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AGENDA

Committee CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date and Time of Meeting TUESDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2023, 4.30 PM

Venue CR 4, COUNTY HALL - MULTI LOCATION MEETING

Membership Councillor Lee Bridgeman (Chair)
Councillors Ahmed, Boes, Davies, Ferguson-Thorne, Hopkins,
Melbourne, Moultrie and Simmons

Bridgid Corr (Parent Governor Representative), Celeste Lewis (Parent Governor Representative), Carol Cobert (Church in Wales Representative) and Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative)

Time approx.

- | | | |
|----------|--|---------|
| 1 | Apologies for Absence | 4.30 pm |
| | To receive apologies for absence. | |
| 2 | Declarations of Interest | |
| | To be made at the start of the agenda item in question, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct. | |
| 3 | Minutes (<i>Pages 3 - 10</i>) | |
| | To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023. | |
| 4 | Children's Services 2023/24 Performance Report - Quarter 2
(<i>Pages 11 - 36</i>) | 4.35 pm |
| | For Members to consider the Q2 Performance Report | |
| 5 | Education/Schools Post-Pandemic Recovery Update (<i>Pages 37 - 40</i>) | 5.30 pm |
| | For Members to receive an update on Schools Pandemic Recovery. | |
| 6 | Committee Business (<i>Pages 41 - 146</i>) | 6.40 pm |

For Members to receive updates on a range of Committee related matters.

7 Way Forward

To review the evidence and information gathered during consideration of each item and agree Members comments, observations and concerns to be passed on to the relevant Cabinet Member by the Chair.

8 Urgent Items (if any)

9 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting of the Committee is on Tuesday 9 January 2024 at 4.30 pm.

D Marles

Interim Monitoring Officer

Date: Wednesday, 29 November 2023

Contact: Michele Chesterman, Michele.chesterman@cardiff.gov.uk,

Tel: 02920 873606

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor Bridgeman(Chairperson)
Councillors Boes, Davies, Ferguson-Thorne, Hopkins,
Melbourne, Moultrie and Simmons

Co-opted Members: Carol Cobert (Church in Wales
Representative), Bridgid Corr (Parent Governor Representative),
Celeste Lewis (Parent Governor Representative)

Emily Gao (Youth Council Representative)

28 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Saleh Ahmed and Patricia Arlotte
(Roman Catholic Church representative)

29 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

30 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings on the 17 October 2023 were approved as a correct
record of the meeting with the inclusion of Cllr Melbourne as being in attendance and
signed by the Chairperson

31 : YOUTH SERVICES

Members were advised that this item would allow them to undertake pre-decision
scrutiny on Achieving a Sustainable Youth Work Offer for Cardiff, which would be
considered by Cabinet on 23 November 2023.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Peter Bradbury (Cabinet Member for Tackling
Poverty, Equality & Public Health), Melanie Godfrey (Director of Education and
Lifelong Learning), Susanne Scarlett (Partnerships & Performance Manager,
Education & Lifelong Learning); and James Healan (Youth Service Manager,
Education & Lifelong Learning).

Councillor Bradbury was invited to make a statement. He drew Members' attention to
paragraphs 31-44 of the report which contained information on the outline proposals
for change; the vision and operating model, details on what each of the locality teams
would offer and the key principles underpinning the proposed operating model.

Members were appreciative of the considerable amount of work carried out prior to
them receiving the report and heard how it was the accumulation of an independent
review and appraisal by Education Department and work with stakeholders,
communities, members of the Authority, young people and the workforce of the youth
services.

Members were informed the intention was to strengthen the Cardiff youth service offer and to achieve a sustainable, impactful, high quality Youth Work Offer in the city, with strong locality teams at the core, to respond to the unique needs of the individual communities that they served.

The locality teams would be sited in the areas of highest deprivation, building on the existing Cardiff Youth Service offer and would work closely with wider service for young people in their areas.

It was highlighted that the focus was on the service becoming more resilient, flexible and placed on a more agile footing. The move to a locality model, service improvement and change with a clear focus on community would enable the service to more closely align with its communities and schools which was much needed in terms of the impact of COVID around attendance, work with the most vulnerable children and those at risk of disengagement. There had also been the introduction of a better governance and accountability framework and strengthened leadership. An emphasis had been given to the development of the workforce, ensuring staff were valued and had the opportunity to progress. The goal was also to be more ambitious with the curriculum and how it related to the curriculum for Wales.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

- Members asked what steps were being taken to ensure there were sufficient youth workers in Cardiff. Officers responded that a considerable amount of time had been spent over the last year understanding the demands and needs of individual communities and also the other services that existed including the schools that operated in those communities. There was more work to be done, however, in scoping the exact operating model to meet the needs of individual communities.
- Members enquired as to what measures were being taken to ensure youth workers received the support and development opportunities they required to carry out their role effectively. Officers responded that youth workers were given the opportunity to progress and develop and attain the qualifications and accreditation required for the level of their role. Relationships had also been established with educational establishments and supporting fieldwork placements with Cardiff Metropolitan University. In terms of preparing the future workforce there was also a range of trainee and apprenticeship opportunities. In addition, a Youth Service Workforce Development Officer post had been advertised.
- Members asked if there was an opportunity for youth workers to train through the medium of Welsh and to obtain their qualifications in Welsh. Officers responded that this opportunity was available for any officer in Cardiff. Members supported and approved the move towards accredited and professional development opportunities across the workforce and parity of these opportunities available through the Welsh medium.

- Members asked for clarification on the role of Youth Action Groups. Officers responded that the Youth Action Groups would be working with qualified youth workers to see what, if anything, could be done to provide support to the community which included providing support to youth workers. The Youth Action Group ensured there was a level of scrutiny and youth workers were equipped with the tools to deliver good outcomes in communities. The inclusion of Youth Action Groups and young people themselves in developing this service was welcomed by Members.
- Members asked about the lead in time for when the work began, if it could have been shortened, whether it could have been delivered more efficiently in a shorter time and also if there was anything in last year's review that got anything wrong. In response it was felt that the timescale was reasonable and that the independent reviewer had carried out the review in a thorough manner. This was seen as the start of a process that would radically change how youth work was viewed in the city. It was also believed that the report was fair, there had already been operational changes put in place and the next stage would result in valuable changes in the community.
- Members referred to the Locality model and asked whether that meant the Council was concentrating more on breadth or depth. Officers responded that the Locality model would cover and add depth and breadth where resources allowed. Members were directed to paragraph 42 of the report which highlighted the changes in the existing model of provision in terms of breadth and depth. These included street-based youth work, emotional health and well-being, inclusion, active involvement and post 16.
- Members discussed the review highlighting the fact that over 50% of the funding was external and whether the aim was to maintain and build those partnerships or access more Council funding. Officers responded that the goal was for a sustainable youth work offer and this could not be reliant on one source of funding. There was a responsibility placed on Cardiff Youth Service to ensure the flexibility of the service was extended. The service had its own revenue grant and also operating in communities had access to third sector provision as well as external funding. Part of the model included optimising resources by developing robust partnerships.
- Members asked if there was a dedicated officer responsible for seeking out partnerships. The Partnership & Performance Manager, Education & Lifelong Learning responded that it was part of their role to source partnerships. In addition, within a local youth service context, the expectation was that each senior youth officer was charged with forming partnerships and youth action groups. Members noted that there was a commitment to ensure that all of the senior youth service officers in the Council were equipped with the right skills and optimum level of partnership working to achieve the same level
- Councillors referred to a recent article in the Observer newspaper, the second annual Youth Endowment Fund report, analysing young people's experience of violence which referred to shocking and unacceptable levels of experiences of youth violence in England and Wales. It was agreed that investing in youth

services was investing to save. Members noted that the report referred to short term action over the course of the next year or so relating to the establishment of Locality Teams and referred to working on a medium-term approach with adolescents and how it would all come together. Officers were asked whether there were decisions that needed to be made over the shorter term that would have implications over the longer term and the impacts on decision making.

- Officers responded that in terms of the short-term action plan it had been agreed that there was a need to ensure that youth work was strengthened and placed on a resilient and firm footing and deployed in the areas with most impact. It was a case of looking at the budget and the resources available to the youth service, the unique selling point of youth work and aligning it with the national strategy around youth work and making the best use of resources. Some of the decisions taken had responded to issues around violence and safeguarding and work had taken place with the Home Office, Neighbourhood Policing, the Safer Communities Partnership and Youth Justice making sure services were being corralled where they were needed most. Officers noted that the short term was within the control of the youth service as it was youth work and the model needed to be put in place so that it was strong and resilient prior to looking at the broader strategy for youth work.
- Members noted that the longer strategy for youth work included community focussed schools, safe places to operate, spaces for young people to call their own and engage in activities they could access. All of this needed to be brought together with a service comprising a skilled workforce. Whilst it was recognised there were other services for young people in the city, the longer-term Council ambition was to make sure services were better integrated. A wide range of services for young people were commissioned and offered and it was felt these should be better integrated so that youth work was one part of a much bigger provision. Members were proud of the role youth work would play in the bigger network of provision and would like to see youth work at the heart of it. Youth work was seen as forming the trusted relationships with young people and being better able to direct and support other organisations to make those connections.
- Members referred to the presentation on Fairwater Campus at the October Committee meeting which had a heavy emphasis on its community brief. Members enquired whether that was seen as a model for all school sites to adopt in their communities in the future and whether youth work was seen as an integral part of a community focussed school. Officers responded that the relationship between youth work and schools needed to be strengthened. Attempts were being made to ensure that across all schools had a youth work presence. However, although it was intended to employ youth workers in all secondary schools in Cardiff in terms of youth work spaces, whilst embracing community focussed schools, alternative spaces were also being sought in leisure centres, scout halls for instance, and wherever was felt best represented the needs of young people in the community.

- Members enquired if there were links with places of worship across the whole faith. Officers responded that Youth Action Groups were at the forefront in terms of bringing people together on a locality basis and were inclusive. Faith-based membership groups and active church based groups were in place in the city. Officers welcomed any further dialogue with faith-based settings but they did exist as partners within the Youth Action Groups.
- Members referred to the plans to remain agile and resilient and asked if more detail could be provided in consideration of the long term trends over the next 5-10 years in terms of plans, how agile this plan would be and the contribution of the Performance and Governance Team. Officers responded that the Performance and Governance Team would carry out a range of functions across the service to make it more accountable and transparent, as well as case-related work to identify individuals, monitor trends, outputs and outcomes etc. It was noted, for example, that consultation had taken place during the summer of 2022 with young people living in Cardiff where it was identified that young people wanted education around exploitation. An education programme was sought out to be delivered by schools – VR Gangs. It was planned to deliver the training in the coming year as a pilot with the support of Community Safety. This was provided to Members as an example of identifying an evidential base for young people and reacting to that by delivering a programme brief that met the curriculum need.
- Members referred to the changes to existing models of practice where locality teams would be expected to deliver inclusive practice. Officers were asked how this would be carried out given that inclusivity was not homogenous with every strand being different and how it would be possible to demonstrate and measure true inclusivity, specifically in terms of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) provision or for those who were undiagnosed neuro divergent and steps taken to ensure they would be included in the work of the service. Officers responded that the Authority had a range of bespoke provision that met different needs. Members noted that officers had been approached by the Western Learning Federation who were keen to support the Youth Service going forwards in the longer-term strategy examining how the service could be adapted and extended to work with young people who attended specialist services in the city. Council representatives were also committed to meet with any group who felt that the provision was not being met.
- Members asked if there were programmes in place to tackle mental health and to empower young people to talk through their issues, including any work done specifically with males. Officers responded that there was an ingrained support mechanism for young people struggling with emotional, health and well-being issues. There were specific groups around emotional mental health and well-being with a Wellbeing Club in St Mellons and another in North Ely. Youth mentoring was available and primary referrals around emotional health and well-being offered on a one-to-one basis. The aim was to create a culture that was open and inclusive.

- Members also asked if there was any provision for primary aged children who struggled with their mental health. Officers responded that transitions in young peoples' lives were very important and especially around the transition from primary to secondary school. The Youth Service covered the age range from 11-25 but also had a play service. Members were informed that the Service looked at year 6 transition to youth services but the long-term view was integrating those services to ensure continuity.
- Members asked what allowances were made for the chronic under reporting of crime and anti-social behaviour. Members were informed that the street-based teams worked closely in partnership with Community Safety Team and the police to get 'harder to reach' young people involved in more structured activities where anti-social behaviour was identified.
- Members noted that the Service was in the early stages of a piece of work with the Home Office and asked for further information. Officers assured the Committee that the output from this study could be brought to a future scrutiny committee meeting.
- Members of the Committee agreed that they would wish to undertake a range of visits to youth centres and any other appropriate sites felt to be appropriate.
- Members welcomed the news that the Service was taking forward the recommendations of the review completed in 2022, and asked whether they could be provided with a "You said, we did" document arising from the review.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations captured during the way forward.

32 : YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE UPDATE

Alison Jones, (Scrutiny Officer) provided Members with a summary of the Youth Justice Service Update.

Members' attention was drawn to the main information set out in Appendix A to the scrutiny cover report which highlighted progress on the future of the remand grant, the response to the National Standards self-audit of court work, Cardiff's Sustainability Action Plan to support its application to be a Child Friendly City. There were also updates from Angharad Thomas (Operational Manager, Youth Justice Service) on Youth Justice Service progress which included staffing, project updates, activity programme, summer programme, Intervention and information on performance and KPIs. Education data and inclusions were not covered in the response due to staffing issues and they would be provided at the next meeting.

Members were informed that the Independent Chair of the Board would be invited to attend the next meeting.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

- In discussing the report Members felt there were some positives in the update but there were some questions that arose from the information on staffing and it felt it would be helpful to receive clarification on the impact on the service and continuity provision.
- Members also enquired how the Youth Justice Service was involved in the work to review the Youth Service.
- Members noted that on the figures given for involvement in Summer Activities there was some data on more take up but not on data on children who could benefit from the programme.
- Members noted the references in the update to giving priority to encouraging more engagement and asked for more insight into what that might involve.
- Members were keen to know and find out about the links between neuro divergent and criminal youth justice and how the service was supporting people entering the system with undiagnosed neuro diversity.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations captured during the way forward.

33 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None.

34 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note the date of the next meeting of the Committee is 5 December 2023.

The meeting terminated at 6.23 pm

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**CYNGOR CAERDYDD
CARDIFF COUNCIL****CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****5 DECEMBER 2023**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE 2023/24

Reasons for the Report

1. The Cabinet Member responsible for Children's Services will introduce the Quarter 2 2023/24 performance report for Children's Services. This report will enable the Committee to assess the progress being made in improving outcomes for children in need and children looked after.

Performance reporting

2. The range of performance data relating to Children's Services is contained in **Appendix A** to this report. The following data is reported on:
 - Demand - Contact / Referrals to Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and on Open Cases
 - Demand - Well-being Assessments completed within 42 working days
 - Demand - Section 47 Assessments completed within 10 working days
 - Number of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR), registrations and de-registrations
 - Looked After Starts, Ends and Total Number of Children Looked After
 - Number of children and young people receiving Care and Support
 - Number of care leavers over time by age, open to the Personal Adviser team
3. In line with the Children's Services Strategy Strands of Shifting the Balance - Place, People and Practice, the data is then categorised as follows:

- ***Shifting the Balance – Place - Ensuring a range of support in the community and a variety of homes for children are available in Cardiff***
 - Total Children Looked After (CLA) by Placement Type – as at 31st March 2016
 - Total CLA by Placement Type – as at 30th September 2023
 - Placement Location as at 30th June 2022
 - Placement Location as at 30th September 2023
 - Number of Children Returned Home from Care
 - Accommodation Strategy / Fostering Update – narrative

- ***Shifting the Balance – People - Supporting a permanent workforce***
 - Percentage of Social Worker Vacancies in all Teams
 - Net Result of Social Workers Starting and Leaving
 - Sickness Update
 - Workforce Strategy Update – narrative

- ***Shifting the Balance – Practice - Developing our practice and procedures***
 - Interventions Hub - Outcomes following intervention at Adolescent Resource Centre (ARC)
 - Interventions Hub - Outcomes following intervention from Think Safe!
 - Reviewing Hub - Step downs following Care and Support Plan (CASP) Review
 - Reviewing Hub - Safeguarding procedures to be considered
 - Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences on Time
 - Percentage of Initial Core Group Meetings on Time
 - Percentage of Child Protection Review Conferences on Time
 - Percentage of Child Looked After Reviews on Time
 - Percentage of Visits to Children on the CPR On Time
 - Percentage of Statutory Visits to CLA On Time
 - Percentage of Visits to CASP On Time
 - Child Protection Plans in Place

- Children looked after plans in place within 10 working days of start of being looked after
- Care and Support Plans in Place
- Pathway Plans in Place Within 3 Months of Becoming Eligible
- Child Protection Allocations
- Child Looked After Allocations
- Care and Support Allocations
- Personal Advisor Allocation
- Percentage of care leavers in categories 2, 3 and 4 who have completed at least 3 consecutive months of education, employment or training in the 12 months since leaving care
- Percentage of care leavers in categories 2, 3 and 4 who have completed at least 3 consecutive months of education, employment or training in the 13-24 months since leaving care
- Operating / Practice Model / Quality Assurance Update
- Youth Justice Service (YJS) - Number of First Time Entrants into the Youth Justice System
- YJS - Percentage of Children Re-offending Within 6 Months of their Previous Offence
- YJS - Number of Young People in Receipt of a Prevention Service from the Youth Justice Service
- YJS - Percentage of Children with an Order Ending During the Period Who Were Living In Suitable Accommodation
- YJS - Percentage of Children with an Order Ending During the Period Who Were in Suitable Education, Training or Employment
- YJS - Percentage of Children with an Order Ending During the Period Who Had an Identified Special Education Need and Disability (SEND) / Additional Learning Need (ALN)

Scope of Scrutiny

4. The scope of the scrutiny of this report is for the Committee Members to review the information provided to the Committee in **Appendix A** and to provide any comments, concerns or recommendations to the Cabinet Member.

Way Forward

5. At this meeting, Councillor Ash Lister (Cabinet Member for Social Services (Children's)); and Deborah Driffield (Director of Children's Services) will be in attendance to answer any questions Members may wish to ask.
6. Members may wish to review the information presented at the meeting and determine whether there are any comments, concerns or recommendations which they would like to pass on to the Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services.

Legal Implications

7. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

Financial Implications

8. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. These financial implications will need to be considered before any changes are implemented.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to review the information provided in the report, **Appendix A** and at the meeting and provide any comments, concerns or recommendations to the Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services.

Leanne Weston

Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer

29 November 2023

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Children's Services Performance Report

Quarter 2 2023/24

Our Vision

Children in Cardiff are provided with the right support, from the right person at the right time, in the right place and at the lowest safe level of intervention, enabling them to remain with their family where it is safe for them to do so and achieve their full potential.

#KeepingFamiliesTogether

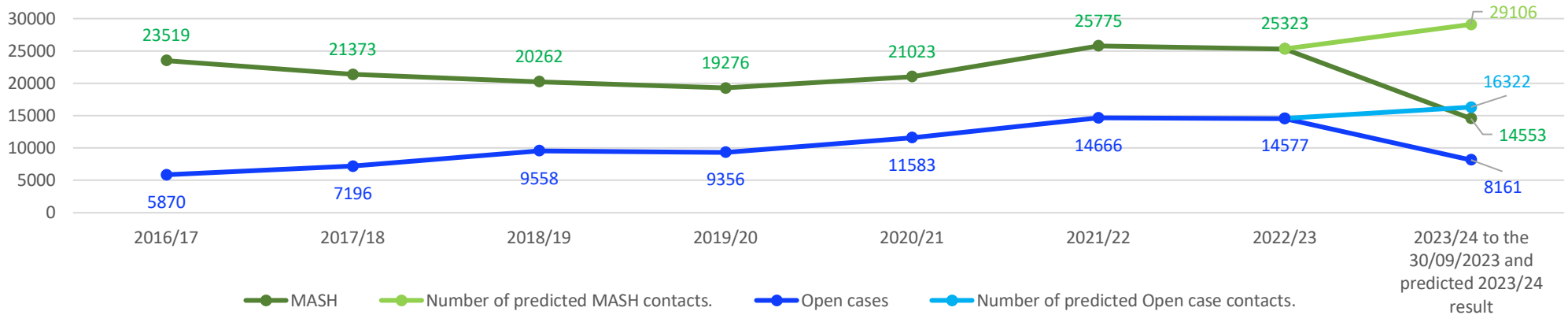


#GweithioDrosGaerdydd
#GweithioDrosochChi

#WorkingForCardiff
#WorkingForYou

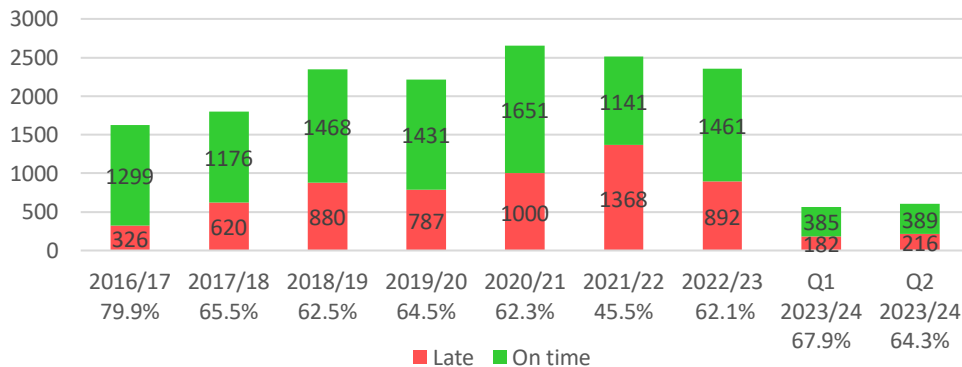
Demand

Contact / Referrals to Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and on Open Cases



The graph above shows the increase in contacts / referrals to Children’s Services since 2019/20, peaking during 2021/22. Although lower than 2021/22, the number of contacts and referrals remained high and the pressures on the service continued during 2022/23. The change in trend since 2016/17 is due to the agreement that all safeguarding concerns on open cases need to be referred via the front door. During Quarter 2 2023/24 MASH received 7,365 contacts compared to 6,278 during Quarter 2 last year. Similarly, contacts on open cases have increased to 4,193 during Quarter 2 compared to 3,306 during Quarter 2 last year. Based on these figures the predicted contacts for the year are shown in the graph above and are projected to exceed last year’s volume and that of 2021/22.

