



Wales Centre for Public Policy
Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru

What do children and young people looked after and their families think about care?

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Summary

- Care-experienced children and young people as well as their families have unique perspectives on the care system and incorporating their views into decision-making has a range of wider benefits for commissioners.
- Moreover, public services in Wales have adopted a Children's Rights approach based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This approach demands that public bodies seek the views of children and young people and take them into account in decision-making processes.
- In this context, a growing body of literature has developed reporting the views of children and young people about the care system with the aim of informing policy and practice. There is also a more limited literature which presents the views of birth parents.
- This report summarises this literature and identifies the following key findings for commissioners in Wales.
- Placement instability has been identified by children and young people as a key problem. Although many placement moves are necessary, they can cause feelings of distress and isolation as well as disrupted access to services and support networks.
- In addition to the frequency of moves, the management of placement transitions can also cause difficulties and children and young people have suggested improvements such as the provision of more information about new placements.
- Placement moves are not the only sources of instability for children and young people looked after. Instability may also be caused by staff turnover and frequent changes to the peer group within placements. Children and young people have proposed improvements to the staff handover process.
- There are good reasons to involve children and young people and their birth parents in decision-making, as well as examples of participatory practices across the UK. However, there are concerns that participation can be superficial and many children and young people appear to feel disempowered.
- Children and young people have suggested practical steps to address many of these issues, highlighting that they can take an active role to improving commissioning in Wales and the wider UK.

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Introduction

Research about the children's care system can omit the views of care-experienced children and young people and their birth families. This literature review aims to provide insight into the commissioning process as it is experienced by these groups, exploring their experiences of the care system. This report also provides a brief overview of participatory practices in the UK care system.

This literature review is one of a suite of reports under the Wales Centre for Public Policy's work on re-imagining commissioning for children and young people looked after in Wales. It aims to address the following research questions:

1. What is the current picture of fostering and residential care placement provision for children and young people looked after in Wales?
2. How is care commissioning experienced by children and their families?
3. What can we learn from how placement provision is managed internationally?

This literature review helps to address the second research question focusing on the following:

- Why should we take into consideration the views of children and young people looked after, and their birth parents?
- How do children and young people looked after, and their birth parents, experience the care system and what does this mean for commissioners?

The views of children and young people

Children and young people within the care system have a different perspective on the commissioning process to professionals. Their lived experiences provide insight into the impacts of commissioning processes on those within the care system and suggest potential improvements. This section details the key findings of research and consultation work with children and young people looked after.

The following areas were identified as relevant to the research questions:

- **Participation in decision-making and communication of decisions**, including why it is important to ask children and young people about their views, and the communication of decisions to move children and young people to new placements;
- Views on the **stability of placements**, particularly the impact of placement moves;
- How children and young people report their levels of **wellbeing** and views on issues related to wellbeing including feeling or being treated differently, feeling safe, and being able to access extracurricular opportunities;
- How children and young people talk about their **relationships** with professionals, foster carers, birth families, and peers;
- Awareness of the **financial aspects of commissioning** and the impact of this on emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Table 1 (Annex 1) presents a summary of studies and consultations conducted in the last 10 years across the UK, drawing on academic literature as well as the work of relevant public and third sector organisations. Studies were only included in the review if they presented the views of children and/or young people collected through surveys, interviews or other qualitative methods and the subject matter of the research was deemed to be relevant to the research questions. The views of children and young people on these matters may vary depending on their placement type as well as their personal circumstances and characteristics. It should be noted that some sources relate only to particular placement types and some involved a small number of children and young people. Information about the scope of each data source is set out in Table 1, Annex 1 below.

Participation and communication

Why participation is important

Children and young people highly value their involvement in decision-making processes about their care (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016; Children's Commissioner for England, 2018). This involvement can demonstrate respect for their rights and lead to improved outcomes.

Respecting rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child (UN, 1990). The Convention states that a child has the right to be raised by their parent(s) (article 18), but where that is not possible, a child has the right to special protection and assistance from the government (article 20). Importantly, articles 3 and 13 state, respectively, that all adults should do what is best for the child, that a child has the right to give their opinion, and for adults to listen and take their opinions seriously.

The UNCRC is the basis for 'The Right Way: A Children's Rights Approach in Wales' (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2017). It provides a framework to help public bodies meet their legal duty to contribute towards the realisation of children's rights, which involves providing children with meaningful opportunities to influence decisions about their lives. This means asking children and young people looked after about their experience of care and using their views to inform decisions taken by adults (e.g. social workers) about what is best for them.

Improving outcomes

Understanding the views of children and young people looked after is also important from a commissioning perspective, providing the following benefits:

- Helping to understand what works well for children in care, and what could be improved;
- Helping to demonstrate how local authorities are meeting requirements to listen to children and young people about changes in services that affect them;
- Forming the basis for new child-led service improvement frameworks that complement and enhance existing frameworks;
- Enabling good practice to be shared between local authorities.

Source: WCPP analysis of Coram Voice (2019)

Furthermore, it has been argued that children and young people looked after are well placed to provide critical insights into the care system as they may be less concerned by existing rules, procedures and professional roles than 'people that are employed by the system or people interested in maintaining current system affairs' (Unrau, 2007:127).

How children and young people can be involved in decisions about their care

Approaches to participation can be divided into individual and collective (Allcock, 2018 citing Kennan et al., 2016). At an individual level, children and young people may express opinions and participate in decision-making about their own care, such as stating their preferred placement type and location. However, there are concerns around the extent to which the views of children and young people are meaningfully taken into account in individual-level decision-making and whether seemingly participatory practices are used superficially (Diaz et al., 2018). Some have suggested the use of more creative methods to facilitate greater participation, such as allowing children and young people to chair their review meetings (Ibid).

Some local authorities have developed models to guide formal meetings such as looked-after child reviews, with the aim of increasing the meaningful involvement of children and young people.

