

Corporate Parent Panel Annual Report
2022-2023

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The report gives an overview of the work of the Corporate Parent Panel over the period from April 2022 to March 2023, outlining the work undertaken by the Council itself, and in partnership with others.
- 1.2. The report contains up-to-date information about the numbers of looked after children; the support we provide to looked after children; information regarding the panel's operations over the last year; and outlines its intention for the future.

2. Purpose of the Panel

- 2.1. Cyngor Gwynedd and its partners has a statutory role and responsibilities to act as corporate parents for looked after children.
- 2.2. Children and young people come into Council care under very difficult circumstances, but the Council is as ambitious for these children as anyone would be for their own children. The hope is that they live as happy a life as possible. Any child that is looked after by the Council has the right to expect the same from their corporate parent as they would from a good parent.
- 2.3. This means that the Council will:
 - Know their needs, talents, dreams, and promote their interests;
 - Be ambitious about their future and expect the best from them and on their behalf;
 - Be interested in their successes and problems and be proud of their successes and celebrate with them;
 - Listen to their opinion and ensure that this influences practice, and developments in services and policies;
 - Ensure that they are involved in planning their own lives and that we consult with them about their choices;
 - Acknowledge, support and respect their identity in every way;
 - Promote and support their educational attainment to the best of their ability, ensuring access to a high standard of education and extensive learning opportunities;
 - Support resilience in their health and emotional well-being;
 - Provide a safe and stable home where there is a feeling of belonging and appreciation;
 - Support their journey from childhood to adulthood and promote their economic potential and prepare them to be responsible citizens who contribute to society.
- 2.4. To support this function, the Council has established a Corporate Parent Panel. The Panel has a specific and direct responsibility to ensure that appropriate and suitable multi-agency services are available for looked-after children, and that the services offered to them are of a high quality, accessible and meet their needs, working with partners to ensure the best possible outcomes for all looked-after children.

2.5. Membership of the Corporate Parent Panel include:

- Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families Department
- Cabinet Member for Education
- Chief Executive
- Corporate Director
- Social Services Statutory Director (also holds the role of Lead Director of Children and Young People)
- Head of Children and Supporting Families Department
- Head of Education
- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board - Children's Services Director

2.6. Through the Panel, the Council, namely all the elected members, delegates its responsibilities in the field to the Lead Member for Children and Supporting Families.

