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| <b>MEETING</b>             | Care Scrutiny Committee                    |
| <b>DATE</b>                | 29 January 2026                            |
| <b>TITLE</b>               | 16+ Team (Leaving Care)                    |
| <b>REASON FOR SCRUTINY</b> | Assurance in relation to 16 plus provision |
| <b>AUTHOR</b>              | Aled Gibbard                               |
| <b>CABINET MEMBER</b>      | Councillor Menna Trenholme                 |

## **1. Why is scrutiny necessary?**

1.1 In order to be assured that the Council provides suitable services and provides value for money.

## **2. What exactly needs to be scrutinised?**

1. The team's area of work and the demand for services
2. How the team deals with service users including those between 16 and 18 and asylum seekers, any challenges and implications of that on the Council's resources.

## **3. Background**

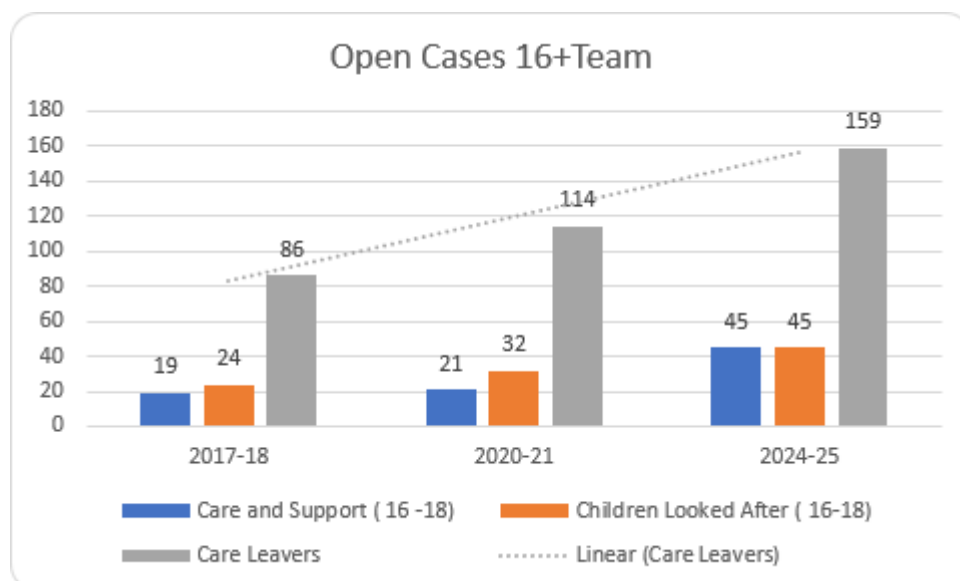
- 3.1 The Post 16 Team has been established as a specific team to focus on those cases which are open to the Children and Family Support Department between the ages of 16 and 25.
- 3.2 The team's work is defined within the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014. Specifically that is under:
  - Part 3 of the Act, which is the duty to assess a child's needs for care and support,
  - Part 6 of the act which relates to children in care and the duty to develop plans and support children and their families and review them regularly.
  - Part 6 of the act which relates to supporting young people leaving care.
- 3.3 The Team's total budget for meeting the needs of young people is £1,040 million. £800,000 of that budget is for accommodation and support needs. £88,000 is for practical support in Care and Support cases and children looked after. There is a budget of £92,000 for allowances for young people (bearing in mind that young people on a Care Order are not eligible for benefits as the local authority is the corporate parent).

#### 4. The demand for the Service

- 4.1 For Care and Support cases the team receives referrals directly from the Referral Team as well as requests for joint assessments with the Homelessness unit in the Housing Department.
- 4.2 During the period April 2024 to March 2025 the Team received 44 new referrals for assessment. This compares with 32 over the same period in the previous year.
- 4.3 Between April 2024 and December 2025, 14 cases of children in care who reached the age of 16 were transferred.
- 4.4 At the beginning of January 2026 a total of 249 cases were open to the Team.
- 4.5

| Open cases January 2026            |            |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Care and Support ( 16-17) (Part 3) | 45         |
| Children looked after (16-17)      | 45         |
| Care Leavers ( 18-24)              | 159        |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>249</b> |

- 4.6 This year so far 15 Section 47 safeguarding inquiries have taken place and 46 strategy meetings under the Safeguarding Procedures. There has been an increase in the number of 16 and 17 year olds on the Child Protection Register.
- 4.7 There has been an increase in the cases open to the Team since 2017-18 by 48%. Of course Asylum Seekers account for some of this increase, but demand at a general level has increased in the same period. See below for the increase in demand over time:
- 4.8