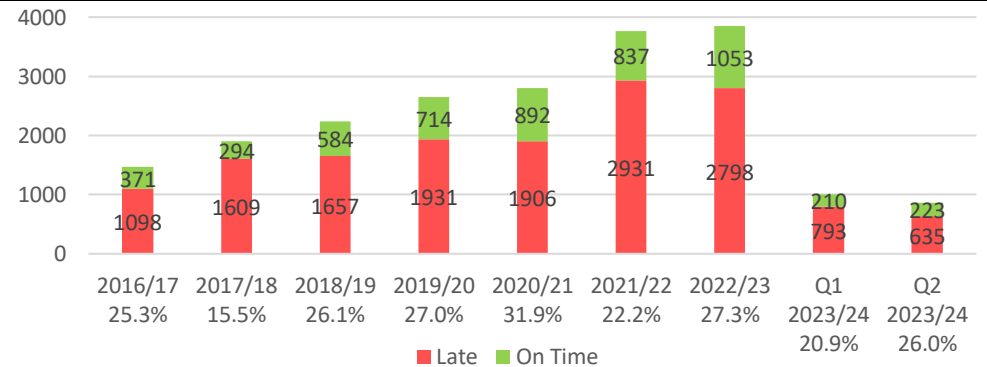
Well-being Assessments



64.3% (389 / 605) of well-being assessments were completed within 42 working days during Quarter 2 2023/24 compared to 67.9% (385 / 567) during Quarter 1.

Well-being assessments were an average 22 working days overdue compared to 43 working days in Quarter 1 2023/24.

Section 47 Assessments



26.0% (223 / 858) of Section 47s were completed within 10 working days during Quarter 2 2023/24 compared with 28.4% (210 / 1,003) in Quarter 1.

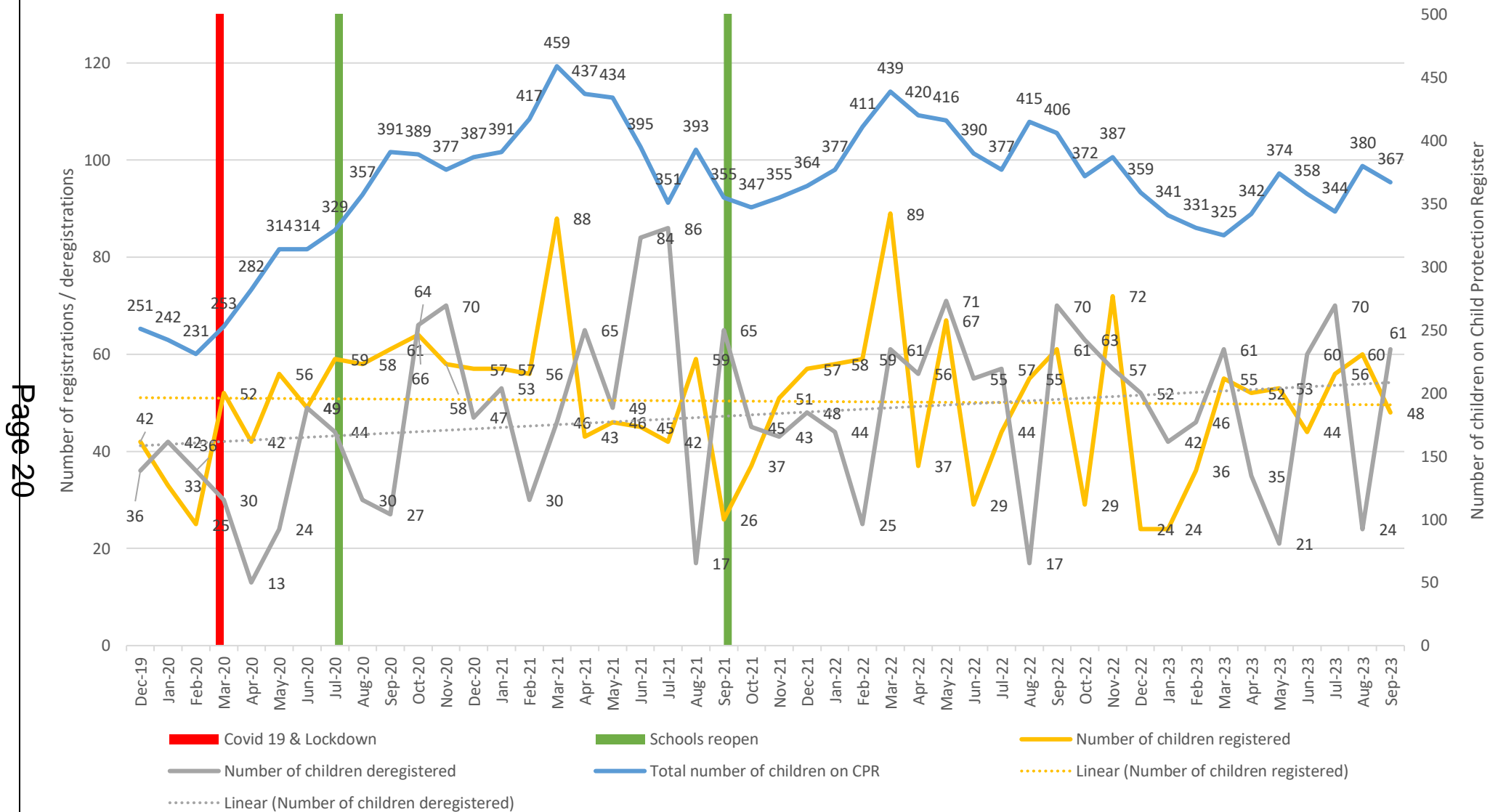
Section 47 assessments were an average 18 working days overdue compared to 20 working days in Quarter 1 2023/24.

Performance in relation to the **timeliness of well-being assessments** has declined slightly during Quarter 2 2023/24 compared with Quarter 1 2023/24 however it is an improvement compared to Quarter 2 of 2022/23 when 62.7% (323 / 515) were completed on time. In relation to the **timeliness of Section 47 assessments** performance has improved during Quarter 2 2023/24 compared to Quarter 1 2022/23, although it has declined compared to Quarter 2 2022/23 when 30.7% (270 / 881) were completed on time. The following actions continue to be taken so this improvement can be sustained and enhanced:

- Use of the management reporting system (Power BI) to provide high level and team specific detailed breakdown of performance information.
- Regular solution focused team discussions to consider performance, demand, capacity and pressure points.
- The Operational Manager (OM) continues to meet with Team Managers on a weekly basis to review the previous week's performance with a focus on identifying presenting difficulties and problem solving.
- The discussions include ambitious but achievable target setting for each team to address overdue assessments as well as strategies to prevent current work falling outside timescales - by reviewing progress in respect of the work that is approaching the completion deadline, determining whether the allocated worker has capacity to complete the work and, if not, determining what the barriers and support requirements are and targeting resource to assist, working across teams where necessary.
- This detailed discussion enables the OM to have scrutiny of those Section 47 enquiries which are overdue or approaching the deadline for completion. For those deemed to be exceptional in nature, thus requiring OM approval for an extension, the information can be captured and logged. For those that are not deemed to be exceptional, action plans can be developed to expedite completion.
- As some teams perform consistently well, the weekly meetings enable best practice benchmarking, with managers sharing ideas and learning across the whole Intake and Assessment service. The meetings also enable the OM to collate thematic information about positive improvements and common difficulties which can then be escalated to inform strategic planning.
- Creative use of resource (for example remote workers, resource assistants, social work assistants) to create capacity for social work staff to focus upon those tasks that only they can do.

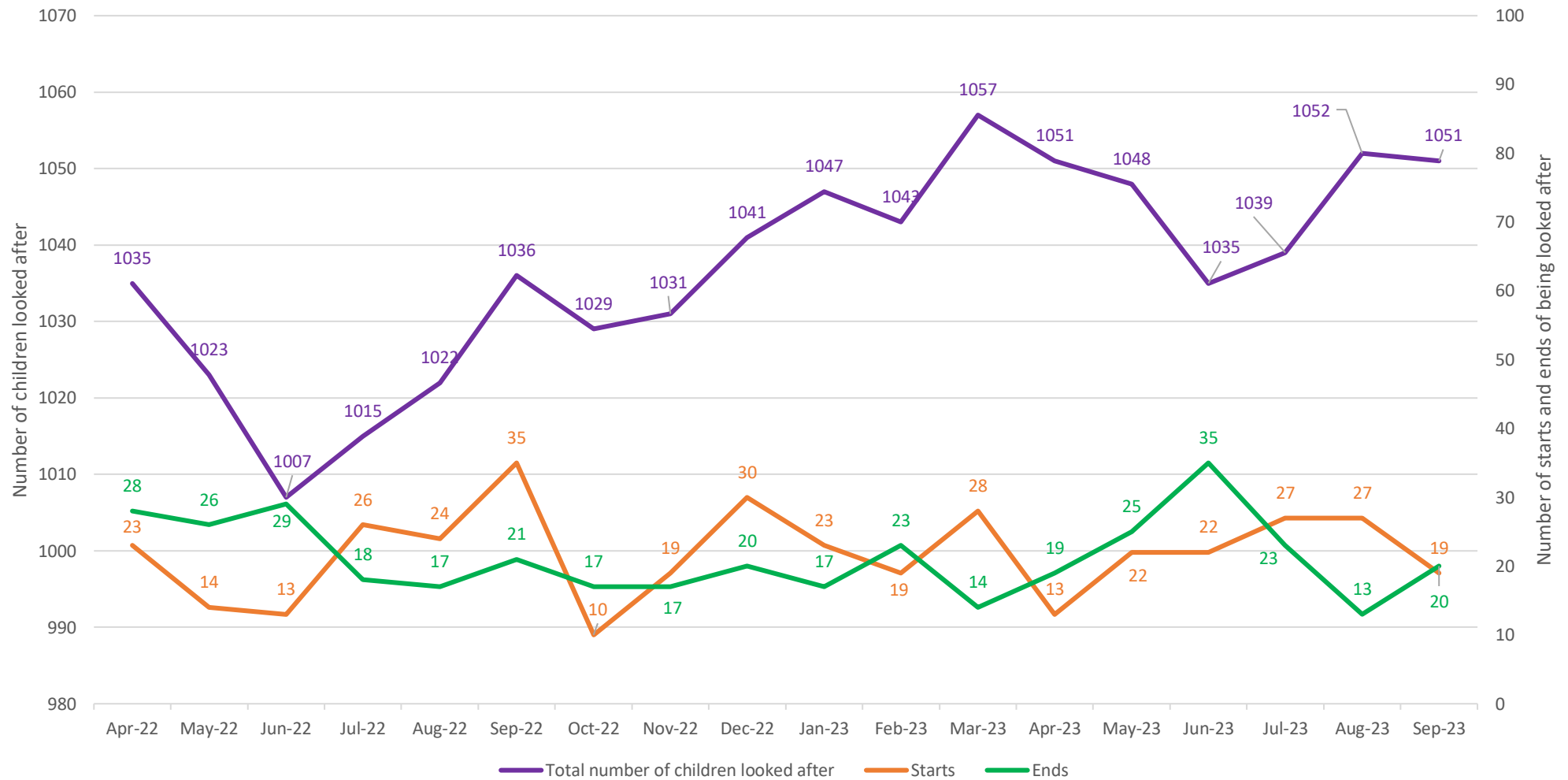
Performance relating to timeliness of assessments is in part related to a process delay in ensuring that assessments are written up - visits are undertaken and child protection investigations are not delayed. Processes are in place to address this, but it must be accepted that this is a demand led service - demand fluctuation will have an impact on performance. We are maximising use of available tools to continue to evaluate and monitor performance.

Number of Children on the Child Protection Register (CPR), Registrations and De-registrations



Following the steady increase in **children on the Child Protection Register (CPR)** from 231 in February 2020 to 459 in March 2021, the number decreased over the first half of 2021/22 to 347 children before increasing back to 439 children by the end of the year. Since then, the number of children on the CPR had fallen to 325 as at 31st March 2023, the lowest it had been since June 2020. During Quarter 1 and 2 2023/24 numbers of children on the register have increased once again and there are 367 children on the Child Protection Register as at 30th September 2023. The overall trend displayed in the graph above shows a gradually decreasing number of registrations compared with an increasing number of de-registrations.

Looked After Starts, Ends and Total Number of Children Looked After (CLA)



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After a decrease in the **number of children looked after** in the early days of lockdown, a subsequent increase in new admissions led to a gradual increase from 939 at 27th April 2020 increasing to 1,040 at 31st March 2022. Since then, as shown on the graph above, during Quarter 1 2022/23 the number of looked after reduced to 1,007 as at 30th June 2022, before increasing steadily through the rest of the year to reach 1,057 as at 31st March 2023. This decreased during Quarter 1 of 2023/24 to 1,035 as at 30th June 2023 but has since increased again to 1,051 as at 30th September 2023.

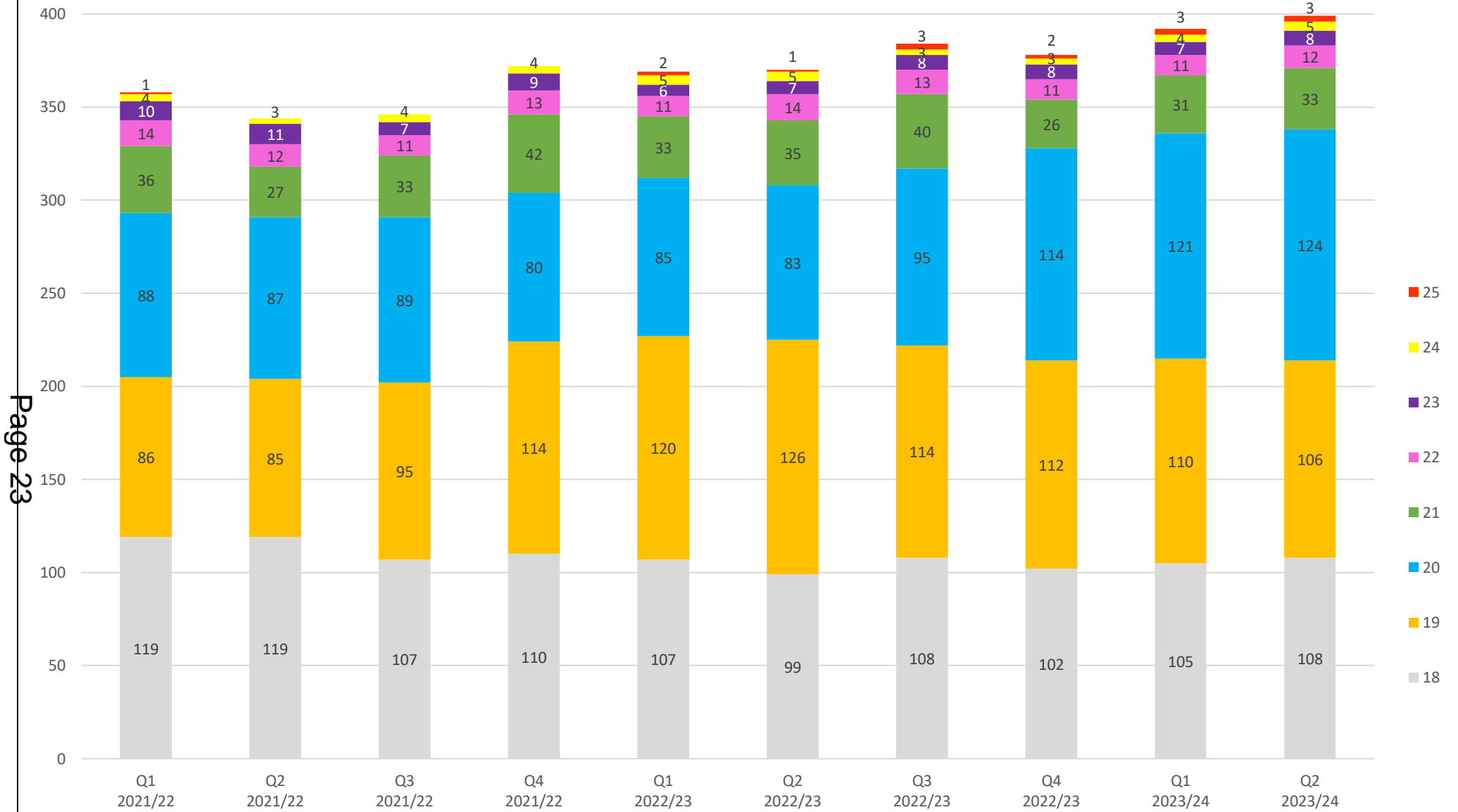
39 of the 1,051 were unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Care and Support (CASP)



Graph showing number of children and young people receiving Care and Support over time, with bars showing numbers of children with the Child Health and Disability Team and numbers of children in Locality teams. "Other" includes the following teams: Care and Support Planning team, Pre-birth team and the project team for Discharge and Reunification. This graph excludes care leavers open to Personal Adviser team, who are shown in the next graph. The overall number of children with a care and support plan is relatively stable.

Care Leavers

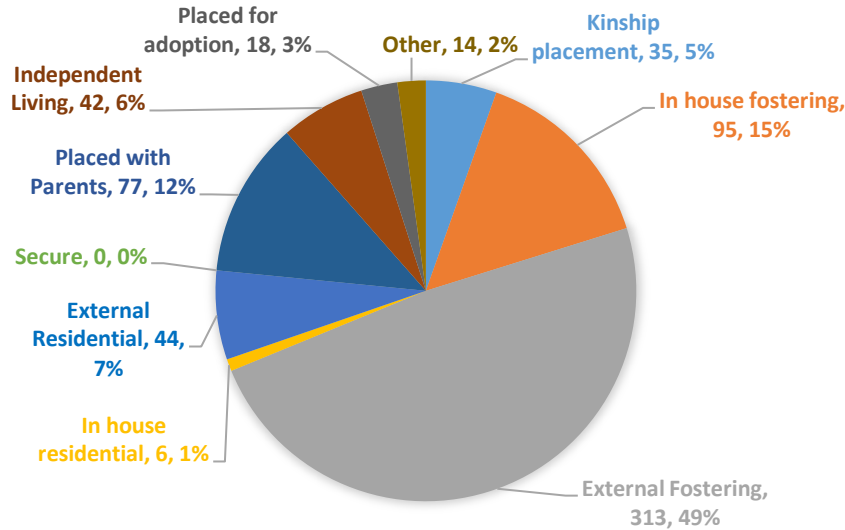


Graph showing number of care leavers over time by age, open to the Personal Adviser team. The number of care leavers is gradually increasing over time. The biggest overall growth is in the group that are currently age 20.

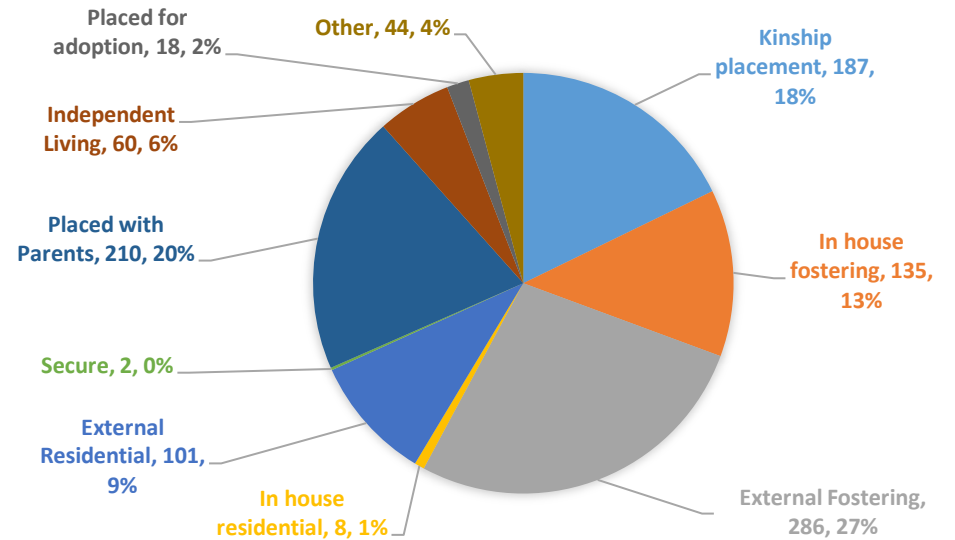
Shifting the Balance – Place

Ensuring a range of support in the community and a variety of homes for children are available in Cardiff

Total CLA by Placement Type – as at 31st March 2016 (644)



Total CLA by Placement Type – as at 30th September 2023 (1,051)



The growth in proportion of children placed with parents on a Care Order or in kinship arrangements with family members is evident – from 17% (112) in March 2016 to 38% (397) in September 2023. This increase accounts for 70% of the increase in the number of children looked after (285 / 407) and is due to a change of practice in the Courts.

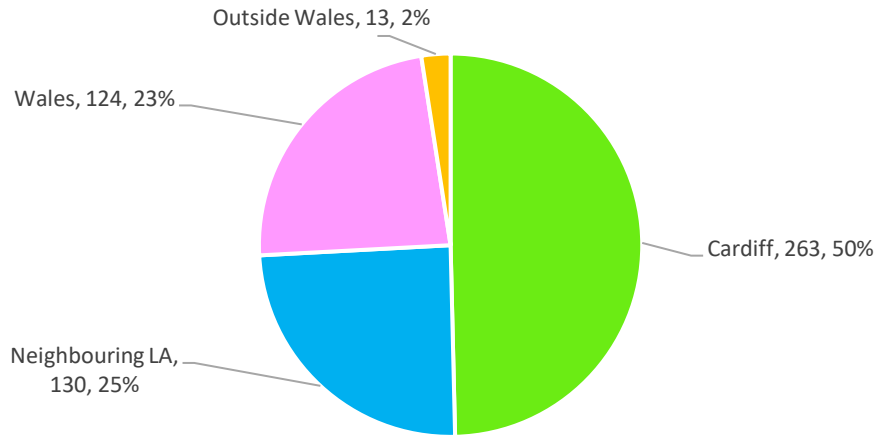
21 (28.8%) of the 73 children who started being looked after during Quarter 2 2023/24 were placed with parents on a Care Order, with family / friends or in parent and baby placements.

As at the end of Quarter 2 2023/24, 53.3%, (286 / 537) children and young people are fostered by external foster carers as a percentage of our regulated placements (excluding kinship); our target is 60%.