The Tower Hamlets model

In taking a person-centred planning approach to social care, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets has developed a set of essential elements for running a person centred looked-after child review. These include:

- **The child or young person looked after should be the first into the room, as this helps to make it feel like it is their space;**
- **The child or young person looked after needs to be supported to make their contribution;**
- **The meeting to have a positive and realistic tone;**
- **Comments about the child or young person looked after should be addressed directly to the child or young person;**
- **Concerns should be honest and fair, and everyone must avoid blaming or negative language (Tower Hamlets Council, 2015:14).**

At the collective level, children and young people may take part in studies and consultation exercises designed to inform policy or practice. In recent years, a growing body of literature has developed, providing qualitative insights from children and young people to supplement official statistics (see Table 1, Annex 1 for a summary of recent work). Children and young people looked after may also be part of advisory groups such as Children in Care Councils. Children in Care Councils were designed to enable the greater representation of children and young people looked after at the local authority level and, although not a statutory requirement, have been adopted by most councils (Thomas and Percy-Smith, 2011). While significant progress has been made, challenges remain around engaging with those placed outside the local authority area (Ibid). There are also examples of advisory groups operating at the national level and being explicitly connected to commissioning.

4Cs Young Commissioner Group

The Children’s Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) supports local authorities in Wales with their commissioning arrangements for children and young people with needs requiring complex care packages. As part of their work, they have established a Young Commissioners group, aiming to give care-experienced children and young people greater influence over the commissioning of placement services in Wales. There are currently 30 Young Commissioners aged between 7 and 17 from across Wales.

Young Commissioners have been involved in the following commissioning-related decisions and processes (Good Practice Wales, 2016):

- **The development of The Children and Young Persons Specification Statement which sets out the requirements of a good home. This was included in the All Wales Residential Framework, a framework for residential care providers;**
- **Testing and improving the ‘all about me’ template which provides information about the child or young person looked after to a new placement provider. A new template based on this feedback is part of a Referrals and Matching Toolkit for local authorities;**
- **The development of the 360 Degree Outcome survey. The survey is completed by children and young people with experience of living in a residential home and forms part of quality monitoring processes.**

Challenges

There are challenges around the extent to which the preferences of children and young people should be taken into account and how this should vary depending on age and maturity. For example, in their review of the foster care system in England, Narey and Owers (2018:73) rejected the ‘misconceived’ idea that children and young people should be able to select their own foster care placement and noted that children and young people may not always know what is in their best interests. They instead argue that children and young people should be included ‘wherever practicable, and reflecting their age, level of understanding and circumstances’ (Ibid).

Others focus on the practical and institutional barriers to implementing more participatory processes. Reflecting on child welfare in general, Keenan et al. (2016) note a number of challenges which must be overcome, which include:

- The need for several options to accommodate different preferences and abilities;
- The need for communication skills to understand the views of children and young people;
- The emphasis of institutions and systems on protecting, rather than empowering, children and young people;
- The degree to which professionals buy into the participation principle and advocate for children’s involvement in decision-making. For example, some may believe that children and young people looked after are too vulnerable or lack the competence to be involved in decision-making (Flykesnes et al., 2018).

In addition, there are challenges around developing participatory practices that work for different groups of children and young people (Allcock, 2018). For example, there is limited evidence around how to tailor participatory practices for children and young people with a disability (McNeilly et al., 2015) and from minority ethnic backgrounds (Flykesnes et al. 2018). One approach to tailoring practices for children and young people with different communication needs is the use of ‘communication passports’. These documents detail the communication preferences of the child or young person so that staff and carers can communicate with them in the most effective way (Franklin and Goff, 2018).

What do children and young people looked after think about participation?

The literature also reveals that children and young people themselves can have negative experiences of participation and identifies issues around the communication of important

information. Many studies revealed that children and young people looked after do not feel that they are involved in decision-making, with some feeling like social workers and foster carers dominate the decision-making process (Care Inquiry, 2013; Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016; Children's Commissioner for England, 2018). In Wales, 17% of 11-18-year olds and 20% of 7-10-year olds in care reported not feeling listened to or included in decision-making and many commented that they wanted to be included more often (Selwyn et al., 2018).

Other research has revealed more mixed views on the review process with some children and young people feeling that their views were included, while others viewed them as 'pointless' or felt that the views they expressed were misrepresented in reports or plans (Family Rights Groups, 2018). Some young people have also reported that too many people attend their review meetings and that they would feel more comfortable in a smaller group (Diaz et al., 2018).

Some children and young people have reported that they have to assert themselves continually to make their voices heard in decision-making processes such as review meetings and some may even view engaging in challenging behaviours as a way to speed up decisions (Edwards, 2012; Girling 2019). In some cases, the failure to communicate and involve children and young people in decisions around their care may cause them to engage in potentially harmful behaviours, such as absconding from a placement (Franklin and Goff, 2018; Girling, 2019). This may be a means of 'forcing agency' where a child or young person feels powerless to affect decisions around their placement (Girling, 2019).

Issues around participation are particularly complex in the context of the Secure Accommodation Order process. Some of the young people interviewed in Williams et al. (2019) did not understand this process or have their views considered and one young man was prevented from attending the court hearing. However, in some cases, informing the young person of the order may increase the risk of abscondment or self-harm (Ibid).

Some children and young have called for particular changes to be made to address these issues such as greater participation in decision-making about placements, seeking their views privately and before a decision is made (Care Inquiry, 2013) and more time taken to get to know the needs, behaviour, and background of children and young people (Edwards, 2012; Care Inquiry, 2013). While there were positive examples reported in the literature – such as children and young people in residential care recalling meetings resulting in changes being made to the day-to-day running of the home (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016) – a number of other issues around decision-making were noted in the literature but not examined in great depth. These include:

- The use of confusing language in review meetings (Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2016) as well as problems arising where the child or young person requires a particular form of communication such as sign-language (Care Inquiry, 2013);
- Review meetings being delayed and slow decision-making processes (Edwards, 2012; Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2016);
- Children and young people being asked awkward or uncomfortable questions in front of birth family members in meetings (Cossar et al., 2011);
- Failure to communicate decisions such as changes to contact with family members (Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2016). One child suggests that children and young people should be given a letter explaining what has been said at meetings where they have not been present (Selwyn et al., 2018).

In addition to issues around decision-making, the literature also suggests wider problems with communication. Children and young people have reported receiving insufficient information about why they are in care, their rights and entitlements, and arrangements for leaving care.