## **5. How does the team deal with service users?**

- 5.1 A worker is designated for each case. The type of worker is dependent on the type of case.
- 5.2 For Care and Support cases, a Social Worker undertakes the assessment. After assessment the case can be run by a Social Care Practitioner or Social Worker. The majority of these cases relate either to safeguarding issues or where there is dispute and tension between parents and the young person, often where there is a possibility of being homeless.
- 5.3 45 children in care are open to the Team and a Social Worker is designated for each one.
- 5.4 For young people leaving care we appoint a Personal Adviser in accordance with the Act.
- 5.5 The intervention offered is dependent on the individual case, but at a general level this means working with other agencies to plan and meet the individual's needs. Working with other agencies is a core part of their work.
- 5.6 The Team's casework focuses on well-being, stability, education, work or training and developing independence skills.
- 5.7 While a young person is under 18 and needs accommodation it is the responsibility of the local authority to find and organize that accommodation. This is met in several ways. The first priority for those cases that are with her parents is to support and maintain the situation at home, if it is safe to do so. For young people in care the majority are in foster care (24). 3 of the young people are in residential care, 4 live with parents under a Care Order arrangement and 14 live semi-independently with support.
- 5.8 Accommodation provision with support is a core element of provision for the Team and for the young people. To meet this need there is a cross section of arrangements working with other partners. We have a Service Level Agreement with Gsda and North Wales Housing Association. The Team also uses 2 private providers who can offer accommodation and support to individuals.
- 5.9 On turning eighteen the Team continues to offer support. All young people leaving care are expected to have a Pathway Plan, and it can be confirmed that performance on this is 100%. Statutory Reviews are not held once a young person leaves care, but the pathway plan is reviewed as necessary.
- 5.10 A young person can choose not to receive support once they reach the age of eighteen. The individual's wish is respected, but the authority has a duty to keep in touch. This is done at least annually. The individual has the right to re-connect for support if desired. Very few young people choose not to keep in touch at all.

- 5.11 See **Appendix 1** which provides an analysis following a questionnaire with the members of the Team.

## **6. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

- 6.1 As part of the Home Office's National Transfer Scheme, each local authority has received a quota of young people to receive under the scheme. Of the total 249 cases open to the Team, 32 of these are Asylum Seekers (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children).
- 6.2 While the young person is under 18, they are treated as children in care. When they turn eighteen they become Care Leavers and are the responsibility of the local authority until they are 25 years old.
- 6.3 4 of the Asylum Seekers are now under 18 years of age, with the rest being adults who receive Aftercare support. 9 of them are in Gwynedd, 8 in South Wales and the rest in England.
- 6.4 Some of the challenges and implications:
- Lack of background information, wishes, needs, trauma, emotional well-being. When receiving a very basic information address it contains. It is not possible to check and confirm basic information about the young person.
  - Language – Significant diversity in the countries of origin of the individuals. The majority come from Afghanistan, with a total of 13 countries represented among the young people.
  - The young people's uncertainty, lack of understanding about the process, managing expectations. They usually become Gwynedd's responsibility after spending a short period in a centre. The process of claiming asylum is complex and it is not easy to explain everything. In addition, some young people come with clear expectations that they want to live in a city and not a rural area like Gwynedd.
  - Locations – Finding suitable location or accommodation is not easy. Many want to live in a city. Sometimes they are in contact with others in another part of the country. Often their location is a combination of what they want and what is available to them.
  - Exploitation. "Trafficking" concerns. With a lack of background information it is difficult to ascertain if there are other factors in the background. Strategy meetings are held where there is doubt to discuss further.
  - The asylum claim process takes a long time. In addition, it is not always easy to find a lawyer to deal with the application. 17 of the 32 in Gwynedd have been given the right to stay. 12 have been rejected.
  - Age assessments are an additional complication. As it is not possible to confirm the age of the individuals, there are times when there is doubt as to whether it is a child or not. In these cases it is necessary to undertake an age assessment. Specific training is required to undertake this assessment.
  - High demands on the employees e.g. visits, difficult to create a relationship, communication through a translator, planning for them.

- For 2024-25 the cost of housing and supporting Asylum Seekers in Gwynedd was approximately £780,000. The Council receives a refund which is set at a level by the Home Office. For 2024-25 this refund was £686,000.
- The Council has temporarily allocated additional funds to employ 2 Workers within the Team to increase capacity to deal with these additional cases.

## 5. Consultation

5.1 We have not consulted with service users for the purposes of this report.

## 6. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 6.1 Have you considered **collaboration**?
- 6.2 Collaboration is essential as part of the work. The Team has regular contact with other agencies such as North Wales Police, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Coleg Menai, Gisda, North Wales Housing Association, Gwynedd Council Housing Department.
- 6.3 What has been done or will be done to **prevent** problems from arising or worsening in the future?
- 6.4 No specific work has been done on preventing problems from arising or worsening in the future.
- 6.5 How have you considered the **long term** and what will people's needs be in years to come?
- 6.6 A population needs assessment at the regional level has been completed and will be updated.

## 7. Impact on equality features, the Welsh language, and the socio-economic duty

- 7.1 We have considered the above features and, as a Department, we follow the Equality Act 2010 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 in our daily work. This ensures that individuals and families receive services and assessments in their language of choice.

## Appendices

Post-16 Questionnaire