

CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

AGENDA ITEM: 5

PORTFOLIO: EARLY YEARS, CHILDREN & FAMILIES (COUNCILLOR SUE LENT)

Reason for this Report

1. To set out the Council's proposed **Corporate Parenting** strategy and seek Cabinet approval.

Background

2. When a child comes into care, the Council becomes the Corporate Parent. Put simply, the term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the Council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguards for the children who are looked after by the Council.
3. The **Review of the Status and Roles of Corporate Parenting in Cardiff Council** (May 2014) set out a number of key recommendations, one of them being the development of a **Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee** in order to raise the profile of Corporate Parenting within the local authority. The review further recommended that the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee is chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council and identified two main advantages. First, it bestows status on the Committee and secondly the Deputy Leader has a clear line of sight over the different Cabinet portfolios and possesses the authority to ensure that all service areas work together in the interests of our young people.
4. One of the key responsibilities for the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee was to commission the development of a cogent and deliverable Corporate Parenting strategy which sets out the commitment we have for the children in our care.
5. Children and young people in our care have been consulted on the development of this strategy. They have said that they want to be supported to achieve their potential, they want their parents to have received more support and they want to be listened to. Taking these

views in to account, this strategy sets out the combined commitment from the University Health Board, Social Services, Housing and Communities and Education and Lifelong Learning Directorates to:

- 'Narrowing the gap' so that looked after children achieve their full potential
 - Improving services so that fewer children need to enter the looked after system
 - Listening to looked after children and improving their experiences of care wherever.
6. At the end of 2014, Cardiff had 1576 Children in Need, 297 children subject to a child protection plan and 651 looked after children. At the end October 2015, Cardiff had 1276 children in Need, 330 children subject to a child protection plan and 630 looked after children. Historically, Cardiff's Looked After Children rate has remained relatively consistent over time. The trend suggests that in the future the rate of Looked After Children will continue to be relatively static.
7. The City of Cardiff Council has the same goals for the children it looks after as those of any good parent, and takes seriously the moral as well as legal responsibility for enabling the children in its care to experience happy and fulfilling lives. This Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines our aspirations for looked after children and young people and supports that delivery of the **Corporate Plan Priority 2: Supporting Vulnerable People** and will contribute to achieving the following **Corporate Plan Outcome: People in Cardiff are safe and those at risk are safeguarded.**

Reason for Recommendations

8. Under primary legislation the Council has responsibilities and a positive role to play as the Corporate Parents for Looked After Children in the care of the Council. A Corporate Parenting Strategy is a key document which outlines how the Council will discharge its responsibilities and prioritise delivery of services for this group of children.

Financial Implications

9. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications (including Equality Impact Assessment where appropriate)

10. The Children Act 1989 placed the statutory responsibility on the council to provide accommodation and services for looked after children. The Care Standards Act 2002 and associated regulations define the operation of local authority fostering and adoption services.

As mentioned previously in this report, the Council has a statutory duty in respect of delivering its Corporate Parenting Responsibilities and in ensuring sufficient and suitable placements for looked after children.

HR Implications

11. There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is recommended to approve and endorse this strategy

Tony Young

Director

13 May 2016

The following appendix is attached:

Appendix A - Corporate Parenting Strategy 2016-2019



Corporate Parenting Strategy

September 2016 - 2019

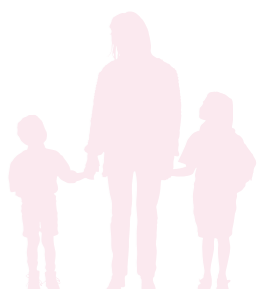
This report is available in Welsh / Mae'r adroddiad hwn ar gael yn Gymraeg



“LAC Traineeship has got me 9 qualifications, I had none before this”

CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword	2
Statement from Councillor Lent	3
Corporate Parenting	4
Context	4
The Strategy	5
1. Effective early intervention and prevention	5
2. Safely reducing the number of looked after children	6
3. Promoting permanency	9
4. Providing high quality placements	10
5. Continue to improve services for children with disabilities, including short break care	10
6. Improve the education attainment and achievement for all looked after children	11
7. Improve and support the emotional health and mental well-being of looked after children	13
8. Provide young people leaving care with appropriate preparation for adult life, taking account of all of their needs including their well being	15
9. Strengthening the role of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee	16
Key Outcomes	17
Implementation Plan	18



This strategy falls within **Corporate Plan Priority 2: Supporting Vulnerable People**. It also contributes to achieving the following **Corporate Plan Outcome**: **People in Cardiff are safe and those at risk are safeguarded.**

This strategy sets out the shared vision of the City of Cardiff Council and the University Health Board for Looked After Children. We are committed to work together as effective and trustworthy corporate parents for any child or young person who is in our care irrespective of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or disability.

Every good parent knows that children require a safe and secure environment in which to grow and thrive. Parents protect and support their children against the dangers and risks of life. Parents are ambitious for them and want them to reach their potential. Parents celebrate and share in their achievements.

A child who is cared for by the Council has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent.