As at the end of Quarter 2, 2023/24, 18.8%, (101 / 537) children and young people are living in external residential placements as a percentage of our regulated placements (excluding kinship), our target is 17%. This is moving in the right direction to meet the target of 17% by the end of the year. We have 4 properties in the final stages of registration, which should help us achieve this target.

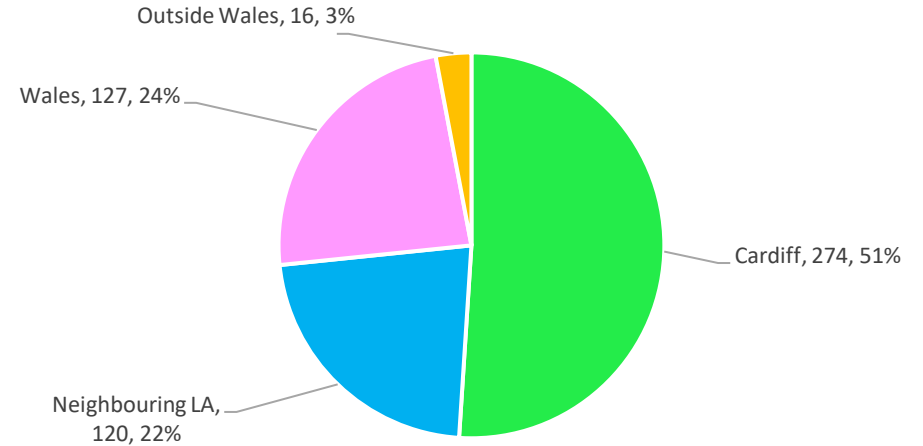
We are making good progress with the implementation of our Accommodation Strategy to develop in-house residential provision in Cardiff. The registration process is in the final stages for 4 properties. 5 homes are in the process of being purchased with plans for further homes to be purchased in accordance with our Accommodation Strategy.

Placement Location as at 30th June 2022



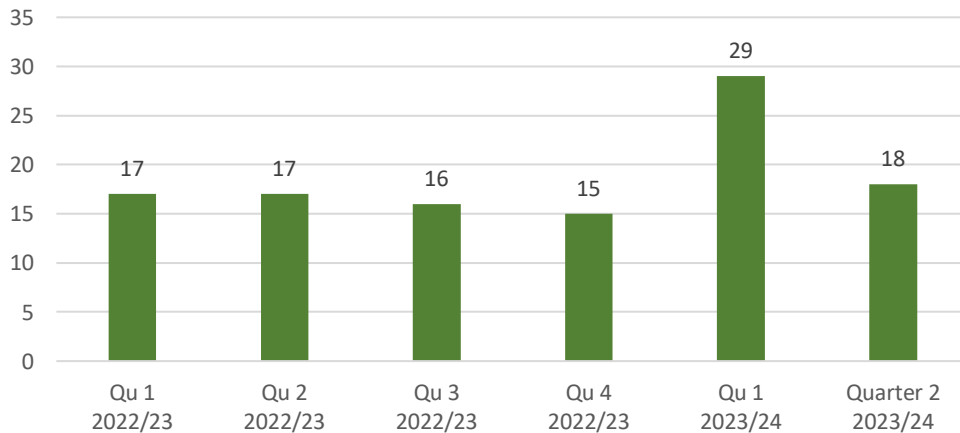
Pie chart showing percentage of children looked after in regulated placements excluding kinship placements, who are placed in Cardiff, neighbouring authorities, Wales and outside Wales as at 30th June 2022.

Placement Location as at 30th September 2023



Pie chart showing percentage of children looked after in regulated placements excluding kinship placements, who are placed in Cardiff, neighbouring authorities, Wales and outside Wales as at 30th September 2023. 73% of children were placed in Cardiff or a neighbouring local authority against a target of 80%. Pressures in the market are impacting on our ability to meet our target.

Number of Children Returned Home from Care



18 children returned home from care during Quarter 2 2023/24 compared to 29 in Quarter 1 2023/24, but consistent with 17 in Quarter 2 of 2022/23.

Please note the number of children returned home from care includes all children placed under Section 76, of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act, or Section 31 of the Children Act 1989, who return home. This could mean they return to parents or a Special Guardianship Order is granted. This is in accordance with the statutory PI definition.

Accommodation Strategy / Fostering Update

Placement sufficiency continues to be a significant issue as the market is not currently able to meet the increase in demand for placements and the complexity of needs for young people. To address this, and in line with Welsh Government's commitment to remove profit from the care of children looked after, the Accommodation Project is ongoing and the following progress has been made:

- 4 properties (3 x 1 bed and 1 x 2 bed) in the registration process have been visited by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). Confirmation of registration is anticipated imminently as initial feedback from CIW was positive.
- Arrangements are being made for work to commence on 2 new 3 bed properties - work on the properties will run in parallel.
- Purchase of a 4 bed property completed during the quarter – detail schedule of works to be developed.
- Search for properties on the open market continues (including for overnight short breaks) and the following purchases are progressing:
 - 5 bedroom property on a new housing estate.
 - Property to provide emergency overnight accommodation for use by the Interventions Hub. (Purchase of staff building completed during the quarter.)
- Recruitment to residential staff posts progressing well with young people's panels integrated into the recruitment process.

Regular meetings to monitor and track progress in relation to short breaks continue. Key progress during the quarter includes:

- Occupancy levels continue to increase with Ty Storrie providing overnight stays for 4 children on 15 nights in August (up from 4 children on 6 nights in June).
- Staff have been recruited to vacancies and the new 12-hour shift pattern is in place.

Implementation of a localised model – “The Right Place in Cardiff” is progressing and key developments during the quarter include:

- Further analysis of data undertaken and as a result consideration is being given to changing the target age range to 10-14 (from 12-16).
- Assessment model is being developed – working towards a 6 week assessment period.
- Work undertaken with staff at Falconwood (which will be the residential hub) and with Adolescent Resource Centre (ARC) staff to develop their knowledge and understanding of the new hub model.
- Awareness raising to be undertaken at staff engagement event in October in readiness for go live - planned for Quarter 3.

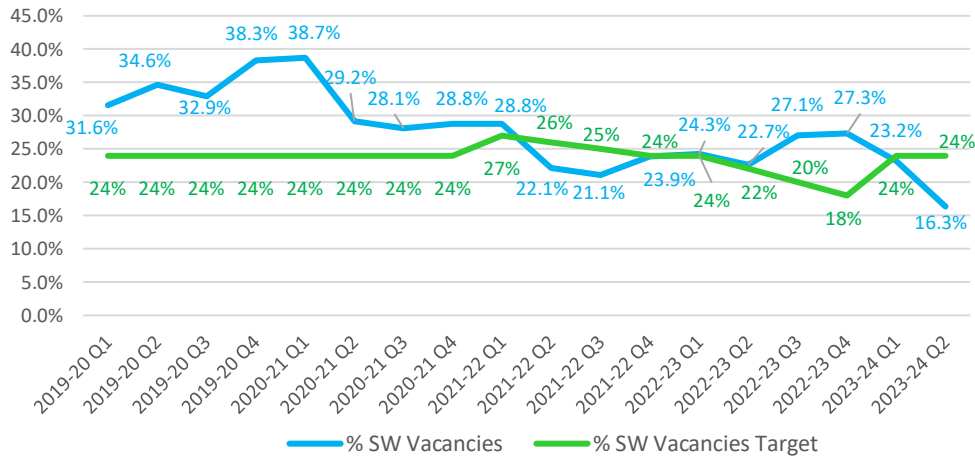
Work to develop the in-house fostering services is ongoing and the following progress has been achieved during the quarter:

- The number of children in in-house fostering placements was 135 at 30th September compared with 128 at 30th June. This has exceeded the target of 130.
- Development of the Teen Scheme continues with 3 young people in placements and 2 arrangements progressing (for an additional 4 young people).
- A recruitment and retention plan is being developed with a view to being signed off early in Quarter 3.
- The marketing plan is being implemented and attendance at key events in the city continues – including a fun day in Bute Park. The team are also attending team meetings across Children's Services and wider Council Directorates to raise awareness of Fostering for Cardiff. We had 11 full assessments of people who would like to become foster carers ongoing at 30th September consistent with 11 at 30th June 2023.
- Relationships with independent fostering agencies are improving and agencies have agreed to give Cardiff advance notice of any placements becoming available in the city in addition to new carers approved in the city.
- Foster Wales have set targets in line with a 20% uplift on enquiry figures from 2022/23. For Cardiff the target for enquiries is 178. Best practice indicates that 1 in 3 (33%) enquiries should progress to an initial home visit this therefore gives Cardiff an initial enquiry visit target of 60. The best practice conversion rate for enquiry to approval is 12% giving Cardiff an approval target of 22.
- At the end of Quarter 2 we had received a total of 90 enquiries and are on track to meet the annual target of 178. We have carried out 19 initial enquiry visits (IEV) which means the conversion rate from enquiry to IEV is currently sitting at 22% which is below best practice (33%). 5 carers have been approved to date this year which is below the midpoint target of 11 approvals.

Shifting the Balance – People

Supporting a permanent workforce

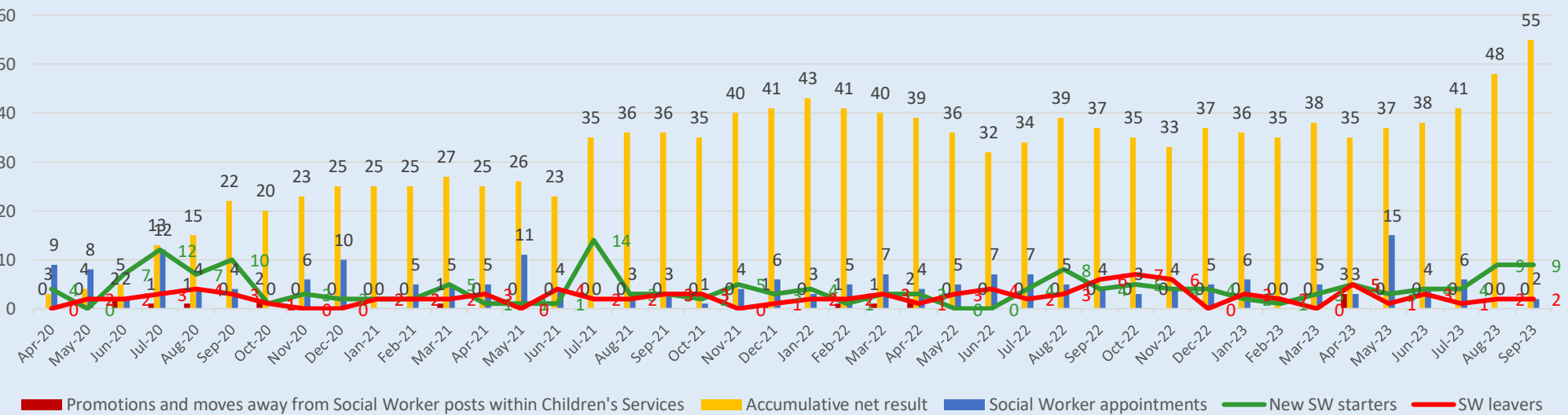
Percentage of Social Worker Vacancies in all Teams



16.3% **Social Worker vacancy rate** as at end of Quarter 2 2023/24. Target met. 34 out of 208 posts were vacant and 174 posts filled on a permanent basis.

- Vacancy rate has improved to 16.3% at the end of Quarter 2 from 23.2% in Quarter 1 and has exceeded the target level of 24%.
- In addition to this, 5 social workers have been appointed and are due to take up post in the coming weeks with an additional 7 students also due to start when they qualify later in the year. 3 students have joined us as Social Work Assistants while they are waiting on their qualifications.

Net Result of Social Workers Starting and Leaving



Sickness Update

FTE Target = 12.0	Q1 2023/24	Q2 2023/24	Q3 2023/24	Q4 2023/24	
Children's Services Sickness FTE days lost per person (cumulative during year)	2.52	5.68			<p>The target for 2023/24 is 12.0 FTE sickness days lost for Children's Services employees.</p> <p>The final outturn for 2022/23 was 12.93 FTE days lost per person which met the target of 14.5 and was a slight improvement on 2021/22 when the outturn was 13.0.</p> <p>During Quarter 2 the number of sickness FTE days lost increased to 5.68 per person, which has taken the forecast figure to 12.49 FTE sickness days lost per person which is over our target of 12.0 days, but would be an improvement on last year.</p> <p>Sickness is closely monitored by CMT to ensure that processes are followed. Options to support staff to return to work on a phased return are explored with input from all members of the management team.</p>
Children's Services Sickness FTE days lost per person full year forecast	10.84	12.49			

Source: Corporate HR Data

Workforce Strategy Update

Page 28

Work to implement our recruitment and retention strategy to reduce social worker vacancies is ongoing. Key progress during the quarter includes:

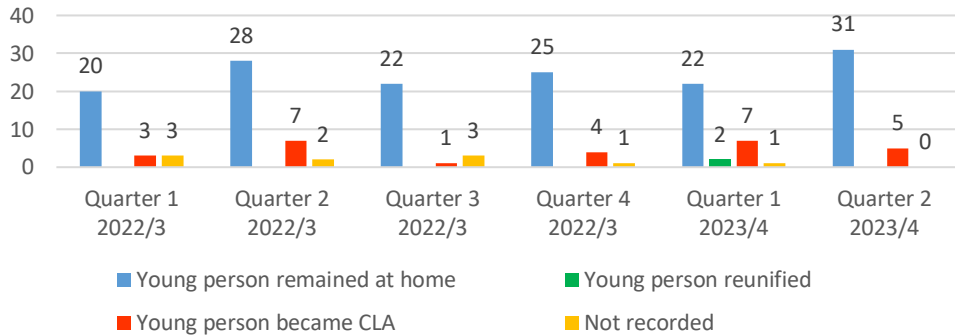
- Detailed Workforce Action Plan is being implemented and progress monitored as part of Directorate Delivery Planning process.
- Vacancy rate has improved from 23.2% in June to 16.3% in September, achieving target level. In addition to this we have 5 social workers appointed and due to take up post in the coming weeks with an additional 7 students also due to start during the year who will qualify later in the year. 3 students have joined us as Social Work Assistants while they are waiting on their qualifications.
- The development of an Officer Decision Report proposing new conditions for social workers will not be progressing at this time due to the improved vacancy position.
- Recruitment to residential posts is progressing well. Training needs for residential / edge of care staff have been identified and providers sourced – arrangements for training to commence are being made.
- A proposal for a Children's Services Academy has been developed and is currently out for consultation with managers in advance of being launched in Quarter 3.
- A Training Team Manager post has been created and is out to advert. When appointed, this post will progress work that has started on the development of role specific induction, competency frameworks and improving career progression.
- Practice Matters forums for practitioners and managers have taken place around good assessments and child sexual abuse practice.
- Work on development of new operating model is progressing. Vacant social worker posts have been converted to case holding social care practitioner roles and expert Grade 10 social worker posts have been created and are out to advert.
- Motivational Interviewing Training has been sourced and a pilot is due to start in October.
- Trauma Informed training has been mapped – an internal module is to be developed and launched by the training team in Quarter 3.
- Review of business support – staff's views from across the service were sought to feed into the process. Next steps include formal consultation with staff.

Shifting the Balance – Practice

Developing our practice and procedures

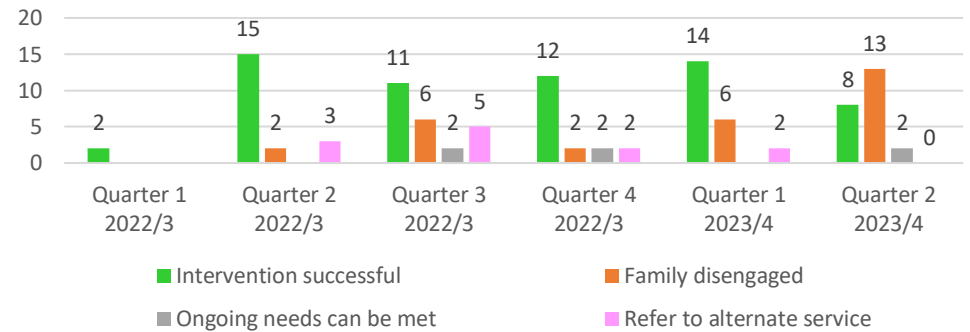
Interventions Hub

Outcomes following intervention at ARC



During Quarter 2, 31 young people who received an **intervention from the Adolescent Resource Centre** remained at home compared with 5 young people who started being looked after.

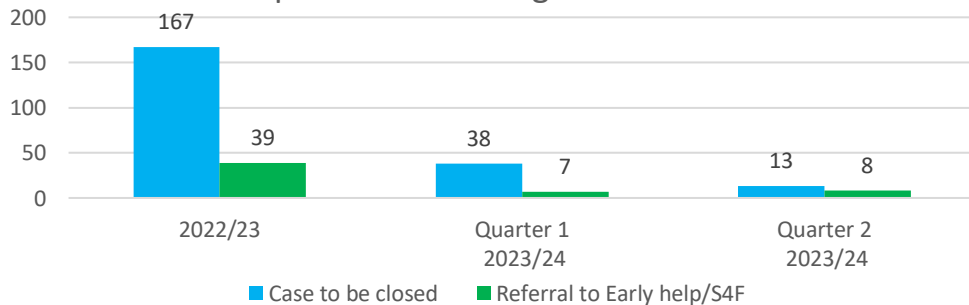
Outcomes following intervention from Think Safe!



During Quarter 2, 8 young people received a successful **intervention from the Think Safe! service** and 2 young people have ongoing needs that can be met; the family of 13 young people disengaged.

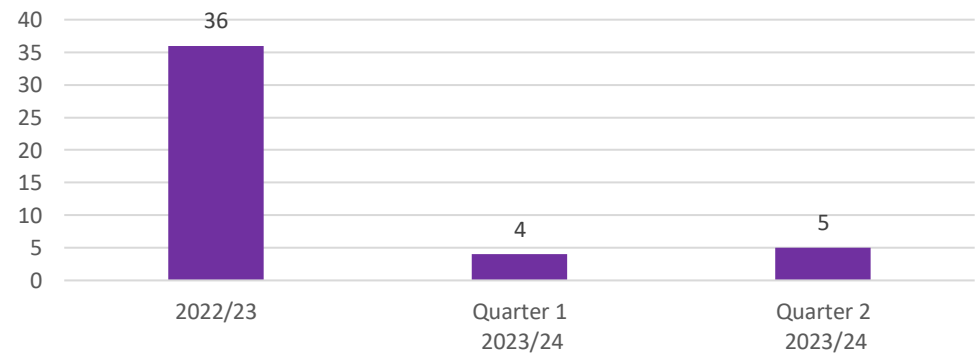
Reviewing Hub

Step downs following CASP Review



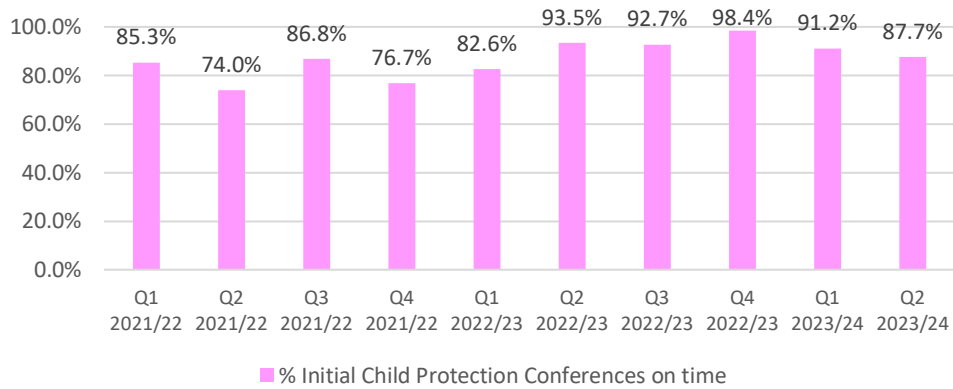
During Quarter 2 2023/24, 13 children have been identified for case closure and an additional 8 for step down to Early Help / Support4Families from 323 CASP reviews. We continue to focus the work of this team on priority areas rather than across the whole system due to resource pressures.

Safeguarding procedures to be considered



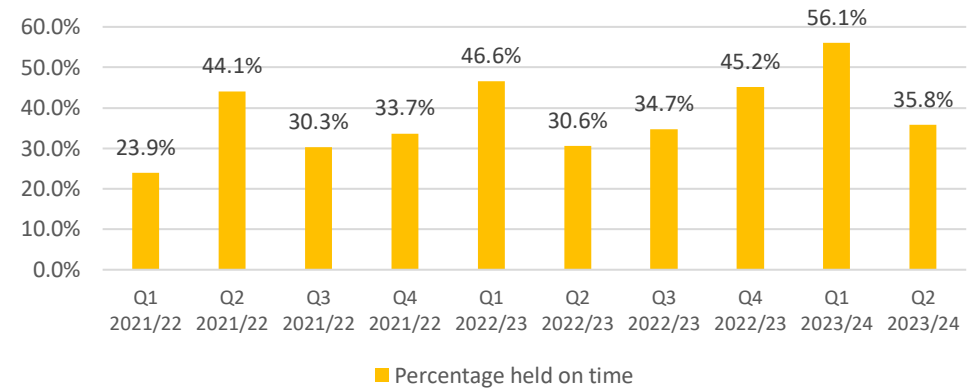
During Quarter 2, it was identified that safeguarding procedures should be considered for 5 of the 323 children reviewed – step ups – compared with 4 / 379 in Quarter 2 2022/23.

Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences On Time



Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held on time = 87.7% (157 / 179) during Quarter 2 2023/24 compared to 91.2% (145 / 159) during Quarter 1 2023/24. Although performance remains relatively high, this is rated as amber due to the reduction in timeliness over the last 2 quarters. All late conferences have since been held and were, on average, 5 working days late. The reasons for the late conferences (including scheduling errors and recording delays) are being reviewed to inform actions needed to improve timeliness going forward.

