

COUNCIL: 27 SEPTEMBER 2018

CHILDREN & FAMILIES STATEMENT

Whilst demand for high intensive support remains high within Children's Services, I continue to remain impressed with the ongoing service development, together with dedication and commitment from staff. I want to provide a brief update for Members on current developments in respect of creating more care placements within Cardiff and bring to your attention the ongoing rising demand upon the service.

Residential Placements

There are currently 63 children placed in residential homes, of these 12 children are placed within Cardiff and 51 are placed out of area/County. Children's Services currently own and run one home in Cardiff, Crosslands. However, officers are actively working to create additional residential capacity within Cardiff by working with the independent sector and supporting them to establish provision locally. As a result, a new children's home has been opened by an independent provider for Cardiff children, and another provider has purchased a property and is working with the council to have this registered as a children's home. In addition, the service is working closely with colleagues within Communities and Housing to explore purchasing properties in the city and commissioning independent providers to deliver a children's home provision.

Fostering

The service has also embarked upon a wholesale review of the fostering service. At this early stage the service will work towards the following three main phases:

- the development of the Fostering Services Business Model for Cardiff;
- the development of a Fostering Services offer for the marketing, recruitment, support and development of Foster Carers; and
- a review of the current Fostering Services structure in Cardiff to support the implementation and delivery of the new business model.

Benefits of the new model include:

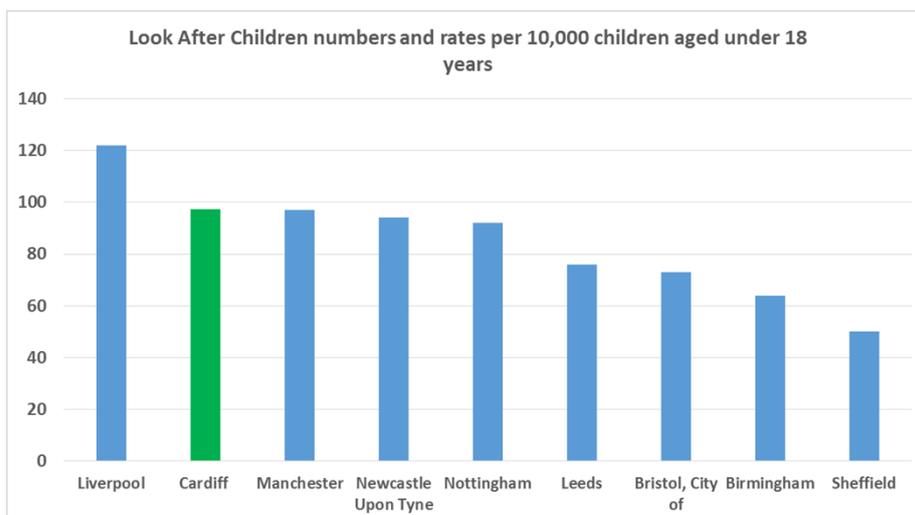
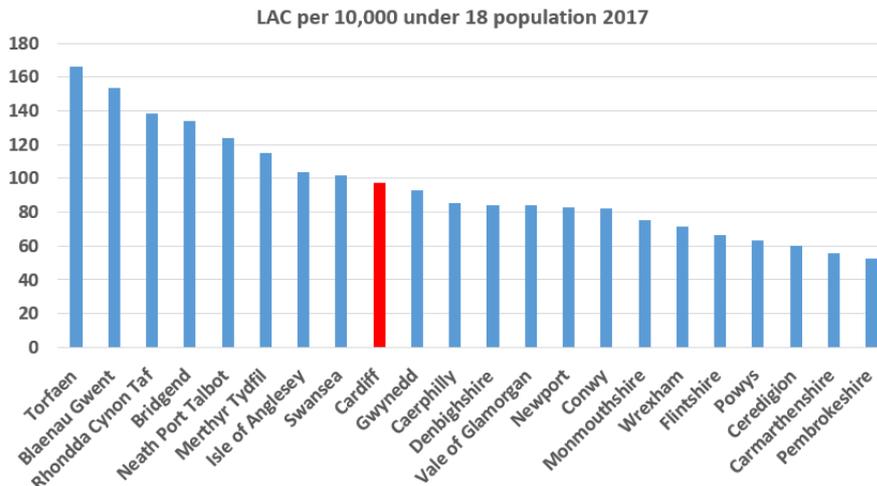
- increasing the number of children who can be placed in Cardiff;
- the continuity of schooling (where appropriate) after being looked after or a placement breakdown; and
- reducing the reliance on residential placements, where a child's needs can be met in foster care (with potential additional wrap around support).