This strategy reflects a genuine partnership in which no one agency has primacy but in which all are committed to:

- 'Narrowing the gap' so that looked after children achieve their potential.
- Improving services so that fewer children need enter the looked after system.
- Listening to looked after children and improving their experience of care wherever possible as a result.

Evidence of 'What Works'

The Implementation Plan which flows from this strategy is obviously key and sets out a wide range of initiatives to enhance the provision of services in order to better support children living with their families where possible, and to improve services for those children whose needs require them to become looked after by the local authority. Many are services that already exist in Cardiff but which will be enhanced in terms of their impact because the strategy brings all of those services together into a coherent whole system. For example, services such as Child Adolescent Mental Health Services, Families First, Youth Services and Flying Start will make it their priority to contribute towards supporting children and families in order to reduce the number of children becoming looked after.

Fewer Looked After Children

Delivering this commitment will have major implications for two important groups of children in Cardiff over the next five years. Firstly those many children whose life chances will improve because it will mean that the needs of fewer children will be met through statutory interventions in the Looked After system or in the criminal justice system. More children will be able to enjoy family life in their own homes. Secondly and above all, this strategy will prioritise those who nevertheless need to be looked after for whatever reason. At the time of writing the population of Looked After Children in Cardiff stands at 628 and it is the outcomes and experiences of the children in this population at any one time, that will improve because of this strategy.

Tony Young

Director of Social Services
Chair - Vulnerable Children and Families Programme Board

I am pleased to introduce this Corporate Parenting Strategy for The City of Cardiff Council. This Corporate Parenting Strategy is not an end in itself; it provides an agreed direction of travel and a common commitment for children in our care. We will work in partnership to fulfil our statutory duty as corporate parents to nurture, respect and be ambitious for our looked after children and young people as we would for our own children.

As the deputy leader for the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, I am clear that the wellbeing of our looked after children and young people is of the highest priority. As statutory partners we have a particular duty of care to all our looked after children and young people.

We know that looked after children and young people are amongst the most vulnerable in our community, and that all too often their life chances are restricted. We have a responsibility and a commitment to changing this pattern.

Through implementation of this strategy, we will strive to ensure that our looked after children and young people have the best possible start in life that we can deliver. We will support and care for them as they grow up and take their first steps towards independence. We will also make sure that we continue to be there for our young people as they enter early adulthood, just as any responsible parent would.

Councillor Lent

Deputy leader
and Cabinet member for children and families



CORPORATE PARENTING

When a child becomes “looked after” the role of being a parent becomes the corporate responsibility of the County Council. This is known as Corporate Parenting and is the term used to describe how the County Council and its partners collectively fulfil their responsibilities to all children and young people who are in their care by seeking exactly the same positive outcomes that every good parent would want for their own children.

Effective Corporate Parenting requires ownership and leadership at a senior level within the Council, including elected members.

The City of Cardiff Council’s Corporate Parenting mission statement is:

“Working together to ensure the best possible outcomes for children who are looked after or who have left care, so that they can be happy and lead a fulfilling life”

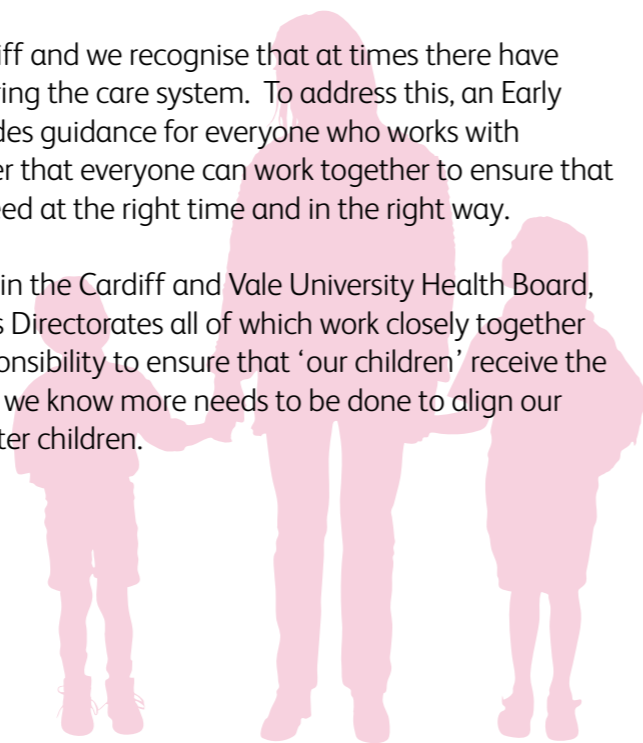
CONTEXT

At the end of 2014, Cardiff had 1576 children in need, 297 children subject to a child protection plan and 651 looked after children. By the end October 2015, Cardiff had 1276 children in Need, 330 children subject to a child protection plan and 630 looked after children

Historically, Cardiff’s looked after children rate has remained relatively consistent over time. The trend suggests that in the future the rate of looked after children will continue to be relatively static.

Too many looked after children are living away from Cardiff and we recognise that at times there have been missed opportunities to prevent some children entering the care system. To address this, an Early Help Strategy was launched in October 2015 which provides guidance for everyone who works with children, young people and their families in Cardiff in order that everyone can work together to ensure that children and families receive the help and support they need at the right time and in the right way.