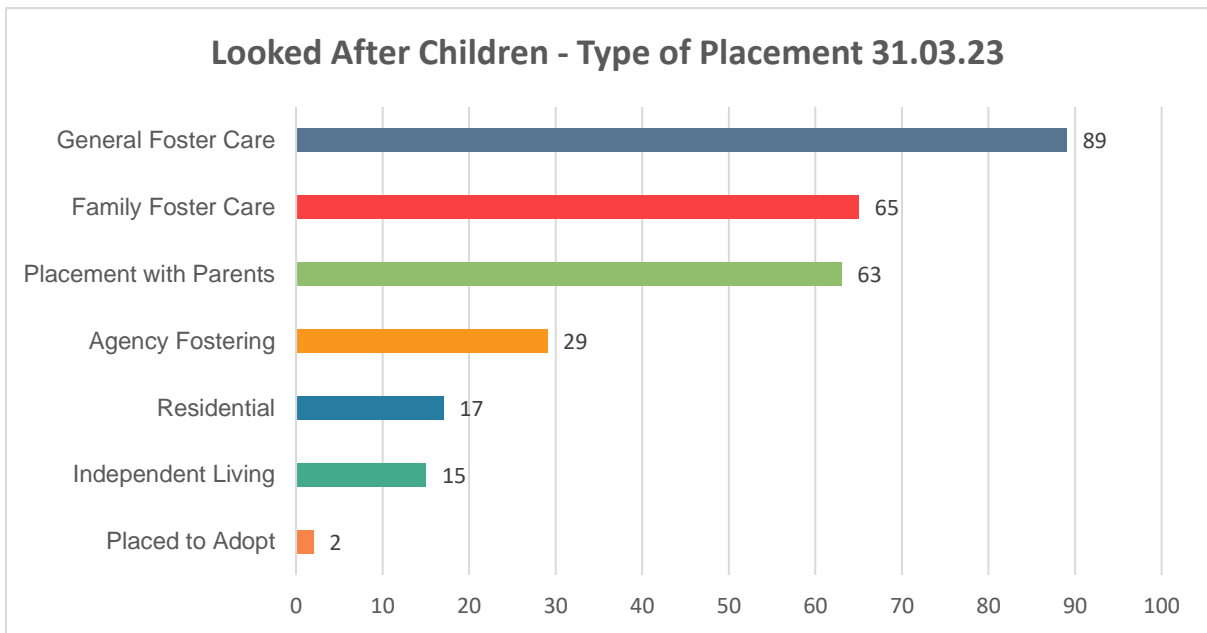
3. Overview of the last year

3.1. The following information is presented based on the figures at the end of quarter four 2023. It includes comparative figures from the previous six years:

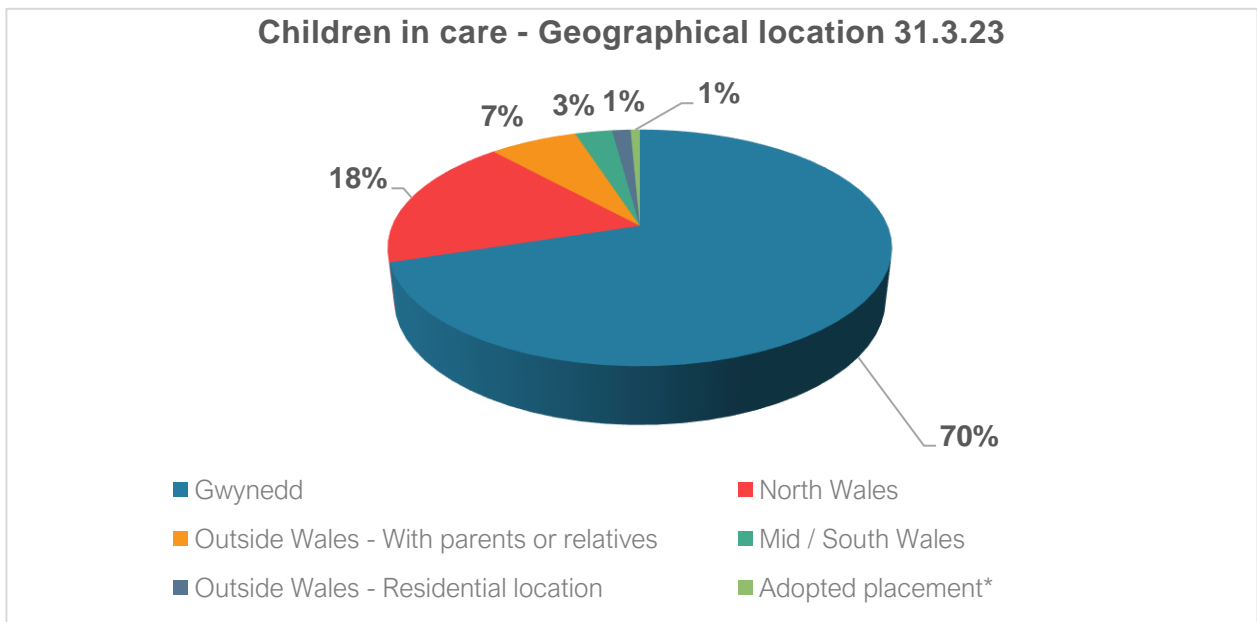
Looked after Children on 31 March	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of looked after children at the end of the year	227	253	291	281	273	281
Number of children coming into care during the year	49	66	82	46	46	59
Number of children leaving care during the year	40	40	44	56	54	51
Number of children who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers	1	1	1	0	3	15

3.2. On the 31 March 2023 there was **281** children in care, compared to **273** at the end of March 2022. During the year an increase of just under **3%** was seen.

