, and we have completed the refurbishment of a local house that is providing a stable base for these emergency arrangements. We have also identified a second property for development.
- To manage the movement into and out of residential care, managing the numbers coming in and the length of stay.
- To develop our own local residential provision in partnership with the third sector to assist us in placing children looked after locally in lower cost residential placements where possible. We will open another 2 bedded home this year and a further 2 bedded home is in development, which will increase the overall bed capacity to 10.
- To step children down from residential to foster care where appropriate.
- To continue to identify opportunities to discharge Care Orders for children placed with parents and kin.
- To develop our own supported accommodation. We have completed one 3 bedded property and have commenced work on a second property.

These actions will continue to be informed by national and regional developments and are central to the Vale of Glamorgan's Eliminate/sufficiency plans currently being discussed with Welsh Government.

Progress against these actions will continue to be reported to elected members as part of existing reporting arrangements.