



For the Citizens'
Rights Agreements

Assurance Review (Looked after Children and Care Leavers) Annex 1a: Wales Follow on review November 2023

**Local authority responses on support for Looked after Children
and Care Leavers as to duties linked to the EU Settlement Scheme**

Introduction

In July 2023, the Independent Monitoring Authority for the Citizens' Rights Agreements (IMA) completed individual assurance reviews with 21 out of 22 local authorities in Wales.

Individual assurance reviews were conducted with local authorities who had not, during a previous information gathering exercise conducted in October 2022 provided sufficient information to demonstrate that they were discharging their responsibility to support eligible looked after children and care leavers, who were eligible to make an application to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). The methodology and rationale for this work has been outlined in our main report.

To deliver these reviews, the IMA sought assurance in the following three areas:

1. robustness of the identification processes;
2. accurate record keeping; and
3. completion of retrospective checks

This updated regional report reflects the findings of these reviews.

Assurance Review Findings

1. The IMA found that that the majority of local authorities had or have now demonstrated robust processes to identify eligible looked after children, care leavers and their family members. Local authorities demonstrated they were recording the nationality of children who entered their care which assisted with the identification of potentially eligible applicants to the EUSS. Most local authorities were able to evidence they had clear record keeping procedures and that retrospective checks had taken place and remain ongoing.
2. Two local authorities reported not having any children or care leavers who were eligible to apply to the EUSS, however they were able to evidence a clear process for identifying such individuals using Home Office guidance, along with confirmation that retrospective checks had been completed.
3. The IMA identified that most local authorities had and have demonstrated that they had communicated information about the EUSS by developing training and delivering awareness sessions using subject matter experts and team management support. This was reinforced by disseminating information to relevant staff.
4. Some local authorities told the IMA they had attended 'knowledge sharing' sessions with the Regional Safeguarding Board and had shared best practice as part of a "cluster" of local authorities. Many reported seeking legal advice for more complex cases.
5. Several local authorities reported undertaking extensive manual checks of all their records to aid with identifying all eligible citizens and dedicated resource to complete these checks on receipt of the Home Office Guidance.

6. One local authority reported completing an in-depth data review exercise which allowed them to build a greater understanding of each child's personal circumstances and appropriate persons in their life. This led to a higher number of children and care leavers requiring EUSS applications and support than was initially expected.

7. Another local authority reported manually searching all non-British children and care leavers in their system which resulted in two additional eligible children and their family members being identified and supported to submit applications to the EUSS.

Improvements by local authorities

8. As a result of conducting individual assurance reviews, the IMA noted a number of improvements made by local authorities to their processes, procedures, and systems.

9. Several local authorities had taken proactive measures to improve their processes and procedures once the IMA's initial report was published. Some local authorities have developed additional policies, process and guidance for staff delivered through further awareness and training. This has led to the IMA being assured that these local authorities are meeting their obligations.

10. One local authority stated they had no eligible children or care leavers in their area, however, following IMA intervention, the local authority was able to identify two eligible children and took the necessary steps to complete applications to the EUSS as well as signpost support to three family members. This local authority confirmed they were developing an IT system which will strengthen retrospective checks in the future to ensure all eligible cohorts can be identified and supported.

11. The IMA found that some local authorities acknowledged there were gaps in their process and procedures. The IMA shared best practiced principles to support these local authorities to assist with improvements to their process. The IMA was able to evidence improvements for these local authorities by reviewing additional policies and documentation developed by these local authorities.

12. The IMA found that some local authorities revised their processes because of its engagement including completing further and ongoing retrospective checks. Overall, this has resulted in nine additional children and care leavers being identified as eligible to apply to the EUSS with the local authorities providing the appropriate level of support. A further three family members were also offered support. The IMA welcomes this given the importance of the EUSS and ensuring that children and care leavers eligible for residency status are supported now and in the future.

13. With regard to identifying and supporting eligible children, some local authorities recognised the requirement to report their data in a different manner and were able to take the necessary steps to improve their management information and reporting systems to ensure all eligible children and family members are, and continue to be identified, and supported.

14. The IMA was able to make recommendations for improvements to three local authorities' processes with revisions to supporting documents, refinement to record-keeping procedures and further support to aid understanding of the EUSS. This will assist with the identification, and support for eligible cohorts both now and in the future.

15. Three local authorities took proactive steps to conduct further retrospective checks and advised they would report any additional numbers of eligible children to the IMA. This extends to care leavers, non-EU and EEA EFTA citizens and family members where signposting and support to the EUSS will be provided if necessary.

16. One local authority informed the IMA that a national code request for the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) had been actioned. This means that the EUSS status of a child will now be recorded within all local authorities in Wales using WCCIS, as opposed to individual local authorities each creating their own local codes for recording this data. Some local authorities advised they were unable to update their case management systems and the IMA will review options to support these local authorities.

17. The IMA has welcomed the positive engagement with each local authority in Wales, noting the support of Albert Heaney, Chief Social Care Officer for Wales in encouraging local authority engagement with this work. The IMA are aware of the operational pressure local authorities are under and are thankful for their collaboration with this assurance review.

RAG Grading: local authority previous and revised gradings

Local Authority	Initial Local Authority Response (2022)			Assurance Review Outcome (2023)		
	Identification	Record keeping	Retrospective checks	Identification	Record keeping	Retrospective checks
Blaenau Gwent	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Bridgend	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Green
Caerphilly	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Cardiff	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Carmarthen	Red	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Green
Ceredigion	Orange	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green
Conwy	Red	Red	Orange	Green	Green	Green
Denbighshire	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Flintshire	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Gwynedd	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green
Isle of Anglesey	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green
Merthyr Tydfil	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green
Monmouthshire	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green
Neath Port Talbot	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
Newport	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Green
Pembrokeshire	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Powys	Orange	Orange	Red	Green	Green	Green
Rhondda Cynon Taf	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green
Swansea	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green
Torfaen	Red	Orange	Red	Green	Green	Green
Vale of Glamorgan	Orange	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green
Wrexham	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

Next Steps

18. Each local authority in Wales has been notified of their re-grading following the conclusion of all individual assurance reviews and has received a copy of their revised assessment.

19. Based on the information provided, the IMA does not at this stage consider that further compliance action is required by any local authority in Wales in relation to this assurance review. The IMA will share its findings with key stakeholders for the purpose of knowledge sharing.

20. The IMA may contact any local authority in the future should further information be required, or if any subsequent issues arise regarding this review.