There are dedicated services for looked after children within the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, City of Cardiff Council’s Education and Children’s Services Directorates all of which work closely together and promote an ethos in which staff consider it their responsibility to ensure that ‘our children’ receive the best services and achieve the best outcomes possible. But we know more needs to be done to align our strategic priorities to reflect our commitment to looked after children.



THE STRATEGY

This strategy has been coproduced with colleagues in Health and Education and is underpinned by the following principles:

1. Effective early intervention and prevention
2. Safely reducing the number of looked after children
3. Promoting permanency
4. Providing high quality placements
5. Continuing to improve services for children with disabilities, including short break care
6. Improve the education, attainment and achievement for all looked after children
7. Improve and support the emotional health and mental wellbeing of looked after children
8. Provide young people leaving care with appropriate preparation for adult life, taking account of all of their needs including their well being
9. Strengthening the role of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee.



1. EFFECTIVE EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION

The Cardiff Partnership launched its Early Help Strategy in October 2015. At the heart of the strategy which seeks to make prevention everyone’s business, are the following two strategic objectives:

Strategic Objective 1

- Ensure that children and young people receive help at the lowest level or intervention that is safe and effective in promoting good outcomes.

Strategic Objective 2

- Maximise the impact of Children’s (Social) Services by strengthening the effectiveness of social work intervention and specialist / targeted family support.

In Cardiff we believe that every child and young person should have the opportunity to reach their potential. We recognise that outcomes for children are best when they are supported to grow and achieve within their own families and community as families understand their own children. We know from practice and research that effective early intervention and prevention enable more children to remain at home as families can be supported to address concerns and risks much earlier before they become a crisis, however we recognise that there will always be some children and young people for whom being in local authority care offers the best and safest arrangements for their wellbeing and development.




2. SAFELY REDUCING THE NUMBER OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

There is a very difficult balance to strike between ensuring that children are safeguarded, with their needs being met by their families and the need to intervene effectively when children are in need of protection. The environment nationally in terms of safeguarding has, since high profile cases, become one in which there is an understandable aversion to risk. This is evidenced nationally in the increase in numbers of children subject to child protection registration and a corresponding increase in numbers of children who are looked after.

Children can become looked after for the following reasons:

- As the subject of Police Protection.
- As the subject of an Emergency Protection Order.
- As the subject of a Remand to Care.
- As the subject of Remand to Custody (LASPO Act).
- Through being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act.
- Southwark Judgement (16 and 17 year olds assessed as children in need due to being homeless or at risk of being homeless).
- As the subject of a Care Order.
- Through being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act at the request of a person with parental responsibility.
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

The vast majority of children become looked after as a result of a legal intervention by the local authority under the Public Law Outline.



“More beneficial than classrooms to practical people”

Children can exit the looked after system in a number of ways:

- By reaching the age of 18 years.
- By discharging themselves from voluntary accommodation if they are over sixteen years of age.
- By being discharged from voluntary accommodation by their parents.
- By the revocation of a Care Order.
- By being made the subject of a Child Arrangement Order.
- By being made the subject of a Special Guardianship Order.
- By being made the subject of an Adoption Order.

Safely reducing the number of children in care is dependent upon:

a. Effective risk management frameworks

Cardiff Children's Services are committed to introducing the **Signs of Safety** risk assessment model. The Signs of Safety approach describes itself as a relationship-grounded, safety organised child protection framework designed to help families build safety for children by allowing those families to demonstrate their strengths over time. For example, when working with a parent who misuses substances, the Signs of Safety approach will seek to manage the substance misuse behaviour and minimise risks to the child whilst change occurs as opposed to setting unrealistic expectations in which change may not occur. This approach also helps practitioners realise that removal of risks is not always necessary when protective factors can be enhanced provided that these are commensurate with the needs of the child.

In addition to the Signs of Safety model, we will adopt a **Restorative Approach** when working with families. Working restoratively means valuing relationships and working with others in ways that promotes respect, trust and belonging. When working restoratively conflicts are resolved through communication and shared problem solving. Everyone is accountable for their actions and the impact of those actions; when harm is caused everyone involved has the opportunity to look at how to take things forward and repair relationships. This approach will complement the Signs of Safety framework and will reflect the approach adopted by the Education Directorate.

We have also commissioned the provision of **Family Group Conferences**. A Family Group Conference is a process led by family members to plan and make decisions for a child who is assessed to be at risk. The aim is to support families to find their own solutions to problems: the family members are the decision-makers rather than the professionals; the 'family' is the primary planning group. Families, including extended family members are assisted by an independent family group conference coordinator to prepare for the meeting. At the first part of the meeting, social workers and other professionals set out their concerns and what support could be made available. In the second part of the meeting family members then meet on their own to make a plan for the child. Three quarters of local authorities in England and Wales currently run or commission Family Group Conferences for children in their area or are planning to do so.