Reasons for being in care

Some reports indicate that children and young people may not receive sufficient information about their early lives and why they have come into care (Care Inquiry, 2013; Selwyn et al. 2018; Family Rights Group, 2018), and that greater help to ‘understand their past’ would make care better (Children’s Commissioner for England, 2015). This appears to be a more significant problem for young children, as 33% of 4-7-year olds in Wales (compared to 10% of 11-18-year olds) felt they had not had an explanation about why they were in care (Selwyn et al., 2018). Analysis of survey data has revealed a statistically significant association between a lack of explanation for entry into care and feeling unsettled in a placement (Staines and Selwyn, 2020).

Some literature indicates that more children and young people could benefit from help and support to access their files or from life story work (Care Inquiry, 2013; Family Rights Group, 2018). Life story work enables children and young people to build a picture of their history and journey within the care system, aiming to help them express their feelings in a comfortable environment and better understand their past (NSPCC, 2019). Improvements may be being made in this area as the 2017 Ofsted survey found an increase from 2016 in the number of children reporting that they had been helped to understand why they were in care.

Rights and entitlements

Some children and young people have reported a lack of information about their rights and entitlements within the care system, especially young children and those newer to care (Edwards, 2012; Care Inquiry, 2013; Children's Commissioner for England 2015).

Children and young people report valuing advocates (Family Rights Group, 2018) but it is not clear whether all have sufficient information about what advocates do and how to access them. Although the Children's Commissioner for England (2015) documented that more than half of fostered children did not know how to get an advocate, research with children in residential care in Wales suggested this group was aware of advocates and how to access their services (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016).

Leaving care

Some young people reported not having enough information about what would happen after leaving care and being unclear about their entitlements and rights (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2011, 2016; Children's Commissioner for England, 2018). Young people have reported a lack of clarity around options and the availability of support when leaving care and having living arrangements finalised at very late notice (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2011). In one case, a young person aged 17 years and 10 months reported not knowing where he would be living when he turned 18 (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016).

Placement stability

Children and young people in care have expressed their need for stability and desire to live in a secure home and build long-lasting relationships, however, many experience high levels of instability in terms of changing homes, schools and social workers (Selwyn et al. 2018; Children's Commissioner for England, 2019). In Wales, 29% of those looked after for three or more years had only one placement, whereas 44% had between 2-4 placements (Selwyn et al., 2018). Young people who experienced five or more placements (20%), were more likely to report that they 'hardly ever' or 'never' felt settled and placement moves were found to be statistically associated with lower wellbeing (Ibid).

Experiences of instability may not be captured accurately in placement move data. As Girling (2019) notes, a wide variety of experiences may cause a sense of instability such as absconding from a placement, or changes in social worker or peer group (see 'Relationships', pp. 17-20). Moving between different placement types (e.g. from a residential home to foster care or vice versa) can add an additional element of change as children and young people have to adapt to different rules and expectations for behaviour (Girling, 2019). Furthermore, the way that children and young people experience a placement move is related to the extent to which they are informed and involved in decision-making. In one study, children and young people who felt they were kept informed and involved during a

placement move were more likely to look back upon the decision positively, even if they did not want to move at the time (Girling, 2019).

Although placements moves can be necessary and may lead to improved wellbeing (Boddy, 2013; Girling, 2019), much of the literature reports negative impacts. Children and young people have reported feelings of sadness, anger, disappointment, and exhaustion (Children's Commissioner for England, 2019) which may be intensified when placements break down (Rostill-Brookes et al., 2011). In addition, frequent placement moves create uncertainty as to how long a current placement will last, causing some children and young people to worry that they might have to move at short notice (Narey and Owers, 2018).

Placement moves may also impact upon children and young people's social support systems. The Welsh Assembly's Public Accounts Committee (2018) heard evidence from children and young people looked after that having to move placements had negative impacts on their ability to make friends. Some children and young people have reported feeling lonely after planned and unplanned placement moves (Children's Commissioner for England, 2019). These problems can be exacerbated when placements were located far away from friends and family, making it harder to visit and maintain contact (Larkins et al. 2015). However, access to social media may enable children and young people looked after to maintain relationships with peers and draw upon peer support during placement transitions (Hammond, 2018).

Frequent changes in location can also impact upon children and young people's access to education and educational experiences. Children and young people have reported having to repeat topics previously studied or change their GCSE options leading to boredom or disengagement (Mannay et al., 2015). Work carried out by the Children's Commissioner for England (2019) on placement instability highlighted how the process of changing schools can cause feelings of fear, loneliness, anxiety or depression and exacerbate a sense of insecurity and uncertainty. In some circumstances, however, a change in school may be experienced positively as enabling increased or more specialised support. Children and young people valued smooth transitions with minimal time spent off school, as well as the availability of a designated teacher to provide support (Ibid).

Disruption is not limited to these areas and changes to placement location can have a range of further implications for children and young people. Movement between local authority areas can, for example, cause problems for children and young people accessing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), causing them to go to the bottom of a new waiting list (Williams et al., 2019). Some children and young people in Wales have reported having to travel back to their home authority to access health services or even going without care (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2011). In addition, the placement of Welsh children in an English authority may impact on children and young people's rights to use the Welsh language. For example, it may not be possible to hold supervised contact sessions for

Welsh-speaking children if a Welsh-speaking member of staff is not available (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016).

Many studies also note issues around the management of transitions between placements. Children and young people have identified the following experiences of placement transition as problematic:

- **Not being fully informed about why a placement is ending and having too little time to prepare for a move** (Public Accounts Committee, 2018; Children's Commissioner for England, 2015). Some children even reported 'moving straight after school or on their way back from visiting their birth family' (Narey and Owers, 2018:71);
- **Incomplete referral information for new carers.** For example, information which is not up to date, factually incorrect or which describes the children using deficit-based accounts (Narey and Owers, 2018);
- **No opportunities to visit foster placements in advance** of moving. Children and young people have suggested that they should be able to visit new foster placements before they move (Care Inquiry, 2013; Narey and Owers, 2018). In contrast, children and young people have reported positive experiences of visiting residential placements before a move. This can allow the child or young person to describe the home to their friends and family and get to know the other children and young people in the residence before moving in (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016);
- **Insufficient information about foster placements before moving.** Although the majority of children in one study reported meeting their new foster carers before moving, they did not receive information about the home and other household members (Children's Commissioner for England, 2018). Some reported that this lack of information led to poor matching and felt disappointed in their new placement;
- **Insufficient information about residential placements before moving** (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016; Children's Commissioner for England, 2018; Narey and Owers, 2018). A recent survey found that one in four children and young people did not receive useful information before moving to a residential home (Ofsted, 2016).