3.3. As seen on the following graph, of the **281** children in our care at the end of March 2023, **183 (65%)** were in foster placements, **17 (6%)** were in residential placements and **63 (22%)** were placed with their parents. **2** children were in adoptive placements at the end of the quarter, and **15** young people lived independently with support.



3.4. As the graph below shows, at the end of the year **197 (70%)** children in care were located in Gwynedd. **51 (18%)** children were located in North Wales, with **31** of these children located in the nearest counties (Môn and Conwy). **23** children are placed outside of Wales, with **4** in residential placements and the rest either placed with parents or relatives.



** These locations are not disclosed as it is sensitive information*

3.5. Number of children entering care during the year

3.5.1. During the whole year, **59** children came into care, compared with **45** during 2021/22.

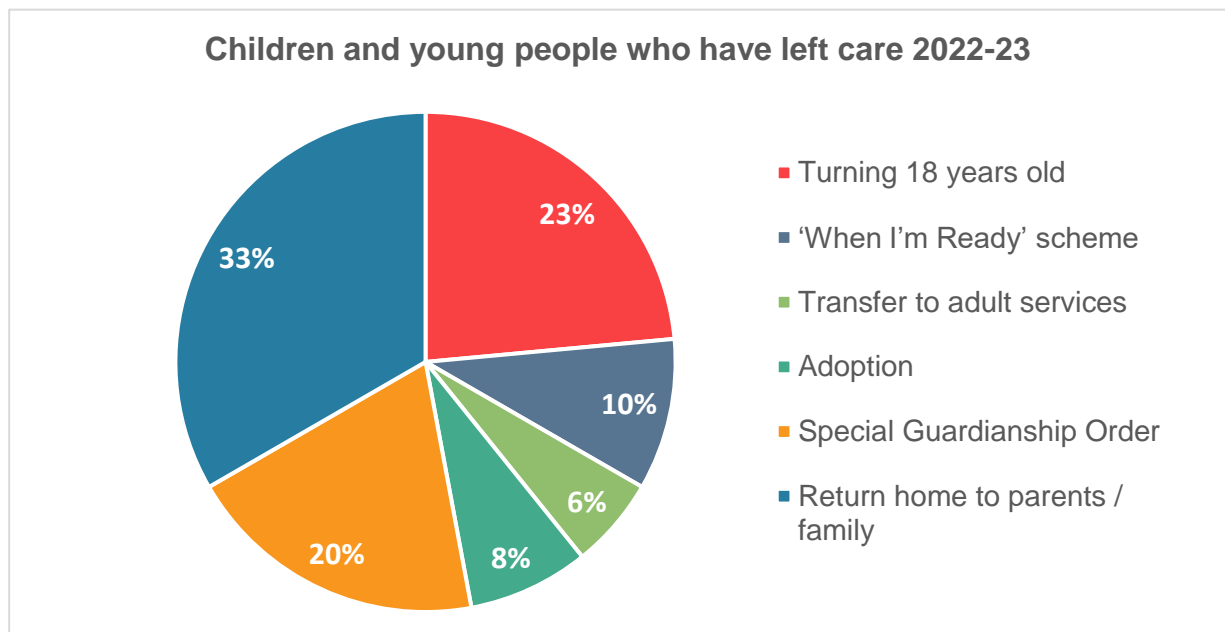
3.5.2. Note that the Council has received **15** Asylum Seekers through the Home Office's Transfer Scheme which has raised the numbers this year. Asylum seekers represent almost **25%** of the children that came into care during the year in question.

3.5.3. The table below shows the ages of the children who came into care during 2022/23. **57%** of the children that came into care during the year were **under 5 years old**, with the most of them having been on the Child Protection Register as part of the safeguarding processes before coming into care. This is due to a number of reasons, but specifically, the abuse and neglect of young children; domestic violence; substance and alcohol misuse; the deliberate feeding of young children with drugs, and mothers whose previous children have entered care becoming pregnant and not having made the necessary adjustments in their lives to be able to safely care for the child.