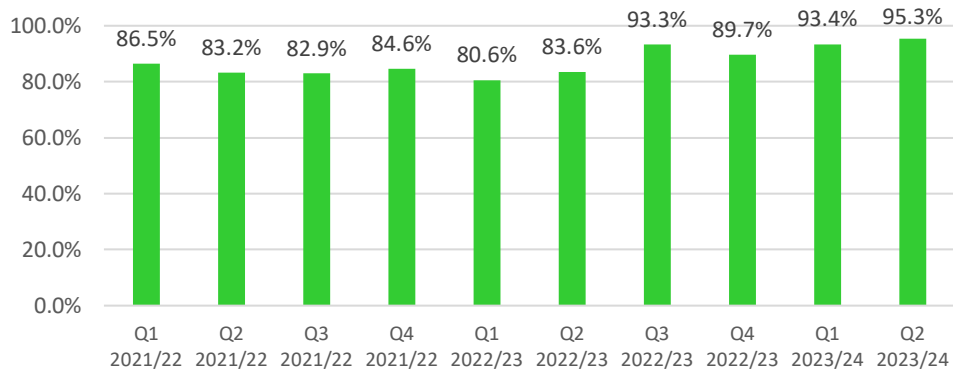
Percentage of Initial Core Group Meetings On Time



Percentage of Initial Core Group meetings held on time = 35.8% (59 / 165) during Quarter 2, compared to 56.1% (83 / 148) during Quarter 1 2023/24.

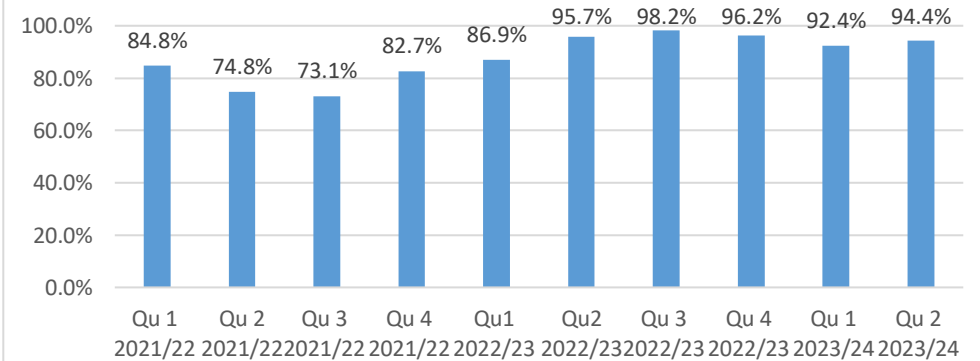
This area of performance continues to be unacceptable, the presentation of performance data will be reviewed to establish if this can be improved to assist with the management of performance. There is currently a Business support review the outcome of which will assist with supporting social workers in improving their performance. Performance continues to be monitored weekly and Core groups is one of 5 key performance areas that are being targeted.

Percentage of Child Protection Review Conferences On Time



The **percentage of Child Protection Review Conferences held on time is 95.3% (262 / 275) during Quarter 2 2023/24, compared to 93.4% (254 / 272) during Quarter 1 2023/24.** Performance in Quarter 2 was at its highest level since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

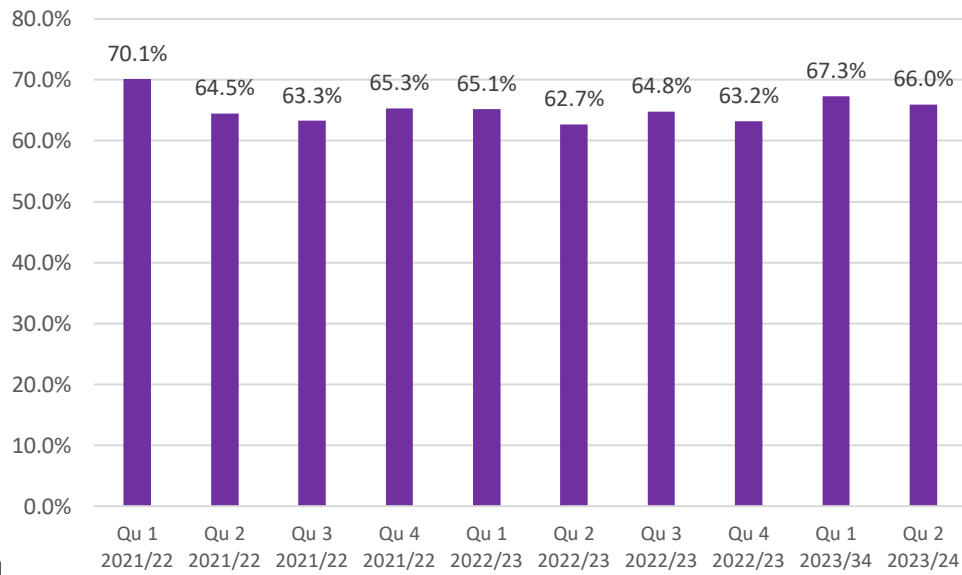
Percentage of Child Looked After Reviews On Time



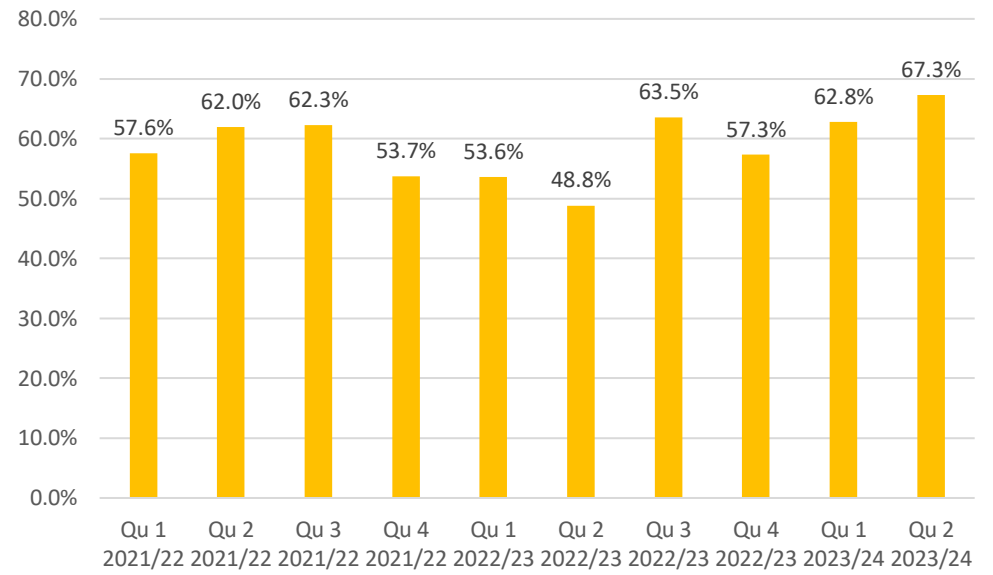
The percentage of looked after reviews held on time during Quarter 2 is at 94.4% (603 / 639) compared to 92.4% (629 / 681) in Quarter 1.

A system is now in place to escalate issues with convening initial looked after reviews.

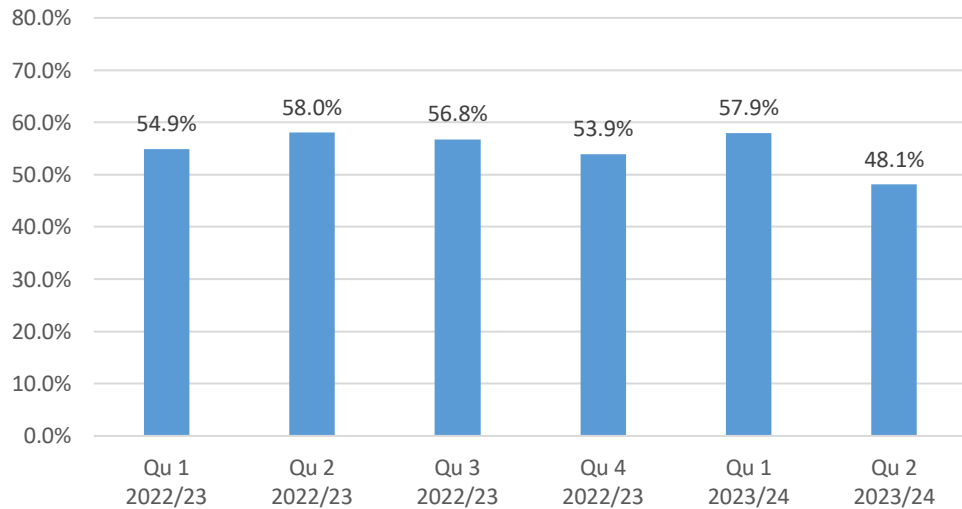
Percentage of Visits to Children on the CPR On Time



Percentage of Statutory Visits to CLA On Time



Percentage of Visits to CASP On Time



Commentary

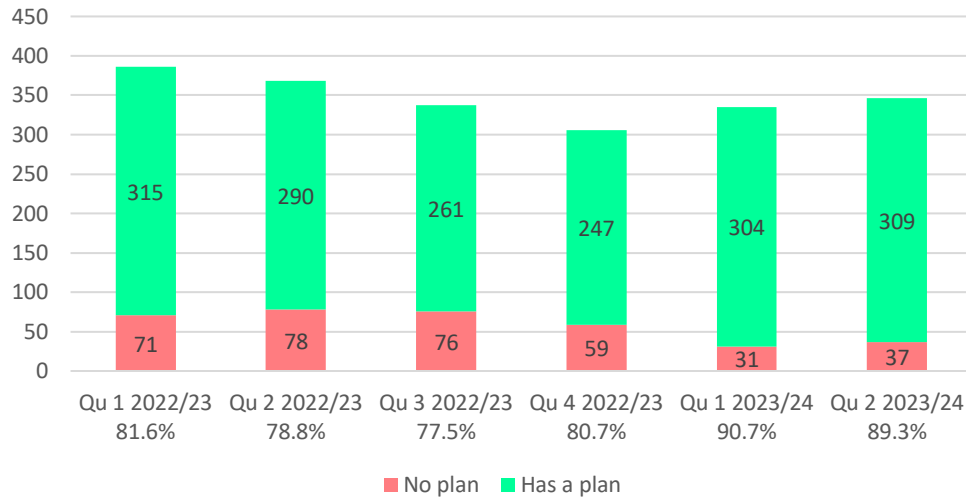
The percentage of visits to children placed on the CPR on time = 66.0% (1,466 / 2,222) during Quarter 2 2023/24 compare to 67.3% (1,840 / 2,733) during Quarter 1 2023/24.

The percentage of statutory visits to children looked after on time = 67.3% (641 / 953) during Quarter 2 2023/24 compared to 62.8% (670 / 1,067) during Quarter 1 2023/24.

The percentage of visits to children with a care and support plan on time = 48.1% (1,320 / 2,742) during Quarter 2 2023/24 compared to 57.9% (1,363 / 2,353) during Quarter 1 2023/24.

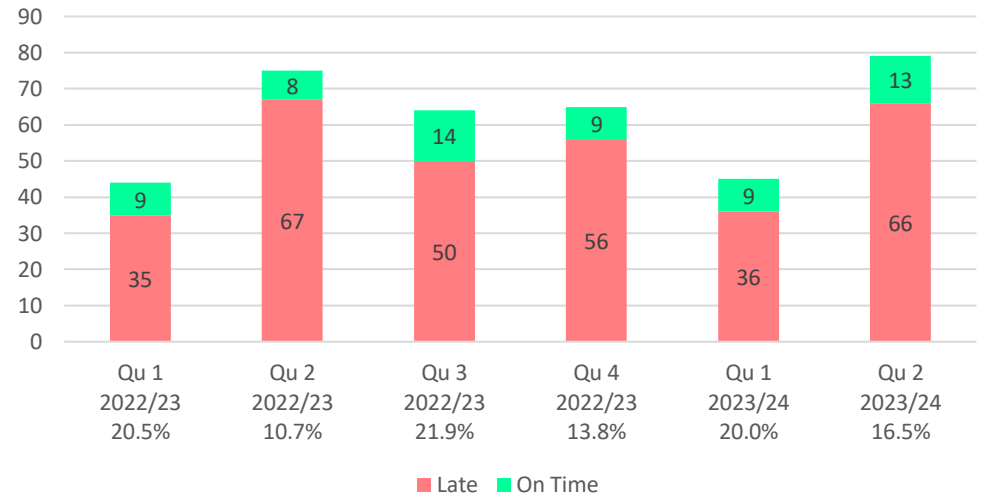
Performance information has been reviewed and adapted to provide OMs with more detailed data to support monitoring of the timeliness of visits being undertaken and recorded. This will allow focused support and understanding of the barriers to improving performance. A system is now in place for Social Work Resource Assistants support teams to improve the monitoring of timeliness using the weekly Power BI report. This has resulted in improved performance in relation to visits to children looked after – the learning from this will be applied to child protection and CASP visits.

Child Protection Plans in Place



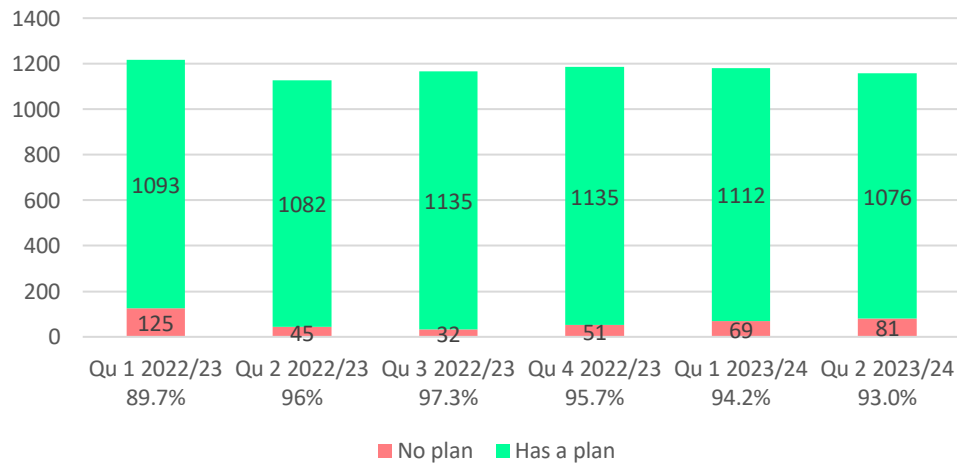
89.3% of children on the CPR had a plan in place (not including children where the plan is not yet required – within 10 days following registration).

Children looked after plans in place within 10 working days of start of being looked after



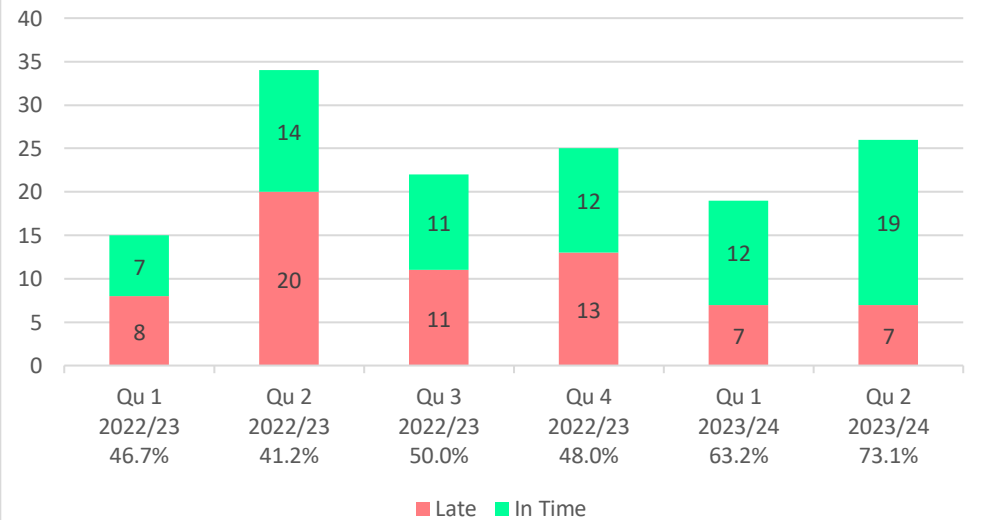
20% of children looked after had a plan in place within 10 working days of starting to be looked after.

Care and Support Plans in Place

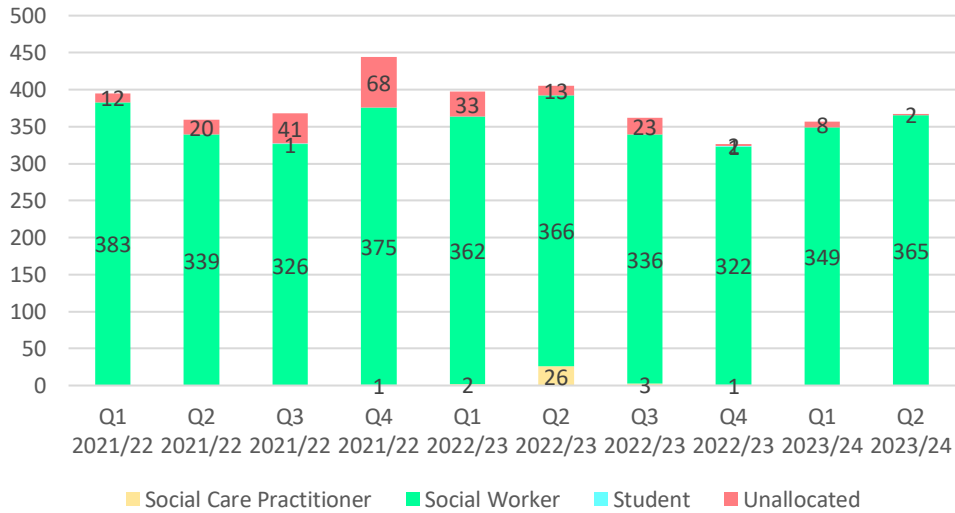


Figures do not include those de-registered in the last 14 days from the CPR or those with a well-being assessment in progress as a plan is not yet required.

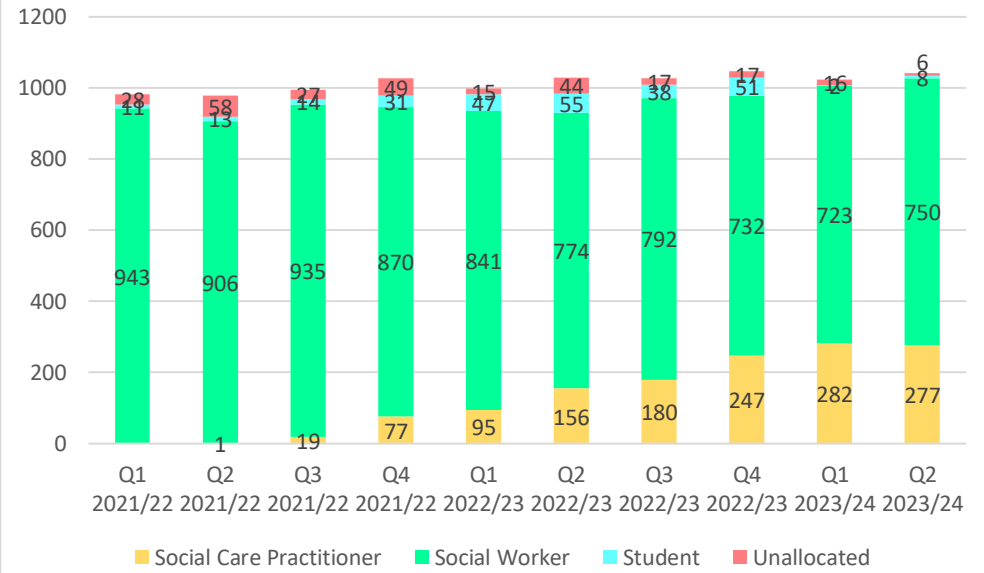
Pathway Plans in Place Within 3 Months of Becoming Eligible



Child Protection Allocations

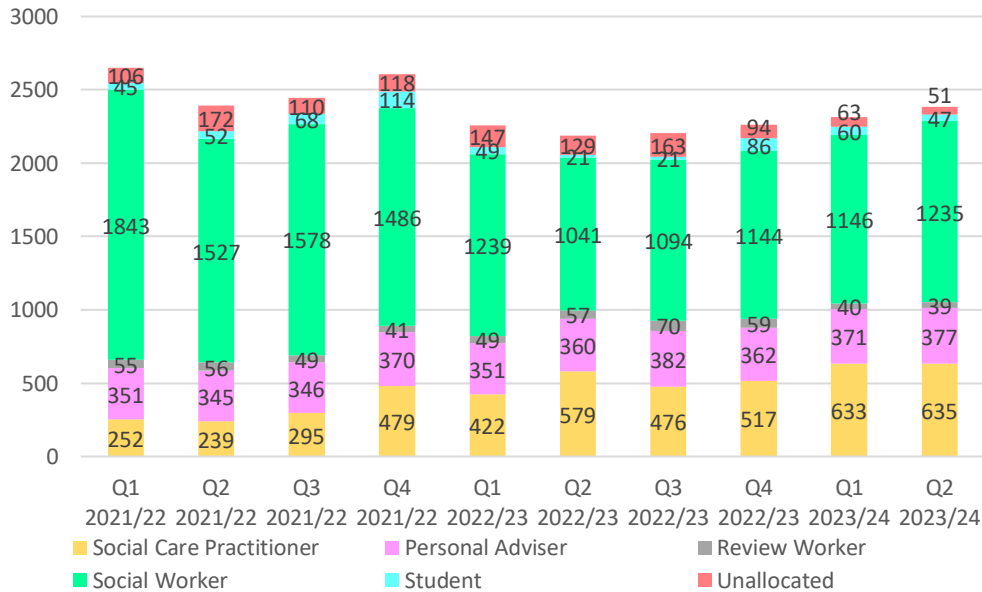


Child Looked After Allocations

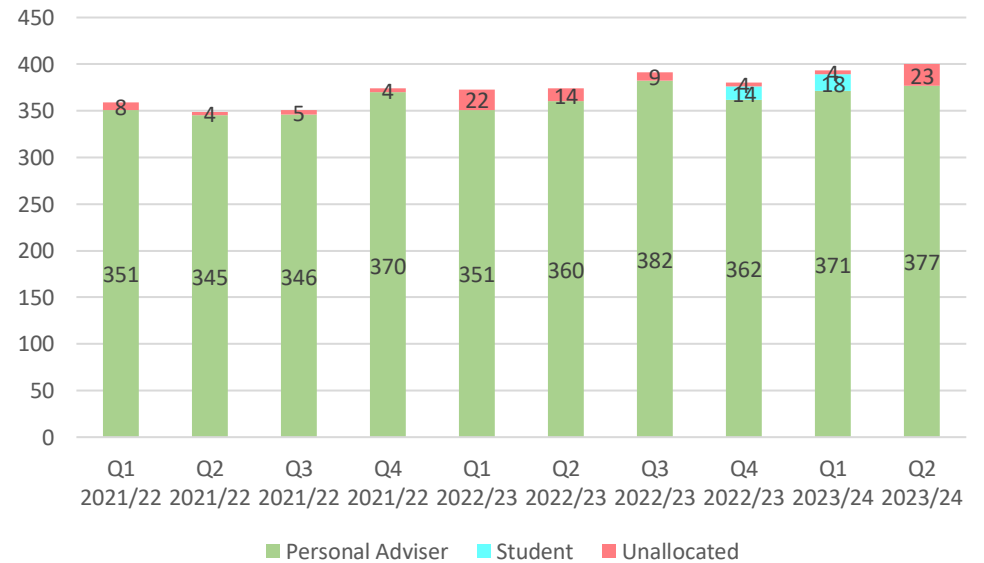


All unallocated cases have since been allocated.