Children and young people have also identified the following factors as improving transitions between placements:

- Having someone to check that they are settling into their new home or to provide mediation or one-to-one support (Care Inquiry, 2013, Children's Commissioner for England, 2019). Kinship care placements were identified as potentially raising emotional issues and conflicts and it was felt by some children and young people that mediation would be especially helpful in these placements (Care Inquiry, 2013);

- The availability of emotional and practical support for young people moving into independent living (Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2011);
- Having an opportunity to customise their bedroom before moving (Care Inquiry, 2013);
- Being moved with, or closer to, a sibling or siblings (Children’s Commissioner for England, 2019);
- Being able to keep familiar objects such as soft toys and photographs of friends or family members (Wilson and Milne, 2013).

Wellbeing

The Welsh Bright Spots study indicates that the majority of children and young people looked after in Wales have moderate to high subjective wellbeing, as measured by the ONS wellbeing scale (Selwyn et al., 2018). In addition, a survey carried out by the Children’s Commissioner for England (2015) found that the majority of children and young people feel that their current placement aligns with their needs or preferences, with 81% replying ‘yes’ to the question ‘do you think the place where you are living now is right for you?’

Nonetheless, a significant minority of children and young people looked after do not score highly in terms of wellbeing or feel that their current placement is suitable for their needs. 18% of young people looked after in Wales had scores in the ‘low’ range, a greater proportion than the general population. Factors that increased the likelihood of low wellbeing included: lacking a trusted adult, being unhappy in a care placement, and having poor relationships with social workers (Selwyn et al., 2018). Similarly, in England, 10.2% of children and young people stated that they did not think the place they were living in was the ‘right place’ (Children’s Commissioner for England, 2015).

In addition, the literature revealed children and young people’s views on a range of areas relevant to wellbeing: feeling or being treated differently as children or young people looked after, access to extra-curricular opportunities, and safety.

Feeling or being treated differently

Some children and young people looked after have reported feeling or being treated differently from their peers at school.

This is sometimes caused by procedure and practices which make their care status visible to other pupils. Children and young people have reported meetings relating to their care status being scheduled during the school day which can cause disruption to learning and awkward questions from peers (Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2011; Mannay et al., 2017). The

expectation of meetings can also cause feelings of anxiety or of being unsettled which act as an additional disruption to learning (Ibid). Feelings of being 'different' may also arise at parents' evenings, when the attendance of social workers rather than birth family members may alert others to the care status of children and young people looked after (Selwyn et al., 2018).

Care experienced children and young people have also reported that they did not have the same degree of freedom and independence as their peers, with some thinking that their social workers and foster carers were too strict and others (typically older children) feeling that they were treated unfairly (Children's Commissioner for England, 2018). Some children and young people have reported that they do not agree with rules on bedtimes, pets and Wi-Fi use in both residential and foster care (Ofsted, 2018) and the use of lengthy risk assessment processes in residential care (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016).

Safety

A larger number of children looked after in Wales (aged 4-10 years) 'always' felt safe in comparison to children in the general population (Selwyn et al., 2018). This finding is mirrored in research with children and young people in secure accommodation in Wales, who reported feeling safe in the secure and regulated environment, although sometimes after difficult and traumatic transitions (Williams et al., 2019). Findings from the annual Ofsted survey have suggested that children and young people in residential homes may feel less safe than those in foster care, although it is not clear why this is the case. In both cases, most children and young people report feeling safe all the time – 69% of children and young people in residential care compared to 93% of those in foster care (Ofsted, 2017).

Extracurricular opportunities

Some children and young people looked after describe having more opportunities since entering the care system (Children's Commissioner for England, 2018). This includes taking part in activities and hobbies outside school, being given extra support at school and being more 'prepared for life'. 93% of young people looked after (11-18 year olds) in Wales said they take part in activities and hobbies outside school (Selwyn et al., 2018). Similarly, research on residential homes in Wales reported good access to extracurricular activities, although children and young people had a lot of unoccupied time (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016).

In contrast, some children and young people in England have reported experiences of missing out on extracurricular activities owing to the failure of social services to act promptly to provide permission for school trips and other activities (Edwards, 2012). An evaluation reporting the positive impact of an arts-based programme on children and young people looked after has highlighted other potential facilitators of participation in extra-curricular activities (Salmon and Rickaby, 2014). These included: financial support for attendance, staff

skilled in encouraging participation and teamwork and consistent support from carers (with high staff turnover a potential barrier).

Relationships

Most studies with children and young people looked after identify maintaining and developing positive relationships as important and many report positive relationships with staff and carers who invest time and effort into supporting them and who are a consistent presence in their lives (Children's Commissioner for England, 2015). Nonetheless, many children and young people looked after also report that long-standing relationships with family members, previous carers, and social workers are not prioritised (Coram Voice, 2015). A study exploring the views of 16 care leavers found that there were almost no examples of continuous positive relationships with adults from early/mid-childhood (Holland et al., 2010).

This section reports children and young people's views on their relationships with social workers and other professionals, foster carers, birth families and their peers.

Social workers

A significant determinant of the wellbeing of children and young people looked after is the quality of their relationships with social workers (Selwyn et al. 2018). It has been suggested that strong relationships between children and young people looked after and their social workers may help to facilitate greater participation in decision-making (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2016) and increase the likelihood that they will find and maintain a suitable placement through improved matching (Care Inquiry, 2013).

The studies reviewed suggest that children and young people have mixed experiences when interacting with social workers. While some children and young people report positive experiences, some have also noted infrequent communication and/or finding their social worker too intrusive (Cossar, 2011; Selwyn et al., 2018; Narey and Owers, 2018; Children's Commissioner for England, 2018). Other issues identified include failures to understand the needs and wishes children and young people looked after and failure to follow through on promises (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2011).

The research has also highlighted the varied experiences and preferences of children and young people when it comes to social worker practice. In one study, the views of children and young people on their social workers ranged from 'a friend' and 'supportive' to 'unreliable', 'invisible' and 'patronising' – with teenagers having more negative experiences (Children's Commissioner for England, 2018). Research conducted by Stabler et al. (2019) suggests that children and young people respond differently to the same social work practices and that accordingly social workers should be flexible in their approach, taking into account the preferences of children and young people.