Under 1	1 – 5 years old	6 – 10 years old	11 – 15 years old	16+
17	16	4	12	9

3.6. Number of children leaving care during the year

3.6.1. During the whole year **51** children left care. **20** young people turned 18 years old, with **5** of them staying with their foster carers under the *'When I'm Ready'* scheme and **3** transferring to adult services with complex needs. **6** children returned to their parents' care after a short period in care. A care order was fully revoked for **11** children. A Special Guardianship Order was imposed on **10** children (which means that they are no longer looked after children). Adoption Orders were imposed on **4** children during the period.



3.7. Support for young people leaving care.

- 3.7.1. During February 2022, Welsh Government announced that it would be launching a Basic Income Pilot Scheme for young care-leavers across Wales. This is a very significant development for young people as they begin their lives as adults and will give them an income of £1,600 a month, before tax.
- 3.7.2. The Scheme came into force in July 2022. **24** young people were eligible, with **23** of them choosing to take part. The needs of the individual who did not commit was complicated. They had an intense care package in place, and therefore they would not be better off if they took part in the Scheme.
- 3.7.3. While there is concern for the financial responsibility, budgeting, and vulnerability of some of the individuals on the Scheme, it does not seem that being involved has influenced them to change their living situation. That is, those who are in foster placements when they turned 18 years old, have continued in their placement, with the same being true about the individuals living with their parents. It appears that the Scheme is very beneficial to those young people who are in further education arrangements.
- 3.7.4. The Scheme is monitored by the Welsh Government as it is an agreement between the Government and the young person. The service attends meetings with Welsh Government to monitor the implementation and encourage the young people to send monitoring information back to the Government.

3.8. Trobwynt Services

- 3.8.1. The Council offers different tiers of support to families - varying from the Team Around the Family which works with families and provides early intervention when problems emerge (which happens voluntarily with consent) to more intense support from the Trobwynt Services that offer a range of interventions for children who are about to enter care.
- 3.8.2. Between April 2022 and March 2023, the Trobwynt Services worked with **208** children. The team started working with **110** new cases during this period.
- 3.8.3. During the year, the team's intervention ended with **117** children. **69** of these children were living at home with their parents without a care order at the start of the intervention. At the end of the intervention **48 (69%)** continued to live at home.
- 3.8.4. In addition, the intervention ended in **16** cases where the children were in foster care at the beginning of the work. **12** of these children had returned to live with

their parents at the end of the team intervention. **17** other children who were considered in care (PWP) were vulnerable at the start of the intervention and we managed to stabilise the home for **11** of these.

3.8.5. Out of **29** children the team assessed in order to consider cancelling the care order, **12** came out of care successfully.

3.8.6. The Adlewychu Service worked with **11** parents who had one or more children in care in order to support them to break the cycle.

3.9. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

3.9.1. During November 2021, every Local Authority in England and Wales received a Home Office directive regarding the placement of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking under the National Transfer Scheme. It was noted that every authority receives a specific allocation of Asylum Seekers (UASC), modelled on the child population, the pressure on children services and the population of asylum application they are supporting.

3.9.2. Of the **15** accepted by Gwynedd, **4** have been placed in a foster placement in Gwynedd and **11** have been placed outside of the county. Very little background information is available in these cases, and identifying suitable placements is incredibly challenging due to their age, linguistic and cultural needs and very often due to the trauma they have experienced.

3.9.3. This work is a significant addition to the 16 Plus Team's workloads, where there is a need to do the same work with every other child in care such as visits, but with additional complexity associated with the cases, the translation arrangements as well as the work that needs to be completed with the Home Office as part of the *Right to Remain* applications.

3.9.4. The Council retains responsibility for each of them whilst the Home Office considers their individual cases. There is a specific process to follow, and they need a specialist advocate.