It is important that partner agencies are engaged in the Signs of Safety risk assessment framework and working restoratively. We will communicate our approaches to partner agencies and invite key partners to join us in our approach. These approaches will enable social workers to respond to risks more creatively as opposed to adopting the traditional methods of removal as means of risk management. However, whilst our focus is to keep children safely supported at home with their parents, we are clear that where parenting is not good enough despite our best endeavours, we will make use of a Care Planning and Legal Meeting to make long term care planning decisions in order to avoid delay.

b. Targeted provision children aged 11 plus

In Cardiff, in the twelve months to 31st March 2015, 163 children aged eleven plus became looked after, of these 132 children were accommodated via section 20 of the Children Act 1989. 13 of these were as a result of socially unacceptable behaviour, 20 due to the family being in acute stress and 21 as a result of family dysfunction. Our experience tells us that these young people are more likely to require specialist fostering or residential placements in order to safely manage the entrenched challenging behaviour that many of these young people display within the home environment. There is limited availability of such placements locally and consequently, these young people are more likely to be placed at a distance from Cardiff, in external placements. These placements place huge financial costs on the Local Authority, not to mention the emotional costs to these young people of being placed away from family and friends and their local community. In response to this need we are in the process of developing an **Adolescent Resource Centre (ARC)** which is expected to provide a more cost-effective solution that will achieve better outcomes for young people and their families.

The ARC will provide intensive support for young people at risk of becoming looked after, who present such challenges that they would otherwise be placed in costly external agency placements. A feature of this service is integrated support from a range of Local Authority partners such as the Youth Service, Youth Offending Service, Education, Health and Housing. The aims of this service are to:

- Reduce the number of young people being accommodated, and support them and their families to enable them to remain at home.
- Reduce the number of adolescents in children's homes, by providing support to young people and their Foster Carers to remain in their placements.

The ARC will provide a team of officers and salaried **Support Foster Carers**. The service will include outreach work and provide opportunities for family support both centre-based and in their own homes – including weekends and evenings, so that it is responsive to the changing need of the families receiving the service. The service will also offer out of hours support to in-house foster carers who offer placements to young people who fall within the ARC's remit.

Each young person accessing the service will live at home with parents or carers who retain overall responsibility for them. Most crucially, those young people living at home with their parents will not fall into the category of being 'looked after' when receiving the overnight stays.

"I think LAC Traineeship could be an alternative option to school at 16"

c. Rehabilitating children back home when it is safe to do so

It is important that we rehabilitate children back home where it is safe to do so in a timely manner. **Independent Reviewing Officers** play a key role in this and are empowered to challenge Care and Support Plans for children who remain subject to an Order unnecessarily. In addition, the **Operational Manager** together with the **Team Managers** for the **Looked After Children Service** make it their priority that those children placed at home under the auspices of a Care Order are reviewed and an application to discharge the Care Order is prioritised.



3. PROMOTING PERMANENCY

Routes to permanence include:

- Permanent return to birth parents
- Shared care arrangements, including regular short-break care
- Permanence within the looked after system, whether in residential placement unrelated foster care or family and friends care
- Legal permanence, through adoption, special guardianship orders and child arrangement orders.

We will ensure that all looked after children have a plan of permanence at the three month review and will consider more than one possible plan if needed in order to minimise delay.

Where a child cannot live with their parents, the first option will always be to arrange for a child to be cared for by a member of his/her extended family. Where the carer is a close family member, this can be through a private arrangement between the parents and the carers; and where the child's needs are being met and parental responsibility is being effectively discharged, there may be no need for involvement from Cardiff Children's Services. If the carer selected by the parents is not an immediate family member, **Private Fostering Regulations** will apply and the placement will be assessed in accordance with Private Fostering policies and procedures.

When our intervention has led to a child not being able to live with birth parents, the priority will always be to try to identify a member of their extended family or a friend with whom they will be able to live with. In these circumstances, such carers will be assessed in accordance with the **'Connected Persons'** regulations and the carers will be supported by dedicated fostering social workers from the Fostering Service. Wherever possible carers in these circumstances will be encouraged to consider **Special Guardianship** because of the added security that legal permanence would give to the placement.



4. PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY PLACEMENTS

Cardiff's Fostering Service was inspected by the **Care & Social Services Inspectorate, Wales (CSSIW)** in February 2015. The inspection report noted the following improvements since the last annual inspection:

- The management team had strengthened.
- Children had been consulted during foster carer support visits.

It also identified the following areas that the service does well in:

- Retained an experienced group of foster carers.
- Benefitted from a motivated and experienced staff group.

Work continues on the Fostering recruitment campaign and the branding was strengthened this year by using stories from foster carers and how they make a positive difference to the lives of the looked after children they care for. The Fostering Service will continue to develop its pool of foster carers in order to ensure that Cardiff children remain in Cardiff. The Looked After Children Service will play a key role in supporting the Fostering Service in order to attract new foster carers.

Our priority is to place children with Cardiff carers in Cardiff and where possible, bring back those children who are placed a considerable distance away from Cardiff. However, there are some children who have to be placed outside of Cardiff for reasons of safety or because of particular needs which cannot be met locally. The current cohort of children placed in external residential units comprises a mixture of children who have moved to an external placement because of particular needs and children who initially went to an external placement because an in-house placement was unable to meet their immediate need. A number of children in each of these cohorts have been in their external placement for a number of years, are very settled and are making good progress. It would clearly be inappropriate to move them on purely financial grounds.