Frequent changes in social worker emerged as a key issue for children and young people. Twenty-five per cent of young people participating in the Bright Spots survey reported having three or more social workers in the previous 12 months, while 38% reported having two. In addition, a significant minority (26%) of young children (aged four to seven) were unsure of who their social worker was (Selwyn et al., 2018). Although most children and young people did report that they trusted their social worker, a statistically significant association was found between having three or workers and expressing a lack of trust (Ibid).

As a result of turnover, children and young people report having frequently to build relationships from scratch and repeat personal and sensitive information upon meeting a new social worker (Care Inquiry, 2013; Narey and Owers, 2018; Children's Commissioner for England, 2019). Children and young people have described the process of getting to know a new social worker as frustrating, repetitive and exhausting, in some cases resulting in feelings of apathy and indifference (Children's Commissioner for England, 2019). Furthermore, losing a social worker can also have an emotional impact on children and young people, who have described feelings of rejection and distress at losing a trusted adult (Children's Commissioner for England, 2019). Some have reported not be able to say goodbye or contact their former social workers once they have moved on (Care Inquiry, 2013).

The literature reports a number of suggestions from children and young people about how the situation could be improved such as a reduction of paperwork and increased training to improve practice and avoid the feeling that they are 'just another case' (Care Inquiry, 2013). Children and young people have also provided the following suggestions for the effective management of transitions between social workers (Children's Commissioner for England, 2019):

- Discuss the change in advance with the child or young person to give them time to adjust;
- Provide information about why the change is necessary and about the new social worker;
- Allow continued contact with former social workers;
- Ensure new social workers are properly informed about the child or young person;
- The presence of another professional who can act as a constant (such as a teacher, Independent Review Officer or counsellor) was also reported to be helpful.

Foster carers and carers in residential homes

Many of the children and young people who took part in Narey and Owers' 2018 review of foster care gave highly positive accounts of their relationships with foster carers. Similarly, in a survey in Wales many children and young people reported feeling like they belonged in their foster family and that they were treated the same as the foster carer's own children

(Selwyn et al., 2018). In contrast, however, children and young people participating in a study in England held more mixed views about their foster carers, generally viewing them less favourably than workers from an independent children's rights organisation (Edwards, 2012).

Children and young people also seem to have generally positive views of staff in residential care. For example, many of the children and young people who participated in the 2018 Ofsted survey stated that staff members were one of the aspects they liked about being in a residential home. However, similarly to social workers, staff turnover was noted to be 'unsettling' and one child reported feeling like staff 'leave because of us' (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016). In addition, some have noted feeling that carers can give up on them too easily and do not always provide the necessary support to work through problems (Care Inquiry, 2013).

Birth families

Interviews with children and young people highlight the negative emotional impact which can result from lack of contact with family members, revealing experiences of distress and loneliness after a placement move (Children's Commissioner for England, 2019). Among the 10% of children and young people who did not feel they were living in the 'right place', lack of contact with their birth family was commonly cited as explaining the unsuitability of the placement (Children's Commissioner from England, 2015). In one survey, one in three young people reported that they had too little contact with siblings which in some cases was owing to the sibling being adopted or moved into a different residential care placement (Selwyn et al., 2018).

However, the issue is complex, and many may find contact with their birth parents to be distressing. A small-scale study on contact showed that some children and young people feel pressured to maintain contact, feel scared during contact sessions or feel let down by parents who do not attend (McDowell et al., 2019). These experiences highlight the importance of the careful management of the contact process, taking into account the views of the child or young person (see also, 'Participation and Communication' below).

Other children and young people

Some children and young people noted that they did not like being placed with certain peer groups or felt wary of other residents in their residential home (Berridge et al., 2012; Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016). For example, some young people do not like being placed with younger children and described the communal areas of their residential home as busy or 'chaotic' (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016). Young people placed in secure accommodation for welfare reasons may feel that placement with young people from the criminal justice system is inappropriate (Williams et al., 2019).

Changes to a child or young person's peer group in a care setting may also contribute to feelings of instability. High turnover in a peer group as children and young people continually enter and leave a placement may be experienced as stressful (Ward, 2009) or cause feelings of confusion or unfairness (Girling, 2019). Care-experienced peers within a placement may be a source of peer support for children and young people looked after which can be lost when friends move on to new placements or return to their birth families (Ibid).

Awareness of the financial aspects of commissioning

Few studies and consultations have included direct questions about the commissioning process. However, some report that children and young people looked after are aware of the financial aspects of commissioning and that this awareness may have negative emotional and psychological impact.

The Welsh Assembly's Public Accounts Committee (2018) found that some children and young people knew that providers were bidding for their profiles during the commissioning process, causing distress at the idea that providers were making a profit from their care. Three children acting as witnesses to the inquiry replied 'yes' when asked if they felt that they were treated like a commodity.

Two other reports also note the awareness of some children and young people looked after about the financial aspects of the care system. In 'The Right Care' (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2016), one participant reported feeling like she was having to change her placement (against her wishes) owing to financial constraints. The author reflects that telling a young person their placement is too expensive could cause feelings of guilt. Welsh Government (Mannay et al., 2015) research into the educational experiences of children and young people looked after found that some were aware of conflicts between local authorities about responsibilities for financing resources such as transport and school meals. The children and young people involved experienced such conflicts as damaging to their self-esteem.

The views of birth parents

Although they also have an important perspective on the care system, researchers have noted birth parents to be a hard-to-reach group (Larkins et al. 2015) and few studies explore their experiences of the care system. In addition, it may be challenging for researchers to consider the views of birth parents with a range of backgrounds and experiences without seeking a unified 'parental perspective' (Hall and Slembrouck, 2011). In this review, only nine papers were identified which satisfied the following inclusion criteria:

- Published within the last 10 years;
- Directly sought the views of the birth parents of children or young people in care through surveys, interviews, focus groups or other methods;
- Findings relevant to the research questions i.e. provided insight into commissioning processes.

