

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES STATEMENT

AGENDA ITEM: 12

It gives me great pleasure to be able to make my second statement as cabinet member with responsibility for Children's Services.

I am pleased and encouraged with the commitment and dedication I have witnessed during my visits and discussions with staff, our partner organisations and service users. Social Workers are working under incredible pressure in the face of high demand for services and in the context of some high profile and far reaching complex cases.

The number of looked after children has increased from 690 at 31st December 2016 to 756 at 30th June 2017. An independent review of decision making for children who were accommodated in May and June has been undertaken which demonstrated that each and every case provides compelling reasons why there was no choice but to accommodate the children and, where age appropriate, care proceedings have been initiated.

The service continues to experience relentless demand arising from increasingly complex child protection investigations, including complex and organised abuse affecting multiple children. The rising demand and increased complexity is a consistent trend across Wales and the UK.

The early help front door (which will enable referrers to have greater understanding of current prevention and intervention services and their accessibility prior to contacting statutory services) and Signs of Safety will help in the longer term, but will not provide a quick fix to the immediate pressures. The Adolescent Resource Centre (ARC) became operational on 1st April 2017. The intended impact is to prevent the accommodation of teenagers on the edge of care and thus divert expenditure away from costly fostering / residential placements for looked after children to less costly preventative interventions. The impact of the ARC is already being seen with 7 young people on the edge of care prevented from being accommodated at an estimated cost saving of £144,700.

It is easy to view the rise in the number of looked after children negatively – it signals a failure in the overall effectiveness of wider social systems across communities and impacts adversely on our overall pressures. It is costly both financially for the Council and emotionally for the children and families at the centre of the decision-making process. However, it is important that the admission of these children into public care is recognised as the consequence

of effective safeguarding practice and as such, understood as a success because children are safe as a result.

The Agile Mobile Working project is now complete and has mobilised around 640 Social Services staff. The critical success factors of the project have been the ability to vacate / relocate staff and close buildings. This, along with the associated benefits including reduced carbon footprint, should be viewed as the primary benefit of agile working at present. Feedback from social workers has provided valuable insight into the benefits and issues with agile working. Positive feedback from a staff survey included: *“More time to complete recordings and paperwork = less stress”* and *“This has definitely had an effect on people’s health and well-being which in turn increases productivity and performance”*.

The In-House Fostering Recruitment Campaign has been refreshed - the ‘Count Yourself In’ Campaign was launched in February 2017 and attempts to attract people who may think they cannot foster. For example, single people, same sex couples and people with a disability. 100 runners will be running the Cardiff Half Marathon on 1st October to raise awareness for Fostering for Cardiff. Members can help to promote the campaign by sharing the link to the Cardiff Cares website <http://fostercarecardiff.co.uk/>.

Recruitment and retention of social workers continues to be a challenge for Children’s Services. Actions are being taken to refresh the recruitment campaign to address this situation, nevertheless, the underlying factors affecting recruitment and retention in children’s social work remain a challenge across the UK.

It is important that the positive progress the service has made in the following areas is not undermined in the face of increased pressure:

- A positive inspection for Children’s Services & Youth Offending Service
- A wholesale, three phase restructure of the service
- The introduction of MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub –The development of a comprehensive Early Help Strategy that is embraced by all partners and integrated with the wider Children’s Services change programme
- A refresh of our partnership working, placing Children’s Services at the leadership centre for the first time
- The pioneering of agile and mobile working in a very short timeframe and at scale within the Council
- The development of an integrated multi-agency Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Prepare the service for the implementation of The Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014; (April 2015)
- Kick-start a wholesale re-modelling of social work delivery and practice
- Leading a regional partnership programme of service re-engineering for children and adults with complex needs
- The development and launch of a high impact CSE Strategy;
- A range of asset disposals and re-provision across several service areas

- The implementation and refresh of a successful recruitment and retention strategy

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