The Operational Manager responsible for the Looked After Children Service tracks all external placements via the Return of Out of Area Panel, however this needs to be stepped up to ensure that there are no unavoidable delays in moving young people back into in-house placements.

5. CONTINUE TO IMPROVE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING SHORT BREAK CARE

There is evidence that children with disabilities are more likely to become looked after, remain in care for longer and have a higher risk of being placed inappropriately in comparison to non-disabled children. To improve and maintain good practice in relation to these children, there is a dedicated **Child Health and Disability Team** and when children become looked after they remain within the specialist team and retain their social worker. This allows for the social workers to develop a relationship with the child or young person, understand their specific needs and where required commission bespoke services to meet such needs.

We work closely with Adult Services to ensure that those young people who require support beyond 18 years of age are transitioned in a timely manner, this applies to all care leavers with or without disabilities.

To reflect our commitment to improving service for children and young people with disabilities, a project has been commissioned together with the appointment of a Change Manager to reshape services for children and young people with disabilities. The project will work with Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and Education partners in the vision of delivering on and improving outcomes for disabled children, young people, young adults and their families (0-25 years) through a range of partnership projects. These outcomes will be improved by designing and implementing integrated service delivery across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. The project will implement common processes which are aligned across the local authority areas which will lead on to support the development and delivery of an integrated service of children with disabilities.

We know that short breaks can give families a rest from caring and give children and young people the chance to meet other people and have fun in a safe, friendly environment. It is our vision and priority that all children (disabled and non-disabled) will be able to attend play, leisure, sports, arts and other activities in their local communities. We aim to support organisations and groups offering these services, to ensure that staff are well trained and confident to look after disabled children. When needed, we aim to support individual children to enable them to attend activities of their choice. For those children who require more specialist short break care services, we will do an assessment to ensure that they receive the most suitable services to meet their needs.

6. IMPROVE THE EDUCATION ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Research suggests that looked after children and young people are more likely to have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, to be excluded from school, and to leave school with no qualifications compared with children in the general population. In the Year 11 cohort in 2015 45% were on the Special Needs Register and 21% had a Statement of Educational Needs. Children and young people who are looked after have the same core health needs as other young people, but their backgrounds and experiences are likely to make them particularly vulnerable to poorer health outcomes. Children and young people who have experienced disrupted childhoods and inconsistent or broken attachments with their parents and families are very likely to have mental health problems, and often struggle to make attachments with carers. The effects of separation from birth families on entry into care can also contribute to or accentuate mental health problems.

We will ensure that all looked after children have access to a broad and balanced education, commensurate with their needs and wherever possible, this will be in a mainstream school. Education is considered fully when a change of placement is necessary to ensure there is as little disruption to their learning as possible.

Regular designated teacher forums ensure that these teachers are briefed and trained on relevant issues including attachment and well-being. The progress of looked after children is discussed in every **Team Around the School (TAS)** meeting and under performance is challenged. Challenge Advisers know the names of the looked after children in their schools and discuss their progress with the Headteacher. School Governors are briefed on their responsibilities as part of the Local Authority governor training programme. We will work with partners in Health to ensure that children with emerging emotional and mental health difficulties are supported early, and play an active part in supporting the University Health Board to reshape those services.

In the context described above, it is critical that we take effective action to support looked after children in order to enable them to maximise their potential. We have a dedicated Looked After Children Service in order to improve our focus on outcomes for looked after children. The Operational Manager for the Looked After Children Service works closely with the senior manager in Education with responsibility for looked after children and there are **processes** in place for information sharing, tracking attainment and attendance, rapid responses and joint training. Multi-agency meetings are held monthly, with Children's Service, Education and Health representation. Underperformance of individuals is discussed and actions clearly identified to move issues forward.

Over the last year, there has been an increase in the number of looked after children undertaking university education. There have been no permanent exclusions of looked after children for the past four years and the attendance of looked after children has improved. We have also launched the Traineeship Scheme within the Council, offering work placement opportunities to looked after children and care leavers.

All looked after children have a **Personal Education Plan (PEP)**. The process of completing a high quality PEP has been re-visited and a timeline is now in place with clear responsibilities for different stakeholders. A comprehensive training programme with foster carers, social workers and designated teachers re-visited everyone's role within the process. To further build on this success we are keen to develop a **Virtual School** for looked after children. The Virtual School will be instrumental in gathering data regarding attainment and progress of the looked after cohort from nursery school through to post-16. This will enable the monitoring of the cohort and ensure that the appropriate initiatives are put into place for both the primary and secondary sector. The school will be key in training designated teachers and ensuring schools receive support and advice on subjects such as attachment and the needs of looked after children. The Virtual School tracking system will enable more robust termly tracking of looked after children to ensure there is the earliest possible response and intervention to underachievement. Personal Education Plans will be amended to reflect the intervention that is taken with smart targets that will demonstrate progress when reviewed.