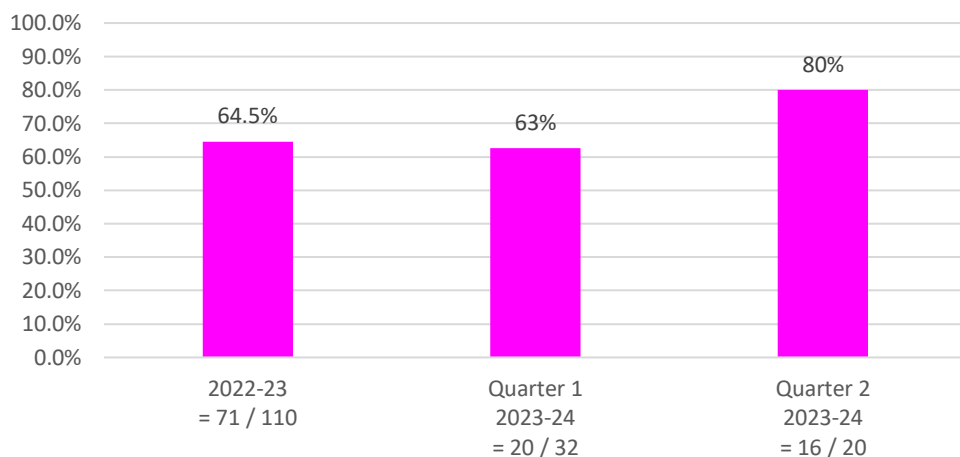
Care and Support Allocations



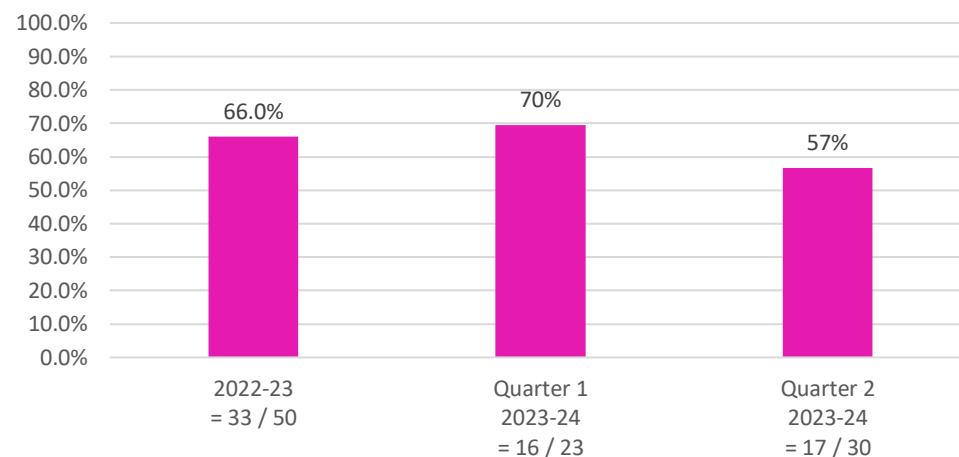
Personal Advisor Allocation



Percentage of care leavers in categories 2, 3 and 4 who have completed at least 3 consecutive months of education, employment or training in the 12 months since leaving care



Percentage of care leavers in categories 2, 3 and 4 who have completed at least 3 consecutive months of education, employment or training in the 13-24 months since leaving care



Operating / Practice Model / Quality Assurance Update

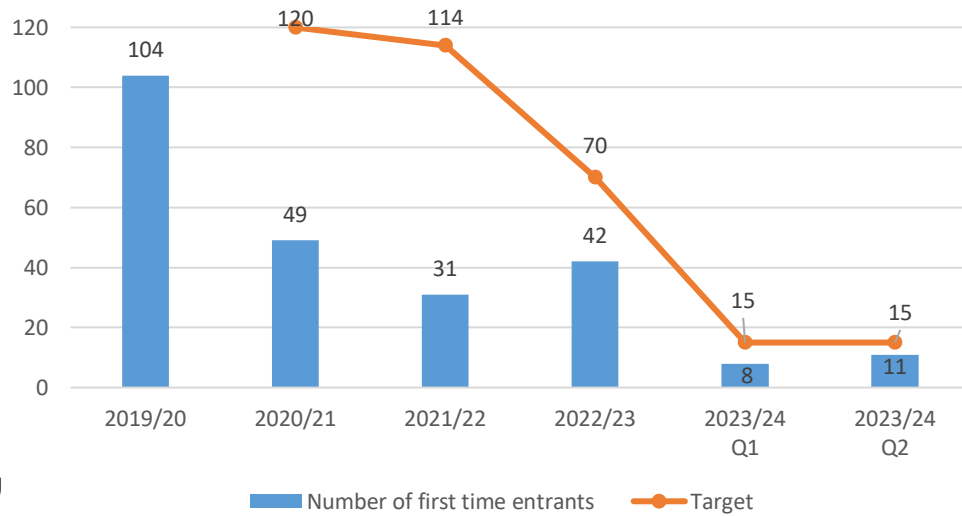
Work to develop a new operating model continues - taking account of demographic data. From a locality perspective - all Grade 7 social workers and Team Managers are permanent staff. The agency social workers that remain in localities are highly experienced social workers offering a wealth of experience. This increased consistency will enable us to continue to strengthen our locality connections. Motivational Interviewing Training has been sourced and a pilot started in October. Trauma Informed training has been mapped – an internal module is to be developed and launched by the training team in Quarter 3.

In relation to Quality Assurance, group auditing has continued during Quarter 2. There continues to be progress made in managers auditing skills and development of our understanding of “what good looks like”. A total of 44 cases were audited using this approach during Quarter 2. Additional Quality Assurance activity during Quarter 2 includes:

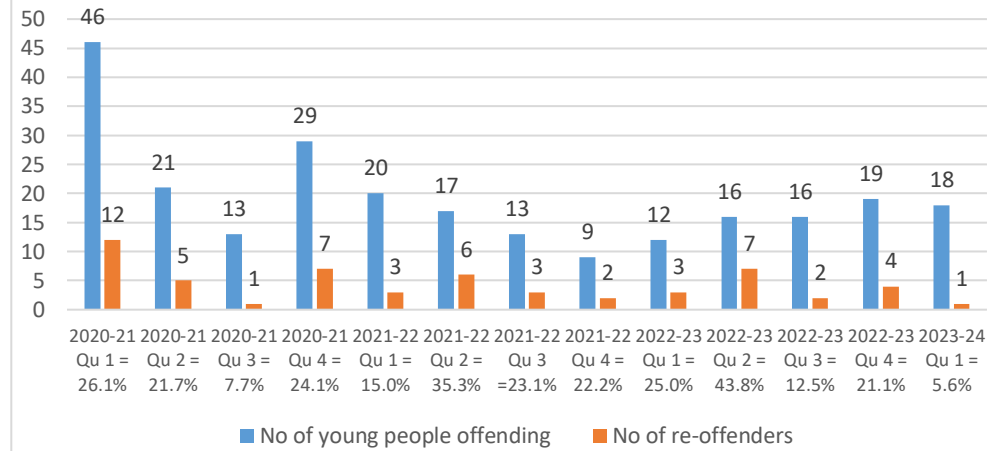
- “Practice Matters” week was held in October 2023 and was an incredible success. A total of 1,618 staff attended 22 workshops throughout the week. The passion of both presenters and practitioners was clear to see and provided an opportunity for us to reflect on successes, hear from the people we support and look at how we might develop our services for the future.
- The annual “Practice Matters” programme was launched in October and focuses on priority areas identified via audit activities. The improvement drive will focus on - All about the child (lived experience); chronologies, genograms, and recordings; supervision and management oversight; assessments and plans.
- Practice Matters forums for managers and practitioners have continued to be held. Sessions have been held in relation to Child Sexual Abuse for managers and “what good looks like” in assessments and case recordings for practitioners.
- Strengthening Practice meetings have been introduced – which are weekly meetings of senior operational managers and leaders have been introduced to scrutinise performance and the quality of practice via monitoring of action plans.
- Completion of case reviews, thematic reviews and individual management reviews.
- Development of practice guidance.
- Quality assurance process for Child Practice Reviews / Adult Practice Reviews launched to ensure our input into this process is effective and Regional Safeguarding Unit plans are SMART.

Youth Justice Service

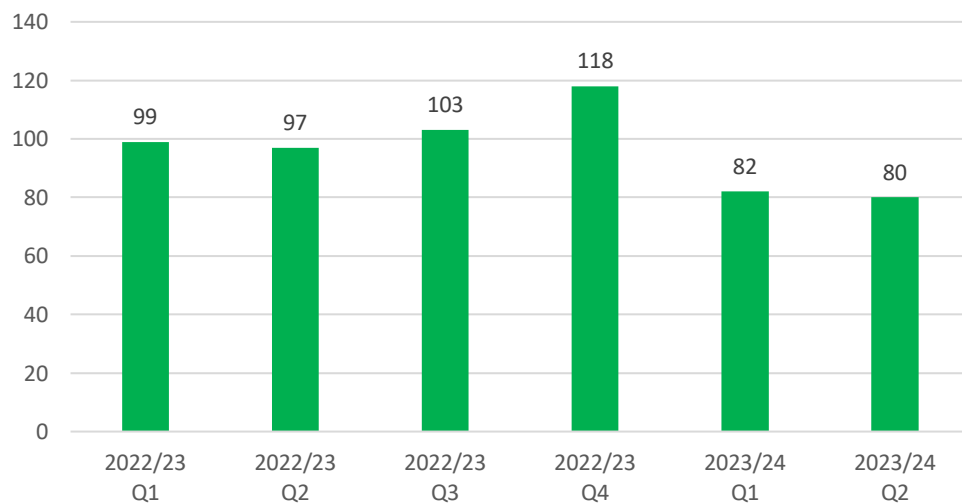
Number of First Time Entrants into the Youth Justice System



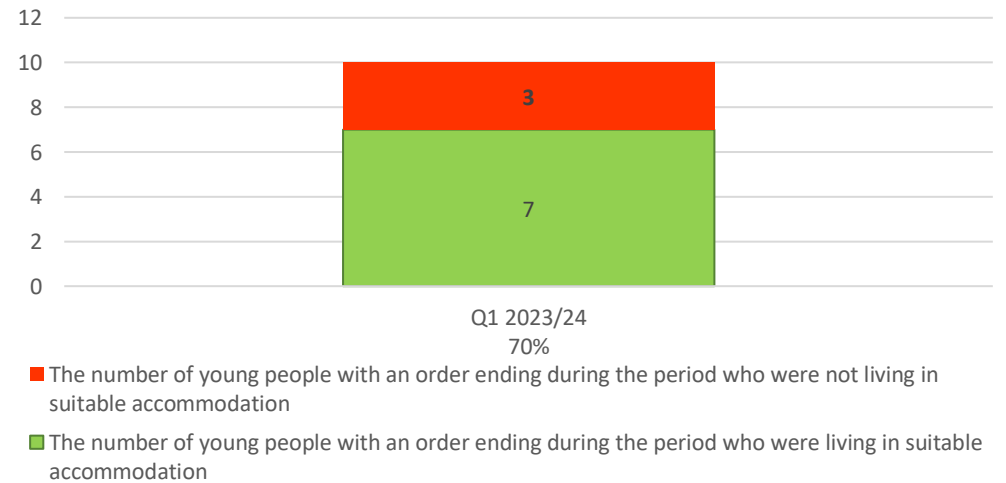
Percentage of Children Re-offending Within 6 Months of their Previous Offence



Number of Young People in Receipt of a Prevention Service from the Youth Justice Service



Percentage of Children with an Order Ending During the Period Who Were Living In Suitable Accommodation



Updated data to follow.

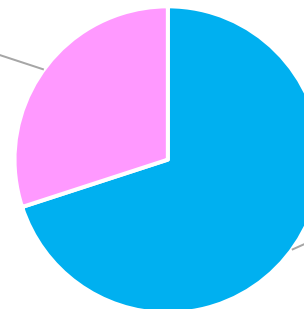
Percentage of Children with an Order Ending During the Period Who Were in Suitable Education, Training or Employment

Data not yet available

Percentage of Children with an Order Ending During the Period Who Had an Identified Special Education Need and Disability (SEND) / Additional Learning Need (ALN)

The number of young people with an order ending during the period who did not have an identified Special Education Need and Disability (SEND)/ Additional Learning Need (ALN), 3, 30%

During Quarter 1
2023/24



The number of young people with an order ending during the period who had an identified Special Education Need and Disability (SEND)/ Additional Learning Need (ALN), 7, 70%

7 out of 10 (70%) young people with an order ending during Quarter 1 had an identified Special Education Need and Disability (SEND) / Additional Learning Need (ALN).

Source: YJS
Updated data to follow.

**CYNGOR CAERDYDD
CARDIFF COUNCIL**

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 DECEMBER 2023

PANDEMIC RECOVERY IN SCHOOLS

Purpose of the Report

1. For Members to receive a brief update of this issue ahead of a presentation on the latest position in relation to Pandemic Recovery in Schools being made at this meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Background

2. At its work programming forum on the 19th of July 2022, Members of this Committee agreed that they would wish for **“Covid-19 Recovery in Schools”** to be a priority topic during 2022/23 and that bi-annual reports be considered by the Committee.

Issues

3. At this meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, Members will receive a presentation on the following issues. The presentation will be sent to Members as soon as it is available:
 - School funding
 - Attendance
 - Attainment across all sectors.
 - Support the LEA is giving to those schools in need of additional support whilst in a period of “doing more, with less”
 - Impact of ALN reform and policy
 - Exclusions

- Mental health and wellbeing – staff, pupils etc.
 - Vulnerable Learners
 - Role of the Cardiff Recovery Board in developing a “Recovery Plan”
4. The aim of the presentation at this meeting is to update Members on the above issues and, at this time, **not** a deep dive/ hold to account session. The Chair has agreed that, at this Committee’s meeting on the 12 March 2024, a further deep dive will be held, where Members will receive a further opportunity to scrutinise this issue, along with the following:
- Central South Consortium Annual Report
 - Head Teachers invited to update the Committee on pandemic recovery
 - Further update on any issues arising from this meeting
 - Session with Health on ALN and addressing referral waiting times; neuro diversity diagnoses; mental health etc.
5. This Scrutiny Committee has considered this topic on the following dates:
- 30 July 2020¹
 - 12 October 2020²
 - In December 2020, Members of this Scrutiny Committee were sent a further briefing via email on further updates in relation to education recovery dated 15 December 2020.
 - 15th March 2021³
 - 11 May 2021⁴
 - 21st September 2021⁵

¹ [Agenda for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 30th July, 2020, 4.30 pm : City of Cardiff Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

² [Agenda for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Monday, 12th October, 2020, 4.30 pm : City of Cardiff Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

³ [Agenda for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Monday, 15th March, 2021, 4.30 pm : City of Cardiff Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

⁴ [Agenda for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 11th May, 2021, 5.00 pm : City of Cardiff Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Agenda for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 21st September, 2021, 4.30 pm : Cardiff Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

- 13 December 2022 ⁶
- 4 July 2023 ⁷

Way Forward

6. A presentation will be made at this meeting, and the following witnesses will be in attendance meeting to answer any questions:

- Councillor Sarah Merry, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education;
- Melanie Godfrey, Director of Education & Lifelong Learning;
- Suzanne Scarlett, Operational Manager, Partnerships & Performance, Education & Lifelong Learning

7. Members will be able to agree any comments or views that they wish to pass on to the Cabinet Member and Senior Officers during the Way Forward and decide whether they wish to receive further updates from witnesses in the future.

Legal Implications

8. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by

⁶ [Agenda for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 13th December, 2022, 4.30 pm : Cardiff Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Agenda for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 4th July, 2023, 4.30 pm : Cardiff Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

Financial Implications

9. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION

That Committee considers this report and information provided at the meeting and agrees any recommendations, comments or advice it wishes to offer to the Cabinet Member, Head Teachers in attendance and Senior Officers in Education & Lifelong Learning; and any future scrutiny Members may wish to undertake on this issue.

Leanne Weston

Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer

29 November 2023

**CYNGOR CAERDYDD
CARDIFF COUNCIL**

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 DECEMBER 2023

COMMITTEE BUSINESS REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. This report updates Members on a range of issues relating to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee. This report sets out the following:
 - An updated CYP Work Programme 2023/24 for noting. (**Appendix A**).
 - A copy of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Adoption Collaborative Annual Report 2022/23 for noting (**Appendix B**).
 - A copy of the draft Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) Joint Scrutiny Task and Finish Group report for noting (**Appendix C**).
2. This report also provides an update on the CYP **School Organisation Planning Task & Finish Group** and **EOTAS Task & Finish Group**.
3. The report provides an update on any **informal business or updates** received by this Scrutiny Committee for noting.
4. This report also provides links to the scrutiny of **related matters by other scrutiny committees and other relevant council committees**, which aims to provide Members with further information in relation to the Committee's work.

CYP Work Programme 2023/24

5. This Scrutiny Committee agreed its work programme for 2023/24 at its meeting on the 17 October 2023. Since this meeting, further updates have emerged, and the Chair has therefore reviewed the work programme. Any changes are reflected in **Appendix A**.

6. The Committee is recommended to note the updated timetable of issues for the Committee as set out in **Appendix A**.

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Regional Adoption Collaborative Annual Report 2022/23

7. Attached to this report at **Appendix B** is a copy of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Regional Adoption Collaborative Annual Report 2022/23. **Appendix B** is supported by further Appendices as follows:
 - **Appendix 1** sets out key performance data in respect of children by quarter and local authority.
 - **Appendix 2** provides information in respect of adopter enquiries and recruitment of adopters.
 - **Appendix 3** provides information in respect of Adoption Support.
 - **Appendix 4** provides information in respect of Adoption Panel activity.

8. The report focusses on the following areas of the region's work:
 - Service Development and Governance
 - Staffing
 - Service Functions
 - Family Finding
 - Recruitment & Assessment – Marketing and Adopters
 - Adoption Support
 - Adoption Panel
 - Complaints and Compliments

- Consultation, Engagement and Quality Assurance
- Policies and Procedures
- Conclusion, Future Priorities and Challenges

9. Members are recommended to note the contents of the report.

Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP)

10. At its meeting on the 13^h June 2023, CYP Members considered a request from Scrutiny Chairs to nominate the Chair and 2 Members from each Scrutiny Committee to take part in a cross-scrutiny Inquiry as part of the next stage of the RLDP in relation to a consultation on the preferred strategic options.

11. The RDLDP cross-committee group met on the 7th July 2023 to discuss how it could most effectively scrutinise this issue, given its breadth. The Group agreed that prioritising three topics of focus would be most effective; and that smaller sub-groups be established to undertake this work.

12. The three priority topics agreed were:

- Securing Planning Obligations/s106
- Public Transport
- Local and District Centres

13. The three sub-groups covering the above topics were established. Each group met to gather evidence during October and November 2023. An output report combining the key findings and recommendations from the three sub-groups is attached at **Appendix C**.

14. The cross-committee Group met on the 30 November 2023 to agree the report, before it is signed off by the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny

Committee (as lead committee) on the 13 December 2023, and prior to its submission to Cabinet on 14th December 2023.

15. This Committee is recommended to note the contents of the report set out in ***Appendix C***.

SOP Task & Finish Group

16. The SOP Task & Finish Group was established as a rolling Group to consider a number of School Organisation Planning proposals coming forward during 2022/23 and will continue to meet during the current year. Since the last committee business report (17 October 2023), this Scrutiny Committee and the SOP Task & Finish Group has considered:

- School Organisation Planning: Primary School Places To Serve Cathays And Parts Of Gabalfa, Heath, Llandaff North And Plasnewydd
- Fairwater Community Campus Band B Redevelopment

EOTAS Task & Finish Group

17. The Inquiry into ***“Young People Who Are Educated Other Than at School (EOTAS) and What Factors Could Lead to Them Becoming Vulnerable to Criminal Exploitation”*** was paused during Autumn 2023, to free up the Scrutiny Officer to work on the RLDP Inquiry (details above).

18. However, this Inquiry will resume in early 2024 and the Scrutiny Officer is currently coordinating diaries to facilitate this work. As a reminder, Members of this Task Group are:

- Cllr Bridgeman (Chair)
- Councillor Ferguson-Thorne
- Councillor Hopkins
- Carol Cobert
- Karen Dell’Armi – independent co-optee

19. Celeste Lewis has also expressed an interest in joining this Group and will therefore be added to the Membership. Further progress will be reported back to a future meeting of this scrutiny committee.

CYPSC – Informal Business

20. Due to the volume of items coming forward for the CYPSC Work Programme, sometimes the Chair will advise the Scrutiny Officer to send information informally to Committee Members. The following have been sent to Members:

- **Letter from Estyn** – this was distributed to CYPSC Members via email for comments on the 28 November 2023. Members are recommended to note the contents of the letter.

Relevant Items considered by other Scrutiny Committees

21. To equip CYP Members with as much information as possible to assist them with their work, it has been agreed that relevant information considered by other Scrutiny Committees be distributed to Members for information and reference. The following have been considered recently and links to papers provided:

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee – 18 October 2023

- Via the link below, Members are requested to consider Agenda Item 31 – **Annual Complaints Report 2022/23**

[Agenda for Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 18th October, 2023, 4.30 pm : Cardiff Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee – 22 November 2023

- Via the link below, Members are requested to consider Agenda Items 4 – **Public Services Board Wellbeing Plan 2023-28**; and 5 – **Month 6 Monitoring Report**.