4. The Panel's Operation

4.1. A stable home

4.1.1. Stable homes are essential to create a sense of belonging and safety in the lives of every child. When a looked after child needs to be placed, it is preferred that they be kept close to their family and their community. Therefore, we concentrate on finding ways of accommodating and caring for children and young people closer to home, so they can continue to be a part of their

community and maintain their support networks. This corresponds with the vision in the Welsh Government's current Programme for 2022-2027, which includes several commitments to transform children's services.

- 4.1.2. For some children, there is a choice for the Council to place with general foster carers within the county or with extended family. The extended family could be living outside the boundaries of Gwynedd. Therefore, the outcome for the child is to be placed out-of-county, but that the placement continues within the extended family.
- 4.1.3. **Local foster care** of the best quality is integral. The Council is proud of its ability to provide foster care of the highest standard and it invests in recruiting, assessing, and registering the county's foster carers. At the end of March 2023, **71** mainstream foster homes were registered with the Gwynedd Foster Wales Service. This is compared to **70** in 2022.
- 4.1.4. Practical and professional support is provided to all foster families. At the end of the year, **5%** of looked after children in Gwynedd had experienced three or more moves in their placement. This means, based on the 2022/23 national performance, that Gwynedd foster placements offer a very high level of stability for looked after children.
- 4.1.5. Sometimes, individual circumstances means that a child needs to be placed in a **residential placement**. This arises because of a combination of factors that may include complex needs, challenging behaviour, previous unsuccessful foster placements or special needs that means that a placement in a family setting would not be suitable. The demand for care is higher than supply, which is a significant challenge for local authorities in terms of finding placements that are as close as possible to the child's home area.
- 4.1.6. At present, over **80%** of care homes for children and young people in Wales are run by the private sector. However, the Welsh Government have committed to remove any private profit from children who receive care. During November 2022, a consultation was held on rebalancing the market so that local authorities will not be able to contract to profit-making companies and that the care will have to be provided by the public sector or non-profit sector.
- 4.1.7. The work of considering and developing the residential service in Gwynedd commenced in 2022/23. It was decided that the concept of Small Group Homes was the best option for the county, and that it would include the following essential features:
 - A maximum of two children residing together.
 - Children who live in a Small Group Home should be able to integrate within the local community by attending local educational establishments such as

schools and colleges and by being involved with every aspect of regular community life.

- Children to receive care from a group of residential care workers, ensuring continuity of care for the children.
- Generally, children under 8 years of age should not be placed in a Small Group Home, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

4.1.8. Small Group Homes is a project in the Council Plan 2023-28. During 2023/24 the intention is to:

- Appoint a Project Manager to lead the work.
- Identify and buy a suitable property.
- Apply for the Regional Integrated Fund (RIF) capital funding.
- Develop a Statement of Purpose and policies for registering the unit with Care Inspectorate Wales.

4.2. Good Health

4.2.1. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 states that all looked after children must have a health assessment. When a child comes "into care", an initial health assessment should be carried out by a community paediatrician, within 28 days. **54** Initial Health Assessments were due to be carried out during the year, with **13%** carried out within the required timeframe.

4.2.2. A child in care is also expected to receive a regular Health Review Assessment (every 6 months for a child under 5 and every year for a child over 5). **282** Review Health Assessments were due to be carried out during the year, with **62%** carried out within the required timeframe.

4.2.3. Children in care are more likely to experience mental health problems due to their circumstances and experience of trauma. At the end of March 2023, of the **281** Children in Care in Gwynedd, **21** were open to the Children and Young People's Mental Health Service (CAMHS) with another **12** on the list waiting to be seen. There are **100** more children in care with emotional or behavioural problems, and receiving services such as Action for Children, NSPCC or Children in Care Consultation services.

4.2.4. Regular meetings were held between practitioners to improve access to mental health services. Following recommendations, attention was drawn to a baseline for mental health well-being for the children coming into care. A report from carers was used to refer those children who needed early intervention. This is being trialled in the Fostering Team, and so far, feedback from the foster carers has been positive.