The role of **Achievement Leader** (Closing the Gap) has been established within Education to work closely with the Operational Manager in Children's Services. The focus of their work is solely to oversee the attainment and achievement of looked after children in the authority.

There is a Consortium Plan with key priorities that focus clearly on improving standards achieved by looked after children. This seeks to ensure:

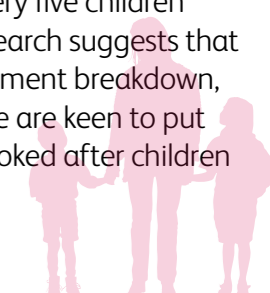
- Strategic oversight of looked after children and their outcomes.
- Children are provided with Personal Education Plan which are monitored and reviewed regularly.
- Provision is in place at the right time and in the right place and in the most efficient and effective way.
- Each Local Authority provision plan is based on the learner voice of the looked after child being heard and reflected upon in the commissioning of effective provision.
- School staff are able to access training and support to be able to identify and provide for the needs of looked after children appropriately.
- Foster Carers and Looked After Children social workers are aware of what works in improving educational outcomes.
- Looked After Children Co-ordinators work together to identify innovation and what works across the region.

Outcomes for looked after children in the Foundation Phase in 2015 are above the Wales average in 2014. At Key Stage 3 and 4 outcomes are just below Wales' national average and at Key Stage 4 Level 2+ threshold outcomes match the Wales average figure. Improving outcomes at all Key Stages remains our focus. We aim to close the gap between the performance of looked after children and the rest of the school children in Cardiff.

7. IMPROVE AND SUPPORT THE EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND MENTAL WELL-BEING OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

We know that there is an increased likelihood that looked after children are more likely to experience emotional and mental health issues than children living with their birth families. It is also true that whilst some young people receive loving and nurturing care from consistent carers others can experience a lack of attention to their emotional needs. Young people can be let down by a system that does not always recognise their behaviour as a sign of distress and fails to provide them with support to develop secure attachments to their carers.

Research undertaken by the NSPCC (June 2015) identifies that looked after children are just over three times more likely to have a behavioural disorder than disadvantaged children and over five times more likely to have a diagnosed mental disorder than non-disadvantaged children. The high rate of behavioural disorders among looked after children is particularly striking, with almost two out of every five children having some kind of diagnosed behavioural disorder. This is a cause for concern as research suggests that children with disruptive and hyperactive behaviours are at particularly high risk of placement breakdown, as their carers can struggle to cope. In partnership with the University Health Board, we are keen to put this right and provide enhanced emotional and mental health well-being support for looked after children and their carers at the earliest opportunity.



The Looked After Children's service within the University Health Board is led by a **Named Doctor for Looked after Children, Adoption and Fostering**. The team develops health services to improve health outcomes and ensure all looked after children have an up-to-date health plan, are up-to-date with childhood immunisations and are registered with a local dentist.

Nationally and locally there is a significant focus on the need to improve support for children and young people with emotional and mental health issues. The Welsh Government has launched a national programme 'Together for Children and Young People' to focus on the whole range of services provided from early intervention through to specialist NHS **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services** (CAMHS). In addition they have released funding to improve services and University Health Board partners are implementing new services and ways of working.

The developments being put in place locally include:

- An early emotional and mental health support service with easy and clear access to a range of supportive therapeutic interventions.
- A Neurodevelopment team to focus on early diagnosis and support for children with difficulties such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
- A transition service for young people aged fourteen to twenty five with early psychosis.
- Improved access to Psychological Therapies in specialist NHS CAMHS for those children with clear mental health issues.
- A crisis intervention and liaison service.

We recognise that we need to develop and maintain a clear mental / emotional health profile of our looked after children, working with our colleagues in Health so that we understand the nature of their mental/emotional health needs in more detail. This will enable us to ensure looked after children have better access to services for their emotional and mental health needs and reduce inequalities in the future.

It is accepted that the key to a stable placement is a young person's emotional health and wellbeing. Significant looked after children have additional emotional and mental health needs which are often not met in a timely manner. In 2014 a significant number of placements broke down, where the young person's poor mental health was considered to be a contributing factor. We also know that in 2014, the directorate engaged independent psychologists, psychiatrists and therapists for assessments and therapeutic interventions for young people and their carers. This evidences a very clear need for a strategic approach to work with our partners in Health and Education to pilot a dedicated emotional health and wellbeing team for looked after children and our carers. The team will work with children, their carers, parents and professionals by undertaking a range of psychological assessments, provide therapeutic interventions, give advice about parenting, child behaviour and development, serious emotional, behavioural and relationship problems, past abuse, trauma and neglect. The focus will be on working out what each individual child needs and enabling that to be incorporated within their overall care plan. The specification for this service will be developed with partners in Education and Health with a view to a pilot commencing in June 2016.



8. PROVIDE YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE WITH APPROPRIATE PREPARATION FOR ADULT LIFE, TAKING ACCOUNT OF ALL OF THEIR NEEDS INCLUDING THEIR WELL BEING

In consultation with young people Children's Services have updated and improved the **Pathway Plan** document and all relevant staff have received best practice training. The revised the pathway plan review process will ensure that pathway plans are formally reviewed.