[Agenda for Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 22nd November, 2023, 5.30 pm : Cardiff Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Relevant Items considered by other Council Committees

22. Members may also wish to note the contents of agendas of other Council Committees, which will be of interest to this Scrutiny Committee:

Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee (CPAC) – 6 November 2023

This includes agenda items on:

- Children Looked After in Education Annual Report 2022-23 and Virtual Headteacher Update
- Cardiff Commitment Update
- Into work Advice Service - Bright Futures Update
- Support for Care Leavers Report

[Agenda for Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee on Monday, 6th November, 2023, 2.00 pm : Cardiff Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Way Forward

23. During the meeting, Members will have the opportunity to;

- Note the updated CYP Work Programme 2023/24 (**Appendix A**)
- Note the VVC Annual Report 2022/23 (**Appendix B**)

- Note the output report from the RLDP cross-committee group **(Appendix C)**
- Note the progress in relation to the SOP Task & Finish Group.
- Note the progress in relation to the EOTAS Task & Finish Group.
- Note progress in relation to those Items distributed informally including the letter from Estyn.
- Note related items considered by other Scrutiny Committees.
- Note related items considered by other Council Committees

Legal Implications

24. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

Financial Implications

25. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme.

However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to:

- I. Note the updated CYP Work Programme 2023/24 (**Appendix A**)
- II. Note the VVC Annual Report 2022/23 (**Appendix B**)
- III. Note the output report from the RLDP cross-committee group (**Appendix C**)
- IV. Note the progress in relation to the SOP Task & Finish Group.
- V. Note the progress in relation to the EOTAS Task & Finish Group.
- VI. Note progress in relation to those Items distributed informally, including the letter from Estyn.
- VII. Note related items considered by other Scrutiny Committees.
- VIII. Note related items considered by other Council Committees

Leanne Weston

Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer

29 November 2023

All meetings are Tuesdays at 4.30pm unless otherwise stated. Subject to change, based on Cabinet Forward Plan

	5 Dec 2023	9 Jan 2024	Mon 26 Feb 2024 17.00	12 Mar 2024	16 Apr 2024	7 May 2024
Committee Item 1	Children’s Services 23/24 Q2 performance	SOP Investment Strategy – <i>pre-decision</i> – TBC	Budget and Corporate Plan Scrutiny	Central South Education Consortium/ Education Annual Report - <i>partnership/ Governance report</i>	Engagement and Participation of Children and Young People – <i>Priority Topic</i> - requested by CYPSC	Innovations in Children’s Services
Committee Item 2	Education/Schools Pandemic Recovery - Update	City Centre Youth Hub – <i>pre-decision</i> – TBC		Education/Schools Pandemic Recovery – Update	YJS Update – quarterly update	Children with ALN who are also CLA
Committee Item 3	Committee Business	YJS Update – <i>quarterly update</i>		Impact of ALN Reform on schools – <i>CYP Priority Topic</i>	Children’s Services 23/24 Q3 performance	CPAC Annual Report
SOP T&F TBC monthly		SOP Investment Strategy - TBC		Admissions Arrangements - TBC	TBC	TBC

Green – Education & LL; Peach – Children’s Services; Blue – Partnership Reports; Pink – Supporting Young People (new portfolio); yellow – cross portfolio/departmental; orange – early years:

Inquiry

- Young People Who Are Educated Other Than at School (EOTAS) and What Factors Could Lead to Them Becoming Vulnerable to Criminal Exploitation

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VALE, VALLEYS, AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE

REVIEW OF SERVICE AND

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

For Period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE



**Achieving More Together /
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd**

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VALE, VALLEYS, AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE (VVC) ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1st APRIL 2022 to 31st March 2023

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Vale, Valleys, and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) as part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS), provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council.

1.2 This report covers the period **1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023**. The requirement to review the service under Regulation 39 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019 on a six-monthly basis is incorporated into this report. It also includes the reporting requirements set out in the governance arrangements for the region. The report provides a record of the performance, activity and the quality of the service provided during the reporting period.

1.3 The report has the following Appendices:

Appendix 1 sets out key performance data in respect of children by quarter and local authority.

Appendix 2 provides information in respect of adopter enquiries and recruitment of adopters.

Appendix 3 provides information in respect of Adoption Support.

Appendix 4 provides information in respect of Adoption Panel activity.

2. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

- 2.1** There have been no changes to the organisational structure of the service although during the year, VVC managers were regraded to reflect the increase in responsibilities and overall development of the service. The service continues to be delivered via three functional teams, each one managed by a Team Manager and a Business Support Team managed by a Business Support Manager.
- 2.2** Staff have continued to work on a hybrid basis with attendance at the office to carry out specific responsibilities and in person meetings where required. Some members of the Business Support Team have continued to work from the office to carry out core tasks and respond to enquiries. The Vale of Glamorgan are undertaking a review of office space which will assist in determining future office needs.
- 2.3** The membership of the Joint Committee changed in May 2022 following the local elections. This caused a delay in convening the meeting scheduled for May 2022 and so a combined meeting of VVC Management Board and Joint Committee took place in July 2022. The Directors for the partner authorities also attended this meeting. The Joint Committee met in December 2022 and in January 2023 to agree the budget.
- 2.4** Quarterly meetings of VVC's Management Board continued to be held during the period and have been chaired by the Vale of Glamorgan's Director of Social Services. There has been no change to the membership of the Management Board during this period.
- 2.5** The Operational Group has continued to meet on a quarterly basis. Revisions to the Terms of Reference have now been incorporated into the new Collaborative Agreement. A joint Heads of Service and Operational Group meeting was held in June 2022 to look at Adoption Support matters and provide greater consistency of practice.
- 2.6** The agendas for all these levels of regional governance have continued to address a range of matters both at a regional and national level. These include budget approval, performance reporting, setting service priorities and relevant aspects from the national

agenda. A representative from AFA Cymru attended a combined meeting of the Management Board, Directors and Joint Committee in July 2022 to discuss the implementation of the Welsh Early Permanence Framework.

- 2.7** The budget for the Collaborative is managed by the Vale of Glamorgan and is monitored closely by the Management Board and approved by the Joint Committee. Due to the vacancy position and revenue generated by VVC adopters being utilised by external agencies, the end of year position in March 2022 reported a significant underspend in the budget for 2021-22. A proposal to retain the underspend within VVC was agreed by Management Board and Joint Committee in June 2022. These monies were allocated to provide additional Adoption Support services, independent assessments, and the regional contribution to the TESSA programme. The service was able to utilise these monies to appoint a fixed term Social Worker to the Adoption Support team and to extend some part-time contracts within the team to increase capacity and meet increased demands. A number of non-agency assessments were undertaken by an external independent agency to reduce the waiting list for this area of work. However, following discussions regarding the 2023-24 budget during quarter 3 a decision was taken to halt further spend against the underspend in an effort to contribute to the savings required for the forthcoming year. During quarter 4 NAS obtained Welsh Government funding to meet the regional contributions to the TESSA programme across Wales which has ensured the continuation of the programme for the next two years.
- 2.8** In October 2022, as part of the budget planning process for 2023-24, the Management Board began considering potential cost pressures for the coming financial year and recommended seeking the views of the regional Finance Officers in this process. A joint meeting was convened in November 2022 between Heads of Service, the Vale of Glamorgan Accounts Manager and the regional Finance Officers. The meeting considered options to address cost pressures affecting the service and potential savings which may be required. These proposals were put forward to a meeting of the Joint Committee in December 2022 but were not agreed until January 2023 following the Welsh Government settlement. The budget for 2023-24 was agreed with cost savings of 3%. It was also agreed to utilise the reserves in the event of the service not

being able to meet the cost savings. The Management Board recommended that the monitoring of the budget would be assisted on an ongoing basis by quarterly meetings of the Finance Officers, the Vale of Glamorgan Accounts Manager and the Regional Adoption Manager. These meetings have been scheduled to discuss the budget report and potential savings prior to presentation to Management Board.

- 2.9** The service is subject to an annual audit. The audit undertaken for the 2022/23 financial year identified a number of strengths and areas of good practice and the auditor determined that the system of controls in place were felt to provide “Substantial Assurance”.
- 2.10** Three issues of concern were identified, two of which related to compliance with the Collaborative Agreement which ended on 31 May 2023. The auditor highlighted the requirement to meet with Directors of Social Services on a bi-annual basis and noted the change to the billing of the partner agencies from quarterly to six-monthly. A meeting was held between the Management Board and Directors in July 2022, but it was agreed that these meetings were not required on an ongoing basis as internal communications mechanisms were already in place in the respective partner authorities. The six-monthly billing process had already been in place for some time as agreed by all partners. The revised Collaborative Agreement has formally removed the requirement to meet with Directors of Social Services and has formalised the billing process to six monthly.
- 2.11** The other issue of concern identified by the audit related to quoracy of Management Board meetings. There were two instances which occurred and due to short notice, it was not possible to arrange a substitute representative. A Management Action Plan has been developed in response to the findings and the finalised report was presented to VVC Management Board in July 2023.
- 2.12** The 2022/23 Statement of the Accounts will be audited by the Vale of Glamorgan’s External Auditors (Wales Audit Office) and reported to the Joint Committee in accordance with the Collaborative Agreement.

- 2.13** Meetings have been held with Regional information officers with responsibility for data management to review VVC's Information Sharing Protocol (WASPI) and carry out a Data Privacy Impact Assessment (DPIA). This work has been led by the Vale of Glamorgan's Data Protection Officer in conjunction with VVC staff and is ongoing.
- 2.14** On 1st June 2015 all parties formally signed the Collaborative Agreement which provides the governance framework within which the service operates and specifies the areas of responsibility and accountability.
- 2.15** The Collaborative Agreement which has been in place was varied in 2019 and extended to 31 May 2023. A revised Agreement has been prepared and the amendments agreed by the partner authorities. The authority to enter into the new Agreement was presented to the Vale of Glamorgan Cabinet on 6 July 2023 and agreed. It is in the process of being executed and sealed by all parties.
- 2.16** The Collaborative has continued to comply with all required performance monitoring and reporting to the National Adoption Service (NAS) as part of the National Performance Framework. VVC has been fully committed in adapting data collection systems to embed the range of measures required under the Framework and the two-stage model of assessment has fully embedded to ensure compliance with the requirements. In the Autumn of 2022, a range of new adoption support measures were issued to address the new requirements placed upon services in terms of contact, and improving the quality-of-Life Journey work which has necessitated further development of VVC's data systems. It is planned that these will be first reported to NAS during the first quarter of 2023-24.
- 2.17** The Regional Manager has been part of a working group initiated by Western Bay to develop the adoption modules for WCCIS. These have now been completed and work is underway to build them into the national system. A meeting has been held locally to begin discussion regarding the process of VVC transferring their record system onto WCCIS once the new system has been built.

2.18 The Regional Manager and Team Managers remain active participants in national forums and subgroups. The Regional Adoption Manager has taken on the Chair of the NAS Performance subgroup which is attended by representatives from the central team of NAS as well as representatives from the regional collaboratives and voluntary adoption agencies. The Recruitment and Assessment Manager was also part of a national group developing NAS' Welsh Early Permanence Strategy. The Regional Manager attends monthly meetings for Regional Adoption Managers facilitated by NAS and monthly meetings which involve representatives from the voluntary adoption agencies. In addition, the Head of Service for the Vale of Glamorgan, as host authority and the Regional Manager attend bi-monthly meetings with other regional and national leads to plan the business delivery of the national service from a regional perspective.

3. Staffing

- 3.1** During the year there have been several changes of staff created by staff leaving the service and long-term sickness. The Adoption Support Team lost two part-time members of staff. One of the vacancies created was filled by a staff member who had been employed on a temporary contract. The other vacancy was covered by an extension of contract for an existing part-time member of staff on a temporary basis until a permanent appointment could be made. The Family Finding Team also lost a part-time member of staff, and this was filled following an internal recruitment process.
- 3.2** In terms of the specialist posts funded from the 2019 Welsh Government investment in adoption services, the service is required to monitor any movement of staff within these posts to ensure that gaps are covered quickly, and performance is maintained. The Regional Adoption Manager has continued to complete six monthly returns to NAS during 2022-23 which report upon the performance of the region in relation to these posts to ensure continuation of the funding.
- 3.3** The investment currently funds five posts within the service which have remained largely stable. However, the TESSA Co-ordinator left the service in July 2022 which meant that the duties were covered by the Family Finding Manager until the post was successfully recruited to in September 2022. The Children and Young Person Co-

ordinator obtained a Social Care Officer post within the Collaborative in August 2022 but he continued to cover the duties associated with the role in conjunction with Adoption UK. A new appointment to the role was made in December 2022.

- 3.4** At the beginning of the year, VVC Management Board agreed to certain proposals to utilise the underspend in the budget remaining from 2021-22. Part of these proposals involved the appointment of a short, fixed term post to address the some of the pressures being experienced by the Adoption Support Team.
- 3.5** As a result of the discussions concerning capacity in 2021-22, the Management Board also agreed as part of cost pressures to some additional investment within the service. Two new full-time Social Care Officer posts were created to support the Adoption Support Team and one part-time Social Care Officer position was created to support the Post Adoption Contact arm of the service. The full-time positions were recruited to in August and September 2022 and the part-time position was filled in December 2022 via an internal appointment.
- 3.6** A review of capacity within the Business Support function resulted in the creation of an additional part-time Business Support Officer post which was filled following an internal recruitment process. The Collaborative also benefited from a Kickstart employee during the year who subsequently went to obtain a permanent position within the service.
- 3.7** The Collaborative experienced some gaps in service delivery created by periods of long-term sickness. The Adoption Support Manager was on an extended period of sick leave in the early part of the year, which required the duties associated with the post to be covered by the other managers in the service. The Letterbox Co-ordinator was absent from her post for a significant period of time due to sickness absence until this was concluded in October 2022. The Letterbox service was covered during this period by extending the contract of a part time Social Worker.

4. SERVICE FUNCTIONS

- 4.1. Performance against each of the service functions is outlined under the following sections of the report alongside areas of development.

5. FAMILY FINDING (APPENDIX 1)

- 5.1 Family Finding remains a key area of activity for the region and the ability to place children effectively and promptly underpins all other activities within the service.
- 5.2 Quarters 1 and 2 saw **73** children referred with a possible care plan of adoption. Referrals increased in the latter half of the year with a further **89** children taking the total to **162**. Referral rates remain very similar for 2022-23 compared with 2021-22. However, the referrals were more heavily weighted to the first half of 2021-22 and the latter half of 2022-23. The reduction in numbers during the 12-month period crossing these two financial years is reflected in the subsequent reduced figures for 'Should Be Adopted' (SBA) decisions, Placement Orders (PO) and resulting placements during 2022-23. However, an increase in referrals for Q3 and Q4 2022-23 has resulted in a rise in SBA and PO activity and it is anticipated there being a subsequent impact with an increased number of children being placed for adoption in 2023-24.
- 5.3 Around **50%** of children referred in 2022-23 were withdrawn from adoption with an alternative care plan being made possible for them. This is a slight increase from the **48%** in the previous year. As noted in previous years, withdrawn referrals in many instances do not equate to a decrease in workload as a lot of work is undertaken to progress the adoption process prior to it being discontinued, particularly from administrative roles within VVC.
- 5.4 'Should be Adopted' (SBA) decisions continued at a similar rate through the year with a further **28** in addition to the **34** reported in the first half of 2022-23, totalling **62**. This is a **30%** reduction from the previous year's figure of **90** which itself had been higher than in previous years. As outlined above, the pattern of referrals and withdrawal rates

have affected these figures, although the rate of SBA decisions increased within Quarter 4 which might indicate a growth trend into the next year.

- 5.5** Likewise, the region has recorded **59** Placement Orders (PO) granted during 2022-23 which is in line with the number of ‘Should be Adopted’ decisions and rate of referrals.
- 5.6** As predicted, placement activity increased during the latter half of the year increasing from **28** in Quarters 1 and 2 to a further **37**, taking the overall number of children placed to **65**. 2021-22 appears to have been a slight anomaly in recent years and the current number of children placed is similar to the pattern in the previous 2-3 years.
- 5.7** There has been a higher proportion of children waiting more than the benchmark of 6 months from the ‘Should be Adopted’ decision to matching. However, analysis of the reasons why children wait longer indicate that half of those children were placed in sibling groups, and a number of children with more complex backgrounds waited longer before being able to achieve permanence with adopters. Positively, some **75%** of children within the region continue to be placed with VVC adopters, **20%** were placed externally but within Wales and only **5%** of children were placed outside of Wales.
- 5.8** Despite an increase in Placement Orders during October-April, the number of children waiting for adoption at the end of the year reduced from **53** in September to **39** in March 2023. It is positive to see a continued decrease in the number of children waiting for adoptive placements.
- 5.9** There were **69** Adoption Orders granted during 2022-23. One adoptive placement disrupted during the year, this child had been placed with his prospective adopter for two years and intensive support had been put in place via VVC, the local authority and other providers but this could not sustain the placement. This is the first disruption in VVC in almost three years which highlights how rare an occurrence this is.
- 5.10** Performance in relation to the provision of Life Journey Material for children being placed for adoption has been maintained at a similar level having significantly

improved over recent years. It is now consistently **100%** at matching Panel. There remain some challenges regarding the capacity of Social Workers within the local authorities to finalise the later life letters for children by the second adoption review resulting in performance for this measure being approximately **80%**. The specialist funded Life Journey Practitioners in partner authorities are consistently meeting the second review target in respect of the finalised life journey book. Significant efforts are being made by the Life Journey Work Co-ordinators in VVC to support local authority Social Workers to improve the provision of later life letters and meet the target.

- 5.11** The Life Journey Work Co-ordinators have developed resources to address the quality of work being produced as this is part of the new performance framework and guidance to assist in the completion of later life letters. The Life Journey Co-ordinators offer regular support, advice, and guidance to the Life Journey Work Practitioners within our partner authorities and in addition offer workshops/briefings to local authority teams. The Life Journey Work Co-ordinators support the allocation process within each authority and monitor performance across the region. The Life Journey Co-ordinators are developing an Improvement Plan to support both improvement in measurable performance and in qualitative feedback on the materials themselves.
- 5.12** During 2022-23, VVC's Transitions Social Worker has supported **35** children through a combination of direct work, support for foster carers and adopters and completion of Trauma Nurture Timeline reports. Some of these children were referred in 2021-22 and so work has continued into 2022-23. Transitions support is provided for all children aged 3+ and has become integral to the service and has enabled an enhanced level of support to be provided to children moving on to adoption.
- 5.13** The demand on the Transitions Service over the past year has meant that priority has had to be given to direct work needed for children and other aspects of the role have had to wait longer e.g. training and facilitating Understanding the Child Days. VVC has continued to review the impact of the expectations from the NAS Good Practice Guides and consider the capacity implications for the service. VVC held the first Understanding the Child Day in March 2023 and the intention is for these to be held

for all children being matched who are aged 3+ (or within a sibling group where one is aged 3+).

- 5.14** VVC has continued to utilise all available family finding methods over the year. The team liaises closely with the Adoption Register Wales (ARW)/LinkMaker team to ensure information is updated and monitored in a timely manner. VVC has participated in national profiling events and an Activity Day over the past year. During the reporting period, VVC has continued to refer children into the Adopting Together Service and has placed 3 children in 2 placements via this Service.
- 5.15** One child has been placed under the new Welsh Early Permanence framework and this placement has now progressed to an Adoption Order application. VVC continues to be at the forefront of advocating for Welsh Early Permanence and are working with local authority partners to identify children where this might be a suitable option.

6. RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT (APPENDIX 2)

Marketing

- 6.1** Despite the challenging backdrop of a national reduction in the number of enquiries, VVC has maintained a robust and realistic recruitment strategy. The Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator continues to be an invaluable resource and is an essential element of ensuring the service engages with as many members of the public as possible.
- 6.2** VVC has a growing social media presence on Facebook and Instagram. The Collaborative uses pay-per-click advertising on both platforms to promote the service and direct individuals to our website.
- 6.3** With the aim of reaching more households in the region, VVC identified Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan as target areas and council tax inserts were sent out to all residents for those 3 local authorities. Cardiff Council was not able to provide this service, but a significant proportion of applicants come from the Cardiff area without targeting recruitment.

- 6.4** VVC has continued to explore all suitable in-person events providing additional opportunities to engage with the public. VVC were represented at Pride Cymru, the Vale of Glamorgan Agricultural Show and National Eisteddfod for Wales. During the year there were fewer opportunities to attend more localised events, but it is envisaged this picture will improve in the coming year with more events being scheduled. VVC's Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator continues explore which local events are available.
- 6.5** The Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator has continued to update VVC's website and curated a robust 'Read, Watch, Listen' section. This provides those exploring adoption with every opportunity to review a range of different sources, in a medium that best suits them. These includes written testimonies, research articles, podcasts, suggested books, tutorials, and documentaries.
- 6.6** VVC continues to respond to **100%** of enquiries within five working days and the majority of these receive a response within 24 working hours via our Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator or Duty Officer.
- 6.7** Overall VVC's marketing strategy is to maximise exposure of the service to enable those exploring adoption to make an informed choice and to ensure that a consistent and high-quality response to all enquiries is provided.

Recruitment of Adopters

- 6.8** In line with the national experience, VVC has continued to see a reduction in the number of enquiries during this reporting period. During the pandemic, VVC experienced a sustained increase in enquiry numbers, and this continued into 2021-22 when **369** enquires were received. In 2022-23, **210** were received which equated to a **43%** reduction.
- 6.9** The rate of enquiries are similar to the numbers received pre-pandemic but every effort is made when tracking enquiries to understand the individual circumstances of the enquirer which might impact on their willingness or ability to continue further with the

process. Every enquiry is followed up by the Marketing Officer on three occasions (within the first week, followed by 1 month and 6 months).