Two of these papers focused on the experiences of a subgroup of birth parents (young parents and parents with disabilities) and others focused on just one aspect of the care system, such as the adoption process (Neil et al., 2010) and contact arrangements (Larkins et al. 2015). All studies reviewed were relatively small in scale, except for Neil et al. (2010) which included findings from a survey of over 400 parents. Two of the studies focused specifically on Wales. Further details on the scope and methods used in the studies reviewed can be found in Table 2, Annex 2.

Despite the limited literature uncovered by the review, the studies identified provide insight into three key areas:

- Views on **social worker practice**;
- Experiences of **involvement in decision-making processes** such as 'Child in Need' assessments and contact arrangements;
- **Support** needs, the availability and accessibility of appropriate support, and the outcomes of support.

Social workers

The studies reviewed revealed birth parents' mixed experiences of interacting with social workers.

Understandably, birth parents have expressed feelings of anxiety and wariness when interacting with social services (Munro et al. 2018; Morris et al., 2017) and some report downplaying the difficulties they are facing to mitigate the risk that they might lose custody of

their children. These fears appeared to be heightened among some groups of birth parents including young parents and parents with disabilities (Lynch et al. 2016, Munro et al. 2018). Parents with disabilities felt that social workers focused too strongly on deficiencies and risks rather than their strengths (Munro et al., 2018). Young parents similarly reported negative experiences of social worker interactions, feeling that some treated them like a child or did not trust or respect them owing to their age (Lynch, 2016).

A range of other negative experiences were reported by parents from a range of backgrounds. For example, parents reported social workers exerting their power in decision-making processes rather than working collaboratively (Neil et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2017; Munro et al., 2018), which damaged relationships and could exacerbate negative emotions around social services intervention. Other qualities or practices of social workers which were found negatively to affect relationships included inconsistency of mood or approach, making negative assumptions, and failure to reciprocate the behaviours expected of birth parents, such as cancelling contact sessions at late notice (Morris et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, some parents reported positive experiences of engaging with social workers. The qualities identified as promoting positive relationships included being able to talk and relate to people from different backgrounds, being able to put people at ease, working collaboratively, explaining processes clearly, avoiding making negative assumptions and being candid about disagreements (Lynch 2016; Morris et al. 2017). Parents valued efforts taken by social workers to keep them informed and involved in decision-making (Neil et al., 2010; Lynch, 2016), as well as working flexibly to provide out of hours support (Larkins et al. 2015). In addition, parents reported appreciating sensitivity when discussing difficult and personal topics (Lynch, 2016).

Reflecting findings on the views of children and young people, parents also expressed frustration at the turnover of social workers and changes to staff in the middle of a case were viewed as particularly disruptive (Morris et al. 2017). Parents valued opportunities to build long-term relationships but found this was not always possible given the pressures created by high caseloads and intense scrutiny experienced by social workers (Ibid).

Involvement in decision-making

The participation of birth parents in decision-making in children's social care has been identified as 'one of the most complex and sensitive areas of social work practice' (Healy and Darlington, 2009:420). Despite the challenges of this work, engagement with birth parents is an important part of social work practice and research in the field of children's social care.

First, there is a legal and policy imperative to keep families together and prevent children and young people from entering the care system where possible. In Wales, section 81 of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 provides that local authorities must arrange for

children and young people to be brought up by their family unless this would be inconsistent with their wellbeing. In practice, local authorities in Wales undertake preventative work through programmes such as Families First, aiming to work collaboratively with parents to provide suitable support (Welsh Government, 2017). In this context, seeking the views of birth parents about their circumstances and support needs is crucial in meeting the aims of these policies and programmes.

Secondly, many parents who are subject to social service interventions face extremely challenging personal circumstances. Domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health problems (the 'trigger trio') have been recognised as factors which are frequently present within families subject to social services intervention (Chowdry, 2018). Across the UK, however, there are concerns around the availability of support for birth parents and its continuity after a child is taken into care. Taking into account the experiences of birth parents may help public services to reflect on their support provision and improve policies and practices.

Birth parents can participate in decision-making at the individual case level as well as more broadly through collective approaches. At an individual level, birth parents may engage with social workers and other professionals around the care of their own children through formal meetings, such as family group conferences as well as informal conversations. At the collective level, groups such as the Family Rights Group advocate for parents subject to social services interventions through conducting research and policy work.

In general, studies emphasised the importance of providing clear and accurate information as well as listening to the views of birth parents throughout decision-making processes (Lynch, 2016; Morris et al., 2017; Munro et al., 2018). Similarly, the provision of information around contact sessions with children and young people looked after is also important to birth parents. Pye and Rees (2019) have found that parents' understandings of contact are generally built up through experience rather than being formally provided with information at the beginning of the process. Participating family members were often confused about the different roles of carers, social workers and contact supervisors and unclear about the purpose of contact and the need for supervision (Ibid).

In the context of 'Child in Need' assessments, findings from Munro et al. (2018) highlight a variety of issues faced by parents with disabilities including not receiving enough information about the purpose and process of the assessment and not being treated as an expert on their own impairments. Younger parents reported not being adequately prepared for the decision to take their child into care owing to the failure of social services to communicate the likely trajectory of the assessment process. Some who had signed agreements with local authorities reported feeling like they had little choice and that there was not enough planning involved (Lynch, 2016). A recent study in Wales on children in care who have parents with

learning disabilities found that there is room for improvement in the provision of accessible and high-quality information communicated effectively to parents (Burch et al., 2019).

Issues around the involvement of birth parents in decision-making are complex and, in some circumstances, this may not be appropriate. A central challenge to including parents in decision-making is the possibility that social workers may be required to exercise their power in a way that conflicts with the wishes of birth parent/s (Healy and Darlington, 2009). Furthermore, the imbalance of power between social workers and families may cause anxiety around engaging with Children's Social Services. Some birth parents have reported feeling anxious and uncomfortable during contact sessions owing to fears of 'making a mistake' and being judged by contact supervisors (Pye and Rees, 2019).

Nevertheless, in the absence of involvement, birth parents may appreciate being kept informed by social workers. One parent, for example, described being grateful to a social worker who kept her informed and helped her come to terms with her child's decision to refuse contact (Larkins et al., 2015).