In partnership with the Housing Department we have created and developed a single point of access for young people's accommodation provision. This demonstrates corporate responsibility for providing suitable housing provision for young people including care leavers.

The council is committed to supporting young people who remain in foster placement post 18 in line with **'When I'm Ready'** guidance. We have made provisions for foster carers to support young people beyond the age of 18 where appropriate.

To reflect our commitment to young people leaving care, Children's Services have increased the **Leaving Care Grant** in line with rising costs associated with setting up their first home.



9. STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The City of Cardiff Council has a **Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee** chaired by the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Children's Services. The central principle of Corporate Parenting is that we should seek for the children in our care the same outcomes that every good parent would want for their own child. This covers their education, health and welfare what they do in leisure time and holidays, how they celebrate their culture and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements. It also extends to providing appropriate support once young people have left care including continued assistance around education, training or employment and emotional and practical support.

The specific role in Corporate Parenting requires all members:

- To be aware of, and to find out about, the basic issues and experiences of looked after children in their area.
- To ensure that the interests of the children come first.
- To set this strategic direction of Council services and determine policy and priorities for their local community within the overall objectives set by the Government.
- To ensure that the Council at all times acts as a good parent in supporting and promoting opportunities for all children and young people who are looked after.
- Actively taking part in visiting and speaking to children and young people and listening to what they say in order to improve services.
- To be aware of and know what the health and housing needs of looked after children are and what specific support is available for when children leave care.

Corporate Parenting is a responsibility for the whole Local Authority including its partner agencies. It is not limited solely to those services targeted at children. Cardiff's approach is for services for children to work together and with partner agencies to bring together areas such as education, health, housing, employment and leisure.

KEY PRINCIPLES

In summary the key principles this strategy will achieve for the children in our care are:

Children and young people are heard by:

- Strengthening the role and effectiveness of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee.
- Ensuring lessons are learnt from the complaints process.
- Ensuring provision of effective advocacy.
- Extending opportunities for looked after children to directly influence policies and strategies.
- Enabling children to make safe and appropriate decisions.

Supporting children in the community more effectively by:

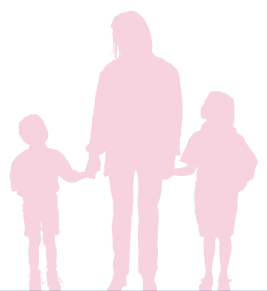
- Close working between Early Intervention and Looked After Children Services to enable more children to remain home.
- Safely reducing the number of looked after children.
- Admitting the right children to care at the right time.
- Liaising with other agencies and partners at an early stage to provide support to families.

Improving the experience of looked after children by:

- Working closely with partner agencies to provide an integrated approach
- Ensuring that there are good quality multi-agency care and support plans for looked after children.
- Promoting permanency through adoption and special guardianship.
- Continuing the promotion of long term placements with connected carers.
- Supporting carers to offer secure and stable placements.
- Continue to improve the choice of high quality in-house placements.
- Effectively manage the use of external residential and independent fostering agency placements.
- Improving services for children with disabilities, including short break care.
- Tailoring services to meet the specific needs of children seeking asylum.
- Ensuring that children's health needs are regularly assessed and acted upon to allow them to lead healthy lives.
- Ensuring that there are good quality Personal Education Plans in place which are reviewed and updated.

Improving the experience of care leavers by:

- Working closely with partner agencies to provide an integrated approach.
- Developing person centred pathway plans.
- Extending the choice and quality of accommodation including the provision of 'When I'm Ready'.
- Providing the opportunities for education, employment and training.
- Strengthening the role of the Personal Advisers.
- Keeping in touch with care leavers and learning from their experiences.



IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Action No.	Action	Responsible	Implementation due date	Progress update	Outcome	RAG Status
1	Implement rapid response service for young people being identified as at risk of becoming looked after due to family breakdown and or family dysfunction.	Operational Manager (OM) Intake & Assessment & Early Intervention, OM Child Protection / Children in Need.	August 2015	A dedicated crisis intervention worker is based within the Intake & Assessment team to respond to all new edge of care assessments.	To ensure that where safe to do so, children are supported at home and family breakdown is prevented.	
2	Commission: Signs of Safety training. Family Group Conferences. Targeted Edge of Care Service.	Assistant Director Children's Services / OM Strategy, Commissioning and Resources.	January – August 2016	A business case for Family Group Conferencing and an Edge of Care service (ARC) have been completed for the Investment Review Board. Signs of Safety plan to be implemented June 2016.	To ensure that we have a range of services and approaches to better support children and families and offer a better alternative to care.	
3	Implement an outcomes based performance management framework to achieve better outcomes for looked after children accessing services within the Integrated Family Support Team (IFST), Families First, Youth Service, Housing and Flying Start services.	OM Looked After Children, OM for Achievement and Inclusion	April 2016		To ensure that the councils core preventative services for children all work together to support children living at home where it is safe to do so.	
4	Achieve effective control over the number of children entering the looked after system without a plan of permanence by strengthening the role of legal surgery.	OM Child Protection / Children in Need.	November 2015		To ensure there are no delays in care planning for children	
5	Continue to develop the pool of in-house foster carers in order to ensure that Cardiff children remain in Cardiff; the Looked After Children Service will play a key role in supporting the Fostering Service in order to attract new foster carers.	OM Strategy, Commissioning and Resources / OM Looked After Children.	April 2016		To provide looked after children with placements in Cardiff	