- 6.10** 9 virtual Information Evenings were held with a total of **77** households attending these events and feedback received has continued to be positive. This represents a small decrease in the number of households that attended an Information Evening when compared to the same period the year before (**83** households). These events were delivered by VVC's Recruitment and Assessment Manager and Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator. Feedback received from participants continues to be positive and despite the Collaborative receiving fewer enquiries, the individuals in attendance are more informed and ready to engage in the process.
- 6.11** **Appendix 2** outlines the number of Registrations of Interest (ROI) received following attendance at Information Evenings and the progress against the two-stage model of recruitment and assessment.
- 6.12** The Collaborative continues to deliver its' 3-day Preparation to Adopt training course in conjunction with our neighbouring Collaborative, Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS). This partnership arose out of a necessity to increase the frequency of training for prospective adopters enabling VVC to facilitate **10** training courses a year with **42** households attending. In addition, one 'second time adopter' training course was held and this had six households attend. Again, this is against a backdrop of fewer enquiries being received although the fact that VVC has been able to maintain a similar number of participants on the training is positive. On a practical basis VVC and WBAS provide a facilitator who jointly deliver the course. Consistently, positive feedback is received from participants.
- 6.13** From April 2022 to March 2023, a total of **47** adopter approvals were recommended by VVCs Adoption Panel. This represents a decrease when compared to the performance for the same period a year earlier where **59** approvals were ratified. Despite the reduction, this remains a significant number of approvals and is a pleasing outcome in light of the challenges already outlined above.

- 6.14** These approvals are broken down as follows, **17** RCT, **21** Cardiff, **8** Vale of Glamorgan, **0** Merthyr Tydfil and **1** other (**1** Swansea). Of those approved **36** were first time adopters, **7** were second time adopters, **1** were third time adopters, and **3** foster carers were assessed for children already residing in their care.
- 6.15** The applicants approved during this period who have secured links have predominantly been matched with children from within the region. Four have been linked with children from other Collaboratives (2 from Welsh Collaboratives and 2 children from English authorities). Three household withdrew after their approval due to a change of personal circumstances (1 couple unexpectedly conceived a child and two other households experienced relationship breakdowns or disruptions).
- 6.16** As indicated under the Family Finding section, a significant number of VVC children have been placed with in-house adopters. However, due to the reduction in the number of children waiting, VVC has accrued a significant number of approved adopters who are waiting for a suitable match. This trend has been noted across Wales and is being closely monitored.

Welsh Early Permanency

- 6.17** In June 2022, the All-Wales Framework for Welsh Early Permanency was launched. Much awareness raising work with colleagues has taken place since its launch and the Collaborative has been proactive in ensuring quality information is available to the public who wish to explore early permanence as an option.
- 6.18** The Collaborative was the first service to successfully assess, approve, link and place a child using this Framework. A Cardiff household was approved as early permanency carers and provided a placement for an RCT child. That child went on to have a care plan of adoption and has since had an Adoption Order granted.
- 6.19** Eager to provide learning from the experience, the early permanency carers have been filmed being interviewed by the Recruitment and Assessment Manager in order for a resource to be made available to others considering early permanency.

7. ADOPTION SUPPORT (APPENDIX 3)

- 7.1** Referrals for Post Adoption Support services and requests for assessment of post adoption support needs have remained stable during the period. **70** new referrals in the year have been received compared to **69** in the previous year. The nature of these referrals however remain complex and require intensive support from the team.
- 7.2** Referrals for Access to Birth Records and Intermediary services for adopted adults are consistent with the level of referrals received in the previous year. A total of **49** referrals have been received and broken down as **26** Access to Birth Records referrals and **23** Intermediary requests. There has also been a continuation in requests for information under the Post Commencement Regulations 2005 as a number of those enquirers have reached 18 years of age.
- 7.3** Due to the demands placed upon the service, there continues to be a waiting list for all aspects of the post adoption support service. At year end there were a number of families awaiting allocation which needed to be prioritised to ensure that the most critical matters were dealt with in a timely manner. The newly appointed Social Care Officers have been utilised to support initial assessments to reduce delay.
- 7.4** The team has continued to be proactive in seeking alternative means of supporting families with the formation of a weekly hub meeting. In addition, a sports group has been running weekly since December 2022 and provides a small group of young people with intense support. The Children and Young People Co-ordinator (CYPC) provides one-to-one sessions for young people to enable them to transition into community groups and facilities.
- 7.5** VVC has established strong links with ENFYS covering Cardiff and the Vale and also Multi Agency Permanence Support Service (MAPSS) which covers Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. Referrals in respect of post adoption support are screened by both these services and therapeutic interventions are either provided or are recommended to the local authority who have responsibility for funding.

- 7.6** In conjunction with ENFYS, VVC has started running courses for adopters on “Nurturing Attachments”, “Rhythm and Regulation” and “Food for Thought” which is followed up with case specific consultation. Training on the “Introduction to BUSS Model” and “SHADES” Training has also been provided for adoptive families.
- 7.7** VVC was also able to facilitate a Summer Fun Day for adoptive families. **69** families attended with **91** children. A Christmas Funday was also organised which reached **62** families and **84** children. Both events had been suspended during the pandemic and their re-introduction was well received by the families in attendance.
- 7.8** The grant funded posts are continuing to be embedded into the region and to enhance the overall service provision maintaining positive links with national counterparts. The Birth Parent Adviser has been proactive in developing a range of support mechanisms for birth parents. The Birth Parent Adviser has received **48** new referrals this year and continued to support ongoing service users. Additionally, the role has an element of awareness raising and VVC continues work closely with a large range of services within our region which exceeds the part time hours allocated to this element of the service.
- 7.9** The TESSA project was rebranded during 2022-23 and is now known as PATHways. VVC’s PATHways Co-ordinator has continued to have a positive impact in assessing and supporting lower priority needs. The Co-ordinator undertakes assessments of need and processes referrals of families who may be eligible for the service. **56** referrals have been made to TESSA / PATHways by VVC during this period. The role has also been important in sign-posting families to other relevant services.
- 7.10** The Children and Young People Co-ordinator has continued to be directly involved in supporting Adoption UK Connected groups on a monthly basis with staff from the Connected service. These groups have returned to face-to-face meetings. The service caters for adopted children and young people aged 7 upwards, **106** children and young people from VVC are registered with the service. In addition, VVC provides direct support sessions to children within the region, and involvement in the sports group can

result in progression to the Connected service and community groups. The post also supervises direct contact sessions for adopted children with birth family or siblings.

7.11 The NAS Good Practice Guides continue to place a number of expectations upon the service to continue to improve Adoption Support services. One aspect is the requirement to undertake check-ins with adopters and birth parents post Adoption Order. It is hoped that this service will commence during the coming year and will be provided a year after the Adoption Order and at the three-year point. It is envisaged that the newly appointed Post Adoption Contact Social Care Officer will assist with this process. In addition, NAS has developed a strategic plan, Adopt Cymru 2025 which details several objectives to improve adoption support services. This plan will form the basis of the regional business plan going forward but will require additional resource to enable the full objectives of the Adopt Cymru 2025 plan to be met.

7.12 As outlined in previous reports, VVC does not manage a budget for the provision of adoption support services although is responsible for undertaking assessments of post adoption support needs. These assessments may recommend an adoption support package to the respective authority where the adoptive family resides, and which holds a budget to support such requests. The total expenditure on adoption support services for the reporting year was **£214,906.24** supporting **66 Children** compared to the previous year which was **£186,484.95** which supported **90** children. The in-house services including MAPSS and ENFYS have managed to reduce the reliance on external therapeutic provision but the costs per package have increased. This expenditure is monitored closely via the Management Board.

8. ADOPTION PANEL (APPENDIX 4)

8.1 VVC has continued to maintain a joint Panel which covers the four partner areas. Panel sittings are scheduled four times per month and are held virtually. Discussion has taken place regarding the resumption of face-to-face Panels but the current arrangements have worked well and enabled full participation particularly from participants who live outside the region.

- 8.2** The workload of the Panel has been consistent during the period and has reflected the level of regional performance as outlined in **Appendix 4**.
- 8.3** Membership of the Panel has remained fairly stable during the past twelve months, with the loss of 3 independent members and the recruitment of 2 new members. There remains an ongoing need to increase Social Worker membership from partner authorities to support the Social Worker membership from within VVC.
- 8.4** Reviews of Adoption Panel Chairs has been undertaken and a schedule of annual reviews of Panel members is underway. DBS checks for Panel members have continued to be updated.

9. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

- 9.1** VVC received two complaints during the reporting period. One complaint was from an adoptive parent concerned about the availability of services to support her adopted son. The second complaint was from a birth mother requesting an adoption application for her husband in respect of her birth son. The complainant was concerned about the advice provided by the Collaborative in terms of the process. Both complaints were investigated and resolved at Stage 1.
- 9.2** VVC staff continue to receive a range of compliments and positive feedback on the services they provide, and these are collated and reported upon as required.

10. CONSULTATION, ENGAGEMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

- 10.1** VVC managers have continued to work with the Vale of Glamorgan's Quality Assurance Officer in developing a robust evaluation of services from the service user perspective. VVC has mechanisms to gain the views of service users at various stages of the process, from initial enquiry through to approval, matching and placement of children and post-adoption. The feedback is collated by the Quality Assurance Officer and reports are shared with the service.

10.2 In terms of Adoption Support, the TESSA/PATHways Co-ordinator has developed a questionnaire for all families in receipt of TESSA/PATHways which compliments the evaluation undertaken by the project. Again, the outcome of those questionnaires are collated by the Quality Assurance Officer. Feedback from service users is also gathered at other points and following receipt of various types of service. Advice has been provided by the Quality Assurance Officer in developing the questionnaires for the check-ins with birth parents and adopters.

10.3 The Regional Adoption Manager has participated in discussions at a national level and has contributed to the development the new All Wales Quality Assurance Framework. This framework provides a system of file audit and peer review by managers in the service.

11. POLICY AND PROCEDURE

11.1 The Regional Adoption Manager has participated in the review of the NAS draft All Wales Policies and Procedures which are due to be finalised in the coming year. These policies will be available for all staff working within adoption and childcare colleagues within the partner agencies.

11.2 The Family Finding Manager has developed a contact risk assessment tool to assist decision making in respect of facilitating direct contact between birth parents and adopters. This tool is now being considered at a national level.

11.3 As outlined earlier in the report, the service has begun to utilise some of the new processes contained in the Good Practice guides such as the Trauma Nurture Timeline.

12. CONCLUSION, FUTURE PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES

12.1 Despite the reduction in the number of children referred for adoption and the number placed, the reduction in the number of children waiting for placement at year end demonstrates the continued commitment of the service to prioritise this area of work.

The number of children placed with VVC adopters has been maintained during the year enabling more children to remain within the region. During quarter 3 and 4, VVC experienced an increase in referrals of children into the service which will increase activity in following year.

- 12.2** In terms of the recruitment of adopters, the region experienced a significant reduction in the number of enquiries received which has brought VVC in line with other regions in Wales. Inevitably this has produced a reduction in the number of registrations of interest received and the number of adopters approved. The region has continued to have a significant number of approved adopters waiting which has enabled children to be placed locally within our regional resource. The challenge going forward is to continue to monitor the level enquiries and to better understand the reasons for the reduction to better inform our marketing strategy. NAS has already highlighted this issue at a national level and is planning to commission some research into the reduction in enquiries via their marketing company, COWSHED.
- 12.3** The ongoing challenge for VVC is to continue to explore all placement options for children waiting and also to manage those adopters waiting for suitable matches. One placement option which has been developed during the year has been the launch of the Welsh Early Permanence Framework. VVC has taken the lead in promoting this service both from the child and adopter perspective and secured the first placement in Wales. This approach needs to be further developed and embedded within the region.
- 12.4** As highlighted in previous reports, the provision of a robust Adoption Support service continues to present a significant challenge for the service. The increased emphasis upon adoption support at a national level has resulted in expectations at a delivery level which are impacted by the resources available. Considerable work has been undertaken by the team in reducing the waiting list for adoption support services and the injection of the additional Social Care Officers into the service has enabled improvements to be made. The service has been able to develop some new ways of working via the sports group and the family hubs as a result of these new appointments.

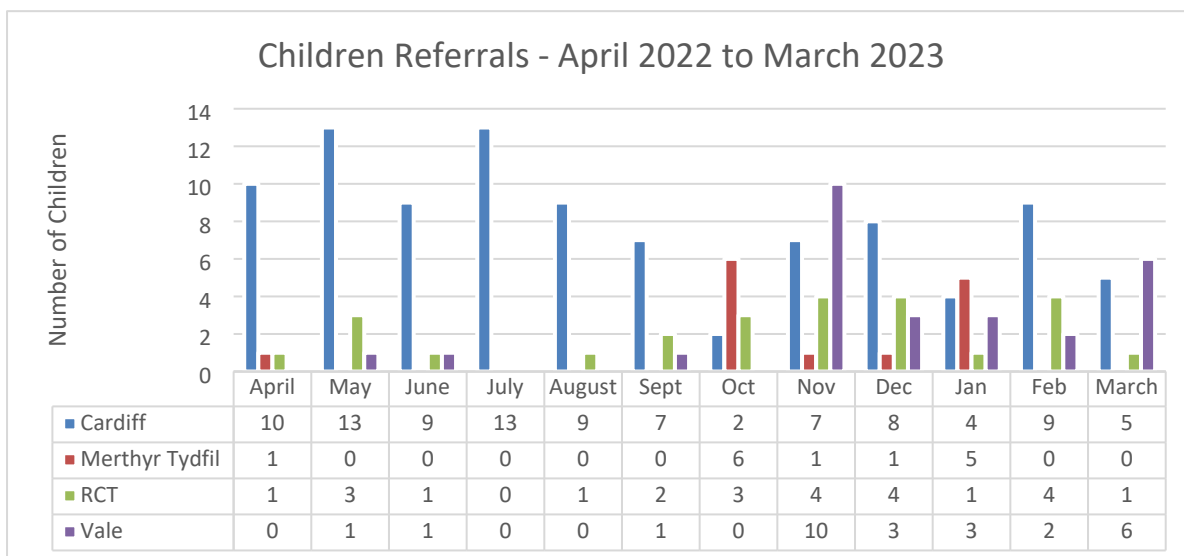
- 12.5** The full implementation of the Good Practice Guides for Adoption Support needs to be kept under review going forward but it is anticipated that the development of the check-in process will go some way to meet the requirements.
- 12.6** A range of matters concerning Adoption Support have been key agenda items for discussion via Management Board and the Operational Group in an effort to standardise practice across the region. The increased demand for funding therapeutic support packages has remained a focus for discussion and will remain a challenge for VVC both in respect of internal cross regional placements and those from external placing agencies.
- 12.7** It is anticipated that the cost savings required for 2023-24 will need to be monitored carefully in the coming year to reduce the impact on service delivery.

Angela Harris

Regional Adoption Manager

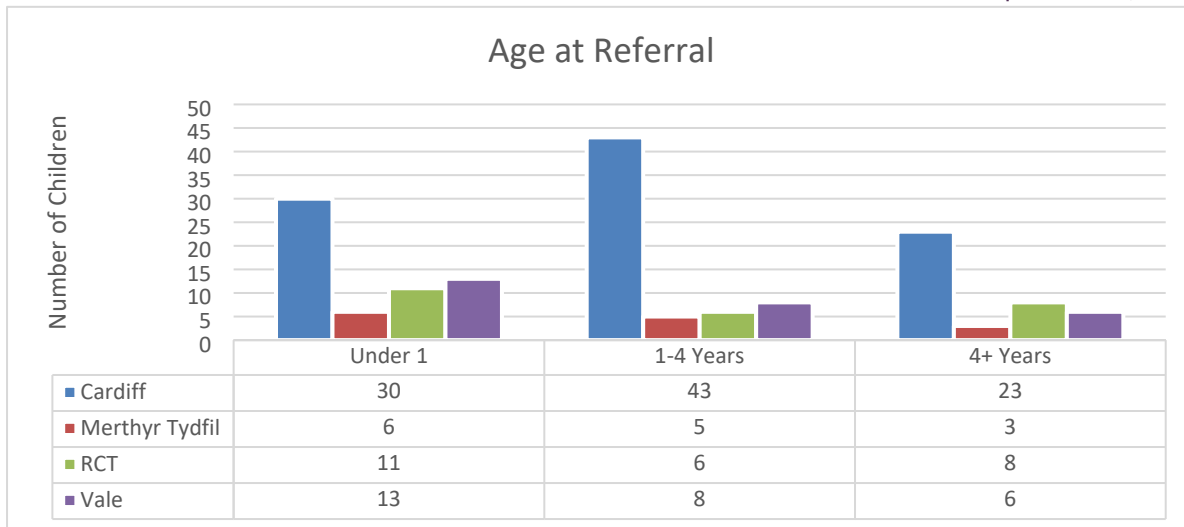
Referrals

162 children were referred to the service during the period April 2022 to March 2023. **54.3%** of children were withdrawn before an SBA decision could be made. This is a **6.8%** increase when compared to previous year. In all cases, the reasons for withdrawal were ‘placed with parents’, ‘positive parenting assessment’, kinship, or change of plan to long-term fostering. **17** children withdrawn before an SBA decision could be made were over the age of 4.

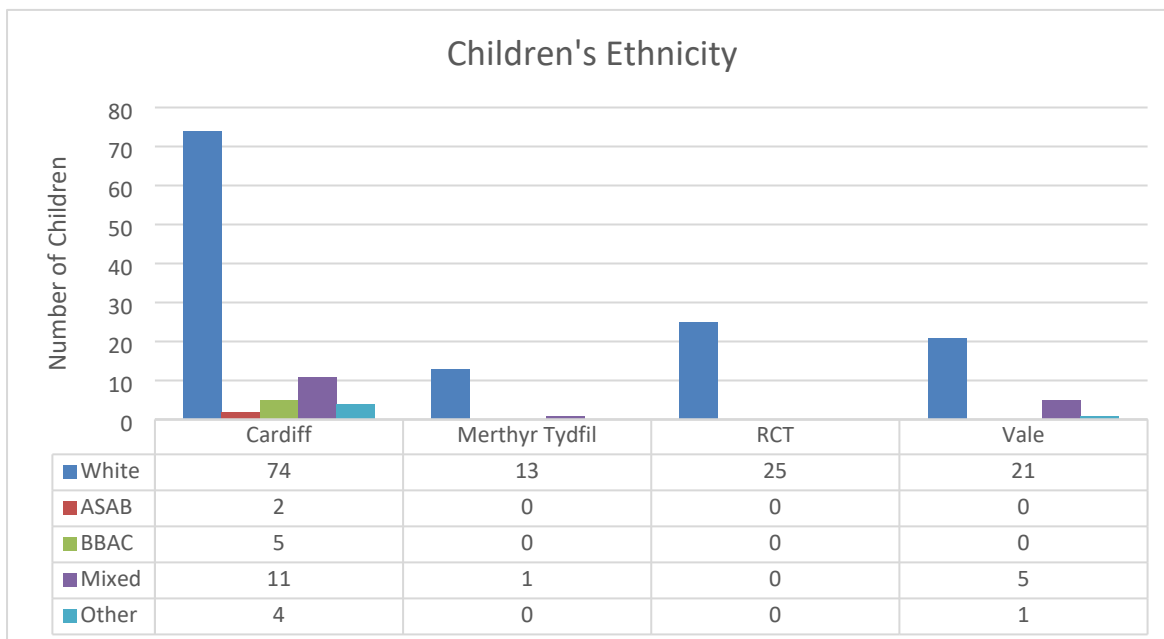


Demographics

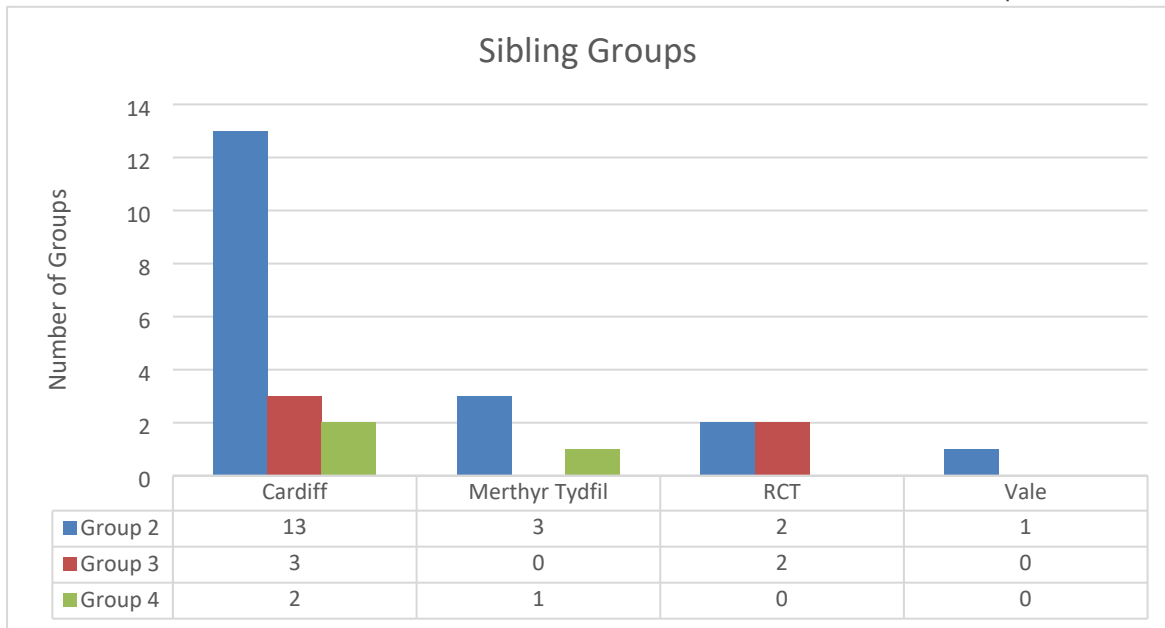
At the point of referral **38.3%** of children are aged between 1 and 4, **37%** are under the age of 1 and **24.7%** are above the age of 4.



Of the children referred to service between April 2022 and March 2023, **82%** of identify as White, **10.5%** as Mixed, **3%** as either BBAC or Other, and **1%** as ASAB.