Support

Multiple studies emphasise the acute needs of many birth parents who may face a range of issues including domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health problems. The specific context of the care system and the possibility of losing custody of a child may inhibit the provision of support as parents may be less forthcoming about their needs. Parents with disabilities noted feeling that securing access to services was risky, requiring a careful balance between appearing needy enough to gain access to services and not so needy that their child might be taken into care (Munro et al., 2018). Tailored support as part of Care and Support Plans for parents with learning disabilities was found to impact positively on how well parents engage with that support (Burch et al., 2019: 38).

The literature also highlighted a range of other support that some parents felt was not being provided. Parents have highlighted the need for practical support to tackle underlying issues such as difficulties with housing, finances, employment and training (Lynch, 2016; Morris et al., 2017). One young father reported that his immigration status (and resulting No Recourse to Public Funds) was a fundamental issue preventing him from being a good parent but had no access to support to resolve the problem (Lynch, 2016). Besides specialist support, some parents have also reported the absence of frequent, low-level support from social workers (Percy-Smith and Dalrymple, 2018) and around contact (Pye and Rees, 2019). This links to a wider issue around the continuity of care, as some parents report support stopping abruptly when a care order has been made (Morris et al., 2017; Munro et al. 2018).

Care-experienced young people who are parents appear to be disproportionately likely to experience social services interventions themselves (Roberts, 2019). Accordingly, support

for young parents is also important from the perspective of preventing inter-generational cycles of entry into the care system. Research conducted with care-experienced parents has highlighted challenges around the provision of appropriate support for this group. Although there are a range of local initiatives in Wales, availability across local authorities is highly variable and interventions are often only available on a 'one off' basis (Ibid). Furthermore, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of interventions for this group as well as concerns that specialist support might have a stigmatising effect (Ibid).

Although issues of the accessibility of support were not discussed in the literature in depth, it was noted that it may be more difficult for families in rural areas to access support (Morris et al., 2017; Roberts, 2019).

Conclusion

Care-experienced children and young people and their families have shared valuable perspectives on the care system and incorporating their views into decision-making can help to improve policy and practice. This report provides a review of this literature highlighting evidence relevant to commissioning in Wales.

Findings suggest three key areas of challenge for commissioners: placement moves, staff turnover, and developing participatory practices.

The **instability of placements** was identified as a significant problem for children and young people, with many reporting frequent moves and changes in location. Children and young people have reported a range of negative impacts resulting from placement moves including distress, isolation, and disrupted access to public services. The location of placements could also result in problems with maintaining family contact and potentially threaten Welsh-speaking children and young people's language rights. Beyond the frequency of placement moves, children and young people have also highlighted how the good management of transitions and increased participation in decision-making can provide a better transition experience.

The theme of instability also emerged in the context of social workers and carers. Although many children and young people have reflected positively on their relationships with social workers and carers, **staff turnover** was identified as a key issue across the literature. High staff turnover is distressing and frustrating for many children and young people and contributes to difficulties in forming long-lasting positive relationships. Some birth parents have also noted that handovers to new social workers in the middle of a case can be disruptive. While high levels of turnover are viewed as inherently problematic, children and young people have provided suggestions to improve transitions between social workers and mitigate some of the negative impacts of turnover. These include providing new staff with accurate information about children and young people and providing opportunities to say a proper goodbye to staff members when they move on.

Finally, a cross-cutting issue emerged around **how children, young people and their families are involved in decision-making**. There are both good reasons to involve children and young people in decision-making and positive examples of participatory practices in the UK. However, the literature reported many children and young people feeling disempowered owing to a lack of involvement in decision-making and poor communication. In some cases, this might lead to children and young people engaging in challenging or even harmful behaviours. Although the literature on the views of birth parents is more limited, available studies suggest that birth parents may also experience similar frustrations. These findings

highlight the importance of ongoing and substantive participatory processes as policy and practice develops in Wales.

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Annex 1

Table 1: Recent efforts to capture the views of children and young people

Author	Study	Summary
Ofsted	Children’s Social Care Questionnaires (Annual)	Annual questionnaire aiming to capture the views of children and young people about social care settings including adoption, foster care, residential homes, and boarding schools. 26,546 children and young people responded to the 2018 survey.
Staines and Selwyn	The impact of children and young people’s lack of understanding of why they are in out-of-home care on their well-being and felt security (2020)	A study drawing on data from the Bright Spots Survey which explores the impact of not understanding the reasons for entry into care on wellbeing and feelings of being settled.
Children’s Commissioner for England	Children’s experience of instability in the care system (2019)	Alongside data analysis on placement stability, the Children’s Commissioner’s Office interviewed 22 children who were in care or were care leavers to explore the impact of instability and what makes instability harder or easier to deal with.
Girling	Yet Another Change: The Experience of Movement for Children and Young People Looked After (2019)	A study exploring how children and young people looked after experience movement. The research involved semi-structured interviews with seven young people (aged 15-17 years) living in private residential homes in Wales.
Stabler et al.	What do children think about their social worker? A Q-method study of children’s services (2019)	A Q-method study exploring how children involved with social services experiences their interactions with social workers. 22 children were asked to sort through and rank statements about their social worker and asked to explain their rankings.
Williams et al.	The experiences and outcomes of children and young people from Wales receiving Secure	Explores the experiences of young people in Wales who received secure orders between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018. Includes interviews with 11 young people within this cohort.

Accommodation
Orders (2019)

Selwyn et al. (Coram Voice)	Bright Spots (2017- 2019)	Uses age appropriate questionnaires to interview children and young people looked after in local authorities in England and Wales, to identify and promote practices that have a positive influence on the wellbeing of children and young people.
McDowell et al.	Contact with Birth Parents: Hearing the Voices of the Looked After Child (2019)	A study exploring the impact of contact with birth parents on young people looked after. Interviews were conducted with seven young people, exploring their experiences of contact
Children's Commissioner for England	Voice of Children in Foster Care (2018)	Presents the responses of 100 children who are living in foster care or are care leavers about their views and experiences of foster care and changes they think need to be made to the fostering system to improve the care experience.
Department for Education	Narey and Owers (2018)	Children and care leavers participated in this independent review of foster care in England, which sets out recommendations to improve the fostering system for children and foster carers.
Diaz et al.	'Just another person in the room': young people's views on their participation in Child in Care Reviews (2018)	Reports the findings of in-depth interviews with 11 young people about their experiences of Child in Care Reviews. Fieldwork took place in a large rural local authority in England.
Family Rights Group	Care Crisis Review: options for change (2018)	A consultation with over 80 children and young people (aged 9-27) from 10 different areas of England. The children and young people participated in focus groups that were conducted in a variety of formats to accommodate different needs and contexts.
Hammond	Social Media, Social Capital and Adolescents Living in State Care: A Multi- Perspective and Multi- Method Qualitative Study (2018)	A study exploring how children and young people looked after use digital media. Research activities included ethnographic fieldwork carried out in four residential care settings with 10 young people.