This is work in progress and I look forward to updating Members on this in the near future.

Increased Demand for Services

During Quarter 1 of 2018/19, the number of open looked after children cases continued to rise, representing a 29% increase in demand over two years. However, Cardiff's level of demand is proportionately in line with the trend across Wales, as well as throughout the Core Cities. The number of contacts and referrals received by Children's Services has also increased by 16.3% in Quarter 1, compared to the previous quarter.

Performance in respect of timely wellbeing assessments has declined since Quarter 4 of 2017/18, reflecting the increase in the number of assessments completed. This is in the context of a 10% increase in the number of contacts requiring assessment. The number of wellbeing assessments that were incomplete at the end of Quarter 1 was 330 down from 401 in Quarter 4, of which 34 and 60 respectively were out of time. Close monitoring will continue to be undertaken in Quarter 2 to attempt to limit the impact of the increase in demand on timeliness of completion. Whilst the number of looked after children has increased, Cardiff is not an outlier in comparison to other Welsh Local authorities and other UK core cities:



The rising demand that Children's Services are experiencing is consistent with the national trend across Wales.

Children's Services in Wales

This month, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), in partnership with the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Cymru, issued a position statement on the state of Children's Services across Wales. The key messages in this statement further reinforce the pressures that I have previously brought to the attention of Members:

- **Over the last decade the number of children in the care system in Wales has increased significantly.** The reasons why children become looked after and their needs while in the care system are complex and multifactorial.
- **Recent years have seen an increase in expenditure on Children's Services at a time when Councils overall budgets have been cut.** This demonstrates the commitment that has been made by local authorities to meet the demands being placed on services by the rising numbers of looked after children. However, this is becoming unsustainable, with most local authorities now anticipating significant overspends on their children's services.
- **Services for the care and protection of vulnerable children are now, in many areas, being pushed to breaking point.** The huge financial pressures councils are under, coupled with the spike in demand for child protection support, mean that the limited money councils have available is increasingly being taken up with the provision of urgent help for children and families already at crisis point, leaving very little to invest in early intervention. Hence a spiral of uninterrupted and increasing need for services is driving a mounting complexity of challenges for the most vulnerable children.

WLGA and ADSS Cymru have identified four key areas where significant pressures are being experienced in relation to children's services in Wales:

1. External demands and complexities

The on-going introduction of welfare reforms and a decade of austerity has amplified the pressures on families. Increased public awareness and reporting of potential abuse, the impact of poverty and deprivation on families and a lack of funding to help families early on before problems escalate all contribute to this. There is an increased awareness and understanding of issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and an increase in the number of initiatives that are aimed at early identification and intervention such as the evidence based work in respect of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Flying Start and Families First.

2. Placements

The increasing complexity of cases and the growing numbers of children coming into care are negatively impacting on both the availability of appropriate placements and the cost of placements. An ageing foster carer population and the increasing costs of providing residential care have a significant impact on the sector.

3. Legislation and work with the Courts

The last few years have seen a substantial increase in the number of care applications that have been made, with a significant increase in the number of children subject to care proceedings. Increasing expectations from legal judgements create a challenging environment.

4. Workforce

Child and family social work is challenged by high turnover and vacancy rates and a reliance on agency staff, with demand for permanent, experienced workers outstripping supply.

Councillor Graham Hinchey
Cabinet Member for Children & Families
21st September 2018