Action No.	Action	Responsible	Implementation due date	Progress update	Outcome	RAG Status
6	Develop a Virtual School for Looked After Children. The Virtual School will be instrumental in gathering data regarding attainment and progress of the Looked After cohort from nursery school through to post 16 in order to improve attainment of looked after children.	OM for Achievement and Inclusion Leader / OM Looked After Children.	June 2016		To ensure that educational needs of looked after children remain a priority and address any difficulties when it is known that a child is at risk of not achieving his/her education/attainment potential	
7	Develop and maintain a clear mental / emotional health profile of our looked after children so that we understand their mental / emotional health needs in more detail; this will enable us to effectively engage with Health in order for looked after children to have better access to services for their emotional and mental health needs and reduce inequalities in the future	OM Looked After Children, Head of Operations and Delivery, Community Child Health	June 2016		To ensure that emotional needs of looked after children are understood and met by adopting a strategic approach to commissioning emotional wellbeing services for looked after children	
8	Increase the number of kinship arrangements (from 21 kinship carers at 30.06.15)	OM Strategy, Commissioning and Resources / Education Achievement Leader	August 2016		To ensure that there possible, children are placed with members of their family who have been assessed and approved by the local authority	
9	Increase number of discharge applications to reduce number of Placements with Parents arrangements from 52 at 30.06.15 to 32 at 31.07.16	OM Looked After Children / OM Child Protection / Children in Need.	August 2016		To ensure that children do not remain subject to unnecessary Orders	



Looked After Children

Looking after children & young people

Looking After You

Cardiff pledges to listen to children and young people's feelings and worries and to ensure you have clear information:

- We will make sure you have a Care and Support Plan which is all about you and what you need to succeed.
- We will make sure that you have a qualified social worker who will listen to you, respect you and make sure you have a voice.
- Your social worker will visit you at home and make sure that you are happy and safe.
- Your social worker will not change unless there is an unavoidable need. Your social worker will get to know you and understand your needs.

Being in Care/Finding the Right Place for You

Cardiff pledges that you will have a home where you feel safe, loved and cared for:

- Do everything possible to provide you with a loving, secure and stable home.
- If it is part of your care plan for you to go back home we will make sure this happens as quickly and as safely as possible.
- If you can't go home we will find the right place for you.
- We will help you keep in touch with your birth family wherever possible. If it's not possible we'll tell you why.

Involving You/Giving You a Voice

Cardiff pledges that you are able to have a voice and are listened to:

- You will be consulted on all decisions about your care so that you are kept fully informed of your Care and Support Plan.
- You will be informed as soon as possible if there are any changes to your Care and Support Plan.
- Your social worker will encourage you and support you to be involved in decision making about your life, as much as possible.
- We will help you have your say and support you if you are not happy with any aspect of your care and wish to make a complaint.

Treating You Right

Cardiff pledges that it will treat you with respect and value your wishes and feelings:

- We won't talk about you to other people where it's none of their business - unless we need to, to keep you or others safe.
- We will always listen to you and treat you with respect.
- We will explain things in a way that you understand so that you can be fully involved in your care and decisions made about you.

Signature

Getting a good education

Cardiff pledges to help you succeed in school and ensure you have a good education:

- We will make sure that you have a nursery, school or training place.
- We will make sure that you don't have to change schools wherever possible, especially in years 10 and 11.
- You will have a designated teacher who will get to know you and make sure you are ok - but you won't be treated any differently to other children and young people.
- We will make sure that you don't miss school because of meetings or appointments.
- We will listen to you if you are not happy in school and we will talk to teachers on your behalf if you need us to.
- We will make sure that you are involved in your Personal Education Plan and you know what is expected of you and the school to succeed.
- We will make sure that everyone works together to make sure you succeed in school.
- We will support you to make choices about your education with the priority that you feel happy, supported and able to achieve.

Making sure you are health and happy

Cardiff pledges to help you lead a healthy lifestyle and make sure that your health needs are met:

- We will make show you ways to be healthy and happy.
- We will make sure you attend health, dental and optician appointments.
- We will make sure that you are able to attend hobbies and enjoy activities with your friends.
- We'll help you find out about activities that are on so that you can get involved
- We will make sure you can keep going to activities you are involved in if you move placement.

Helping You Get on in Life

Cardiff pledges that on leaving care children and young people will have the right support and life skills to be able to live successfully and independently:

- We will give you help to move on with your life when the time is right and we will support in your new home where you can live and learn and reach your full potential.
- If you can't live on your own when you are 18 we will make sure you have choices and support for you after 18.
- We will help you if you want to continue your education, training or employment.

"I'm really enjoying my LAC Traineeship"