Mannay et al	Enabling talk and reframing messages: working creatively with care experienced children and young people to recount and re-represent their everyday experiences (2018)	A qualitative study on the educational experiences of children and young people looked after. 67 children and young people (aged between 6 and 27 years) took part, using a range of creative methods such as using stickers representing different emotions to create a mind map of their school experiences.
Children's Commissioner for Wales	The Right Care: Children's rights in residential care in Wales (2016)	Presents the findings of interviews and focus groups with 34 young people with experience of residential care in Wales. Topics covered include involvement in decision-making, safety measures and the adequacy of provision in residential care.
Roesch-Marsh et al.	Nurturing the virtuous cycle: Looked After Children's participation in reviews, a cyclical and relational process (2016)	Reports the findings of surveys of social workers, IROs and young people conducted after review meetings. The research also conducted follow-up qualitative interviews with 10 young people.
Children's Commissioner for England	Children in Care and Care Leavers Survey (2015)	A survey of children and young people looked after in England which received 2936 responses from children and in young people in care as well as care leavers.
The Care Inquiry	The views and recommendations of children and young people involved in the Care Inquiry (2013)	Findings from a consultation with children and young people looked after as part of the 2013 Care Inquiry. The consultation took the form of focus groups and interviews in Hounslow and Torbay as well as an online survey. The number of participants was not reported.
Wilson and Milne	Young people creating belonging: creative sensory methods to explore how young people who are looked after feel that they belong (2013)	A study drawing on creative qualitative methods to explore how children and young people looked after in Scotland experience belonging. Participants took photos of their belongings and environments and took part in other creative projects just as creating playlists and videos. 22 care experienced children and young people (aged between 10 and 23) took part.

Berridge et al.	Living in Children's Residential Homes (2012)	Report on residential homes in England including findings on the characteristics, circumstances and experiences of children and young people living in 16 residential homes.
Children's Commissioner for Wales	Missing Voices: A review of independent professional advocacy services for looked after children and young people, care leavers and children in need in Wales (2012)	A review of independent professional advocacy services for children and young people looked after in Wales. 457 children looked after, care leavers and children in need completed a survey and over 100 children participated in focus groups.
Edwards, J.	Looked after care: Young people's views of making decisions in review and planning meetings (2012)	Explores young people's experiences of review meetings, incorporating interviews with 12 young people aged 15 to 19.
Cossar et al.	'Don't make assumptions': Children's and young people's views of the children protection system and messages for change (2011)	A qualitative study seeking the views of children and young people living with their parents, subject to a child protection plan. Interviews were carried out with 26 children and young people aged between six and 17 years old.
Children's Commissioner for Wales	Lost After Care (2011)	A research project exploring how children and young people looked experience planning to leave care. The Commissioner engaged nearly 120 children and young people in residential homes and foster care and care leavers.
Rostill-Brookes et al	A shared experience of fragmentation: making sense of foster care placement breakdown (2011)	A study exploring how young people, foster carers and social workers made sense of the unplanned ending of foster care placements. The researchers carried out five interviews with young people.

Holland et al. How was your day?
Learning from
experience: Informing
preventative policies
and practice by
analysing critical
moments in care
leaver's life histories.
(2010)

A study capturing the views of 16 care leavers.

Ward, H. Patterns of instability:
Moves within the care
system, their reasons,
contexts and
consequences (2009)

A study examining the moves of 242 children in
the care of six local authorities in England.
Interviews were conducted with children and
young people to complement the analysis of
administrative data.

Annex 2

Table 2: Recent efforts to capture the views of birth parents

Author	Study	Summary
Burch et al.	Research on the number of children in Wales placed into care from parents with learning disability and the reasons behind their removal (2019)	A study exploring the rates of care for children of parents with a learning disability. Research activities included interviews with eight parents across five local authorities in Wales.
Pye and Rees	Factors that promote positive supervised birth family contact for children in care (2019)	A mixed method study of experiences of contact with fieldwork taking place in South Wales. A survey was carried out with 38 birth family members and follow up interviews with 17 family members.
Roberts	A family of my own: When young people in and leaving state care become parents in Wales (2019)	Reports early findings from research on experiences of early parenthood among care-experienced young people. Includes findings from qualitative interviews with 8 parents as well as leaving care professionals.
Munro et al.	Re-imagining social care services in co-production with disabled parents (2018)	Explores the experiences of disabled parents who had been in contact with children's social services. 6 disabled parents were interviewed about their interactions with social services.
Percy-Smith, B. and Dalrymple, J.	Stories from journeys to the edge of care: Challenges for children and family services (2018)	Explores the experiences of children and young people who are or have been on the 'edge of care'. Includes some interviews with parents of these children (but this is not the focus of the paper).
Morris et al.	Family experiences of children's social care involvement following a social work change programme (2017)	Presents the findings of interviews with 36 family members of children and young people looked after as part of an evaluation of a social work change programme. The interviews primarily explored the relationships of families with social workers.

Lynch, C. (Family Rights Group)	Young parents' involvement in the child welfare system (2016)	Presents the findings of interviews and focus groups with young parents (up to 30 years old) whose children have been or are currently subject to an intervention by children's services.
Larkins et al.	Children's, young people's and parents' perspectives on contact: Findings from the evaluation of social work practices (2015)	Reports the findings of interviews with children, young people and birth parents conducted as part of the national evaluation of Social Work Practice pilots. Interviews were carried out with 19 birth parents, although the focus of the piece is on the views of children and young people.
Neil et al.	Helping birth families: service, costs and outcomes (2010)	Explores birth parents' experiences of adoption and the support they receive, reporting the findings of interviews with 73 birth relatives including mothers, fathers and grandparents.

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