- 4.2.5. There is close collaboration between the 16-Plus Team and Health Services to complete timely referrals to the young people's substance misuse service - "What's the score" working with adult mental health services for care leavers who have access to these services.
- 4.2.6. Challenges in the neurodevelopmental field continue. Currently **21** children in care have been referred to the Neurodevelopmental Service and are waiting to be seen, however, the number of referrals to the service has increased and the waiting list is now over two years. To respond to the growing need in this area the Council has also appointed an Autism Co-ordinator to lead a team that will work on a program to raise awareness and increase support for families and individuals living with a neurodevelopmental condition such as autism.
- 4.2.7. The Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board pilot scheme relating to an online database (WCCIS) began in January 2022. There is now an agreement in place to use the database and training is underway. This will strengthen Information Technology links and facilitate data sharing and collaboration between the Council and the Health Board.
- 4.2.8. Looked after children's nurses have been providing continuous training to newly qualified school nurses and Health Visitors. Training is also provided to acute hospital services to explain the steps to be taken when a looked after child is admitted to hospital.

4.3. Good Education

- 4.3.1. In September 2022, following an application for a grant to trial a role, a Virtual Head commenced their post for looked after children in Gwynedd.
- 4.3.2. The role's purpose is to work with the schools to ensure exceptional provision for looked after children, by looking at the children's outcomes from the start of their time in the school to post-16 education. This will be done by monitoring individual pupil plans, and ensuring that the schools have the best skills, resources and support for the learner.
- 4.3.3. During the first six months the Virtual Head has:
- Familiarised themselves with new systems, conducting an audit of the current situation with Personal Education Plans;
 - Evaluated Bursary Grant applications 2022/23, ensuring that the money reached the schools and was spent effectively;
 - Looked after Bursary Grant Applications in Care over the last two years to identify training and provision in the schools;
 - Held initial discussion with the IT department to establish a procedure for reporting on the information that is in the Current Education Plans;

- Sent a questionnaire to schools to obtain information on progress in the field.
- 4.3.4. In the future, the Virtual Head will undertake further work to develop the collaboration between services on a strategic level to develop the support and the provision that looked after children receive.
- 4.3.5. Because of Covid-19, during the 2020 i 2022 period Key Stage 4 indicators for pupils sitting GCSEs where not produced. It is expected that the arrangement of reporting on the results of Looked After Children will be able to re-start in summer 2023.
- 4.3.6. During the year, 'Trauma Informed' practitioners training was held. It is based on the understanding that experience of trauma impacts the individual's neurological, biological, psychological, and social development. The training shows how to identify the extensive signs, symptoms and impacts of trauma and during 2023/24 'Trauma Informed Schools' sessions will be available to teachers and staff in schools.

4.4. Raising awareness

- 4.4.1. Following the Covid-19 period, Corporate Parent training to all the Council's Elected Members has re-started. A training session was held in February 2023, and there are discussions in the pipeline to ensure that more Members take advantage of the training.
- 4.4.2. Following the May 2022 Local Government election, the opportunity was taken to re-visit the Panel's membership to ensure that every field is represented. The Council's Chief Executive now chairs the meetings.

5. **What will the Panel do this year?**

- 5.1. During 2023/24 the Panel will re-visit the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Welsh Government is expected to announce its Parenting Charter before the summer and so we will ensure that every aspect of the new Charter is incorporated in the Council's Strategy.
- 5.2. One of the main challenges facing us during 2023/34 is the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children that will need our support. This creates significant pressure on some services and so an additional resource for 16-Plus Team will need to be considered.
- 5.3. The Panel will monitor and challenge the accomplishment of the Small Group Homes project, that is part of the Council Plan 2023-28.

5.4. The Panel will also look at offering and developing the support package to foster parents, considering benefits such as free Leisure Centre membership or Council Tax discount. The hope is that the “Fostering Offer” will encourage and attract more to be foster parents in Gwynedd.