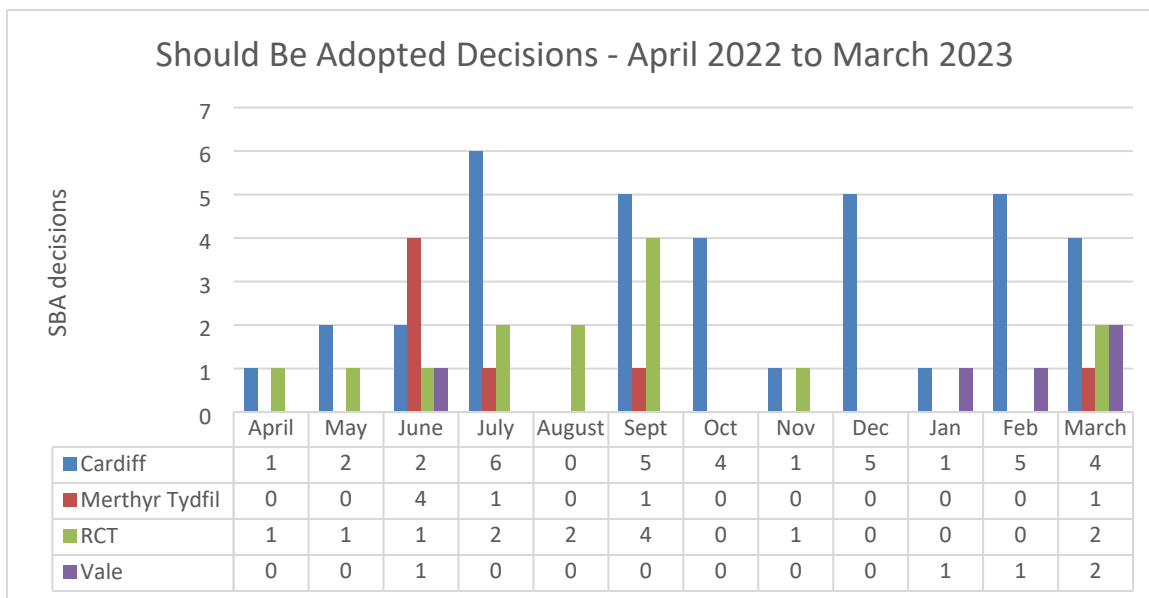


65 (40%) children were referred to the service as a sibling group.



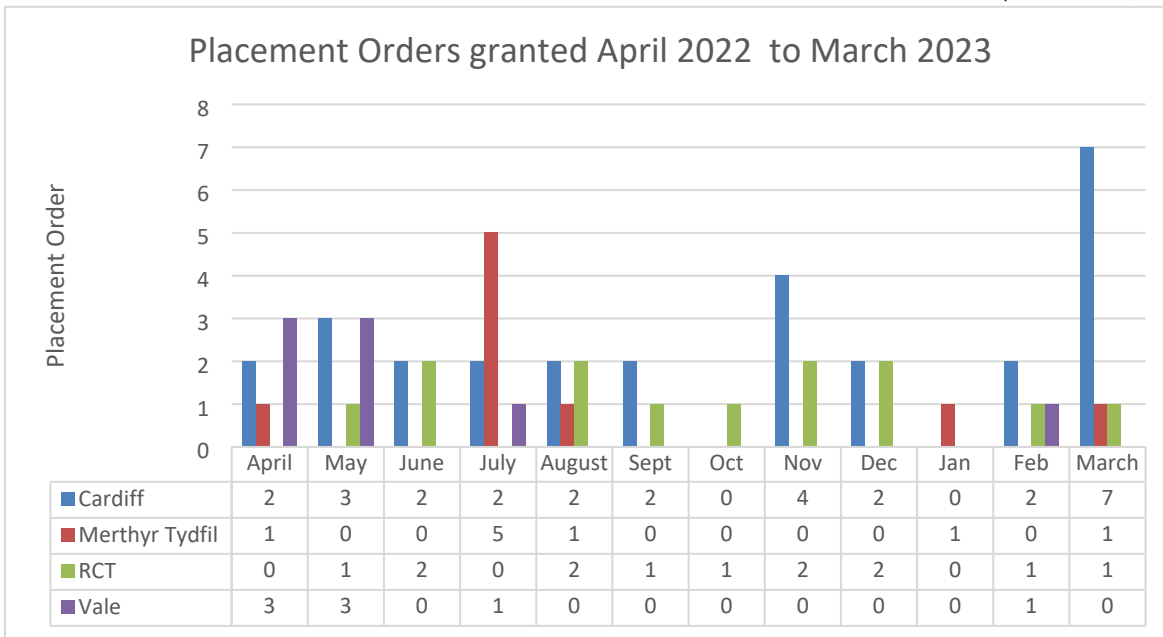
Should be Adopted Decisions

62 SBA decisions were made throughout the year, which is a **31.1%** decrease when compared to previous year data.



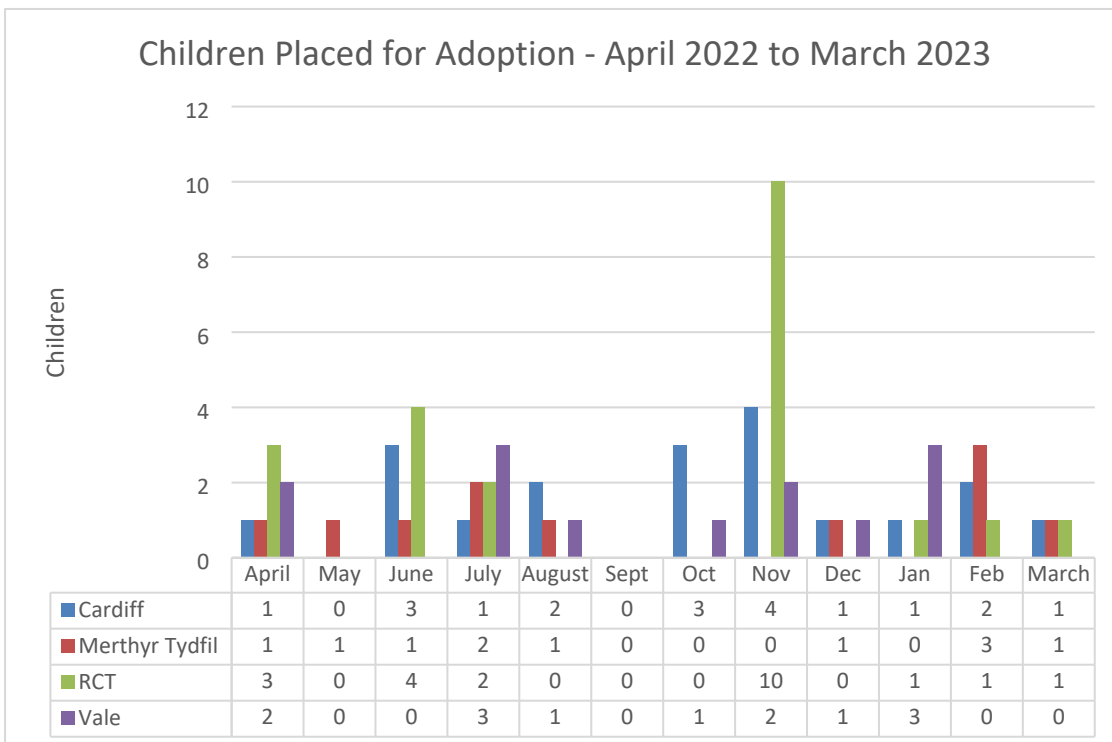
Placement Orders

58 Placement Orders were granted throughout the year. This demonstrates a **25.6%** decrease when compared to previous year and is consistent with the decrease in referrals and should be adopted decisions.



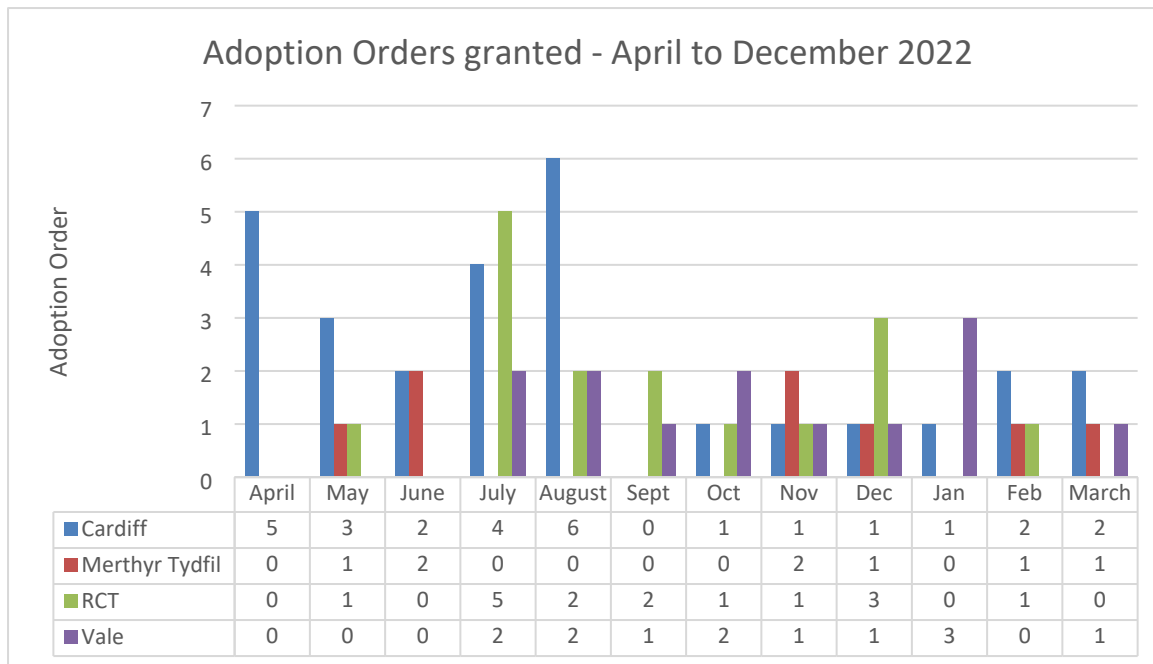
Children Placed

65 children were placed with their adoptive families demonstrating a **23.5%** decrease when compared to 2021-22 and is consistent with data from 2020-21.



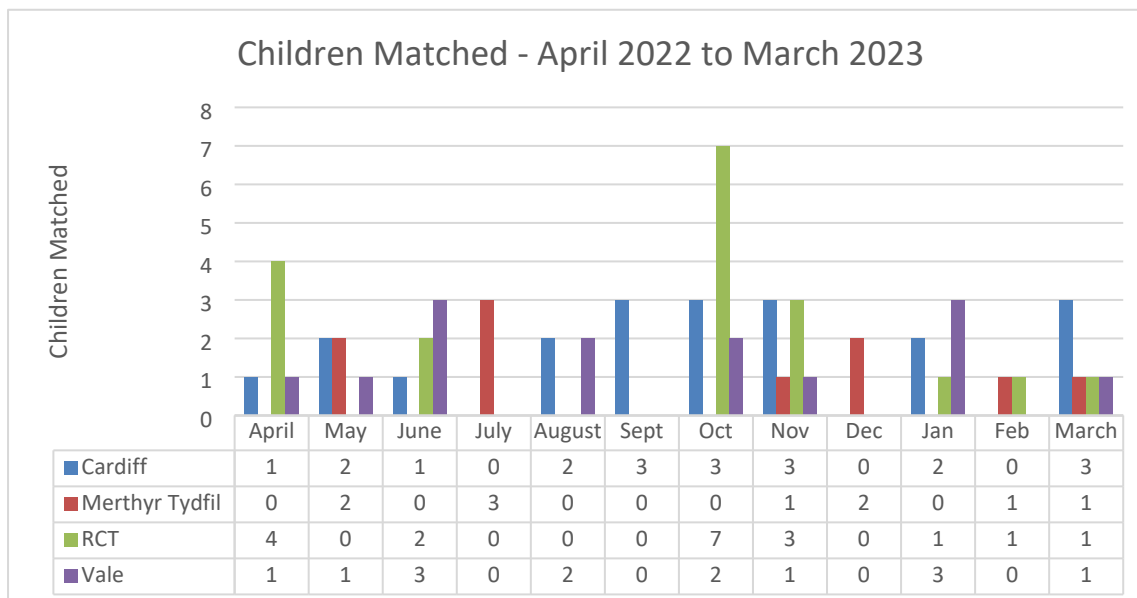
Adoption Orders

65 Adoption Orders have been granted since April 2022.



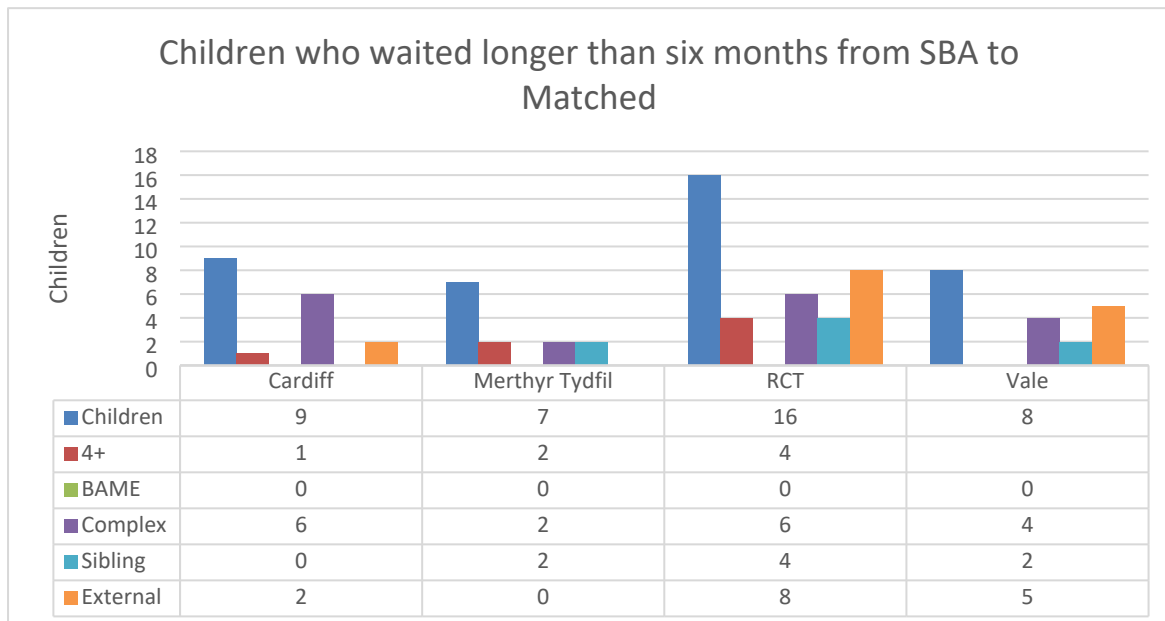
Children matched

63 children were matched during the period April to December 2022.



Number of children Matched since April 2022 who have waited longer than 6 months (or 3 months for a relinquished child under 6 months of age) to progress from “Should be placed for Adoption” decision to approve to “Match”.

Of the **40** children who waited longer than six months from date of SBA to date of Match; **7** children were aged 4+, **8** children were matched as sibling groups, **18** children were reported with complex needs and **15** children were going to be placed externally.

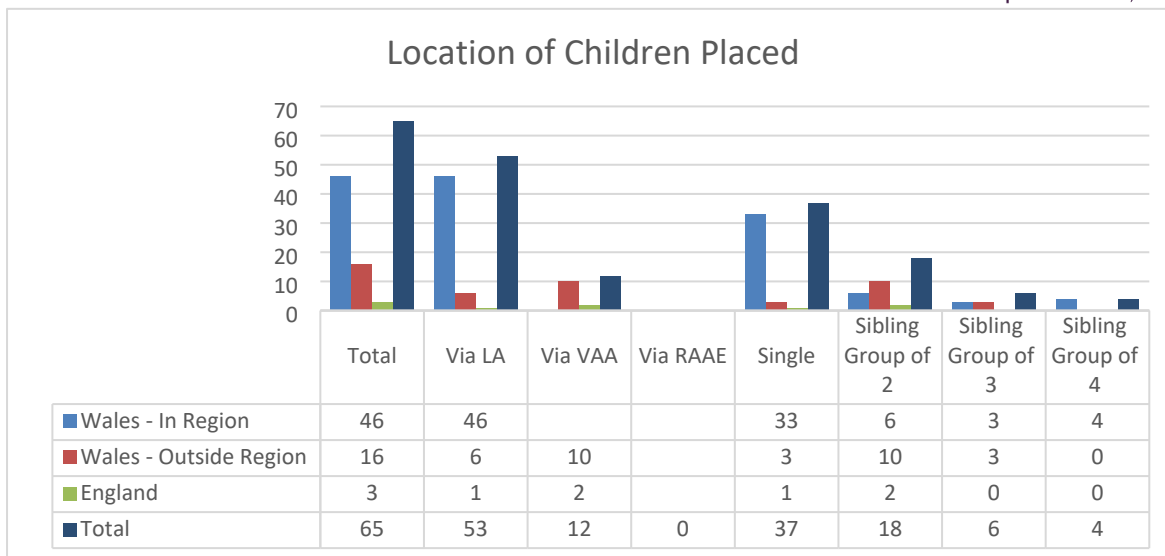


Children waiting as of 31 March 2023

39 children have a Placement Order and have not been matched or placed. Of these **4** children have a strong link, **8** foster carers are currently being assessed for approval to adopt the child, **6** children are part of a sibling group, **7** children have complex needs, **13** children active family finding, and **2** children have been matched but not ratified.

Type of placement

70.8% of children were placed with VVC adopters. **24.6%** of children were placed in Wales and **4.6%** of children were placed in England.



Life Journey

In the reporting period, **100%** of life journey material in draft format is made available at the time of panel. A notable decrease in life journey material available at 2nd Review is observed in Quarter 1, 3 and 4.

Life Journey by Local Authority						
	Matches	LJ Materials	2nd Review	LJ Materials	Panel %	2nd Review %
Cardiff	20	20	24	16	100	66.7
Merthyr Tydfil	10	10	2	1	100	50
RCT	19	19	24	24	100	100
Vale	14	14	9	6	100	66.7
Total	63	63	59	47	100	79.7

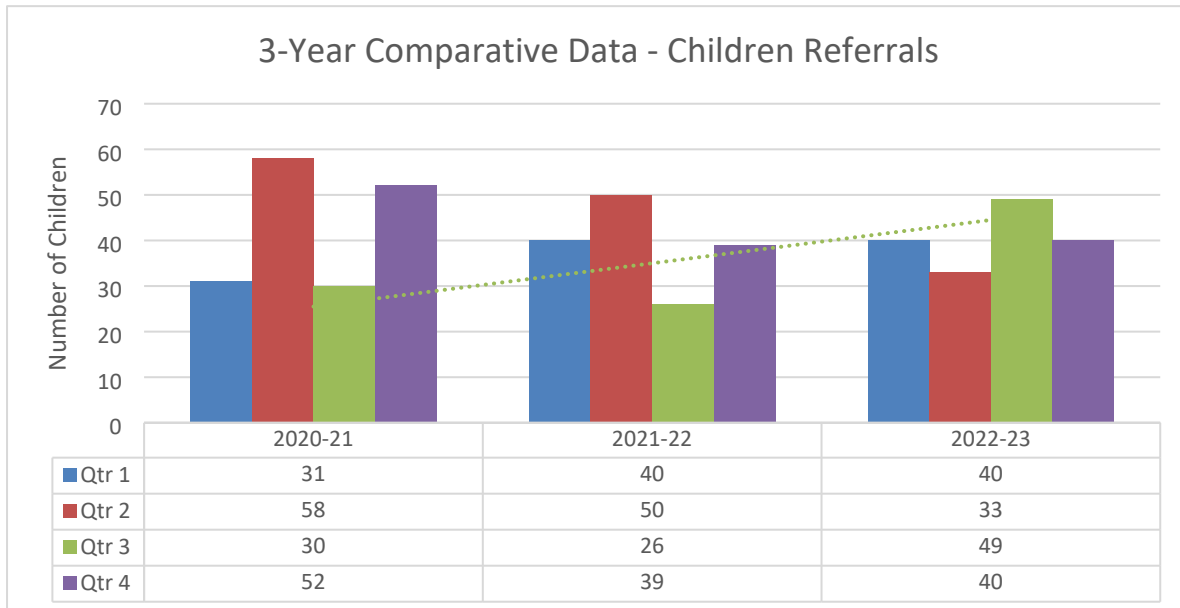
3-Year Comparative Data

Referrals

Over the past three years, referrals to VVC have remained stable. A notable dip in referrals is observed in the period **October 2021** and **July 2022**, and while this spans two financial years, it explains why there has been a decrease in the number of SBA decisions and PO's granted in this year. With the increase in referrals in the later part of the reporting year

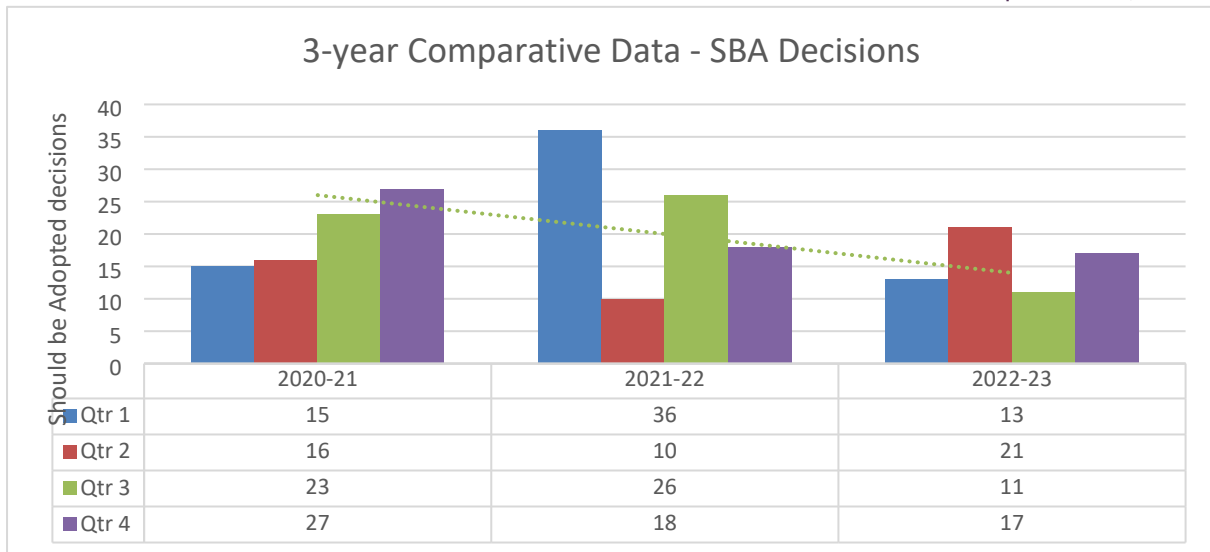
(October to March), it is anticipated an increase in the number of SBA's and PO's granted will be seen in 2023-24.

Nationally, a **15%** decrease in referrals was seen in the first half year of this year which coincides with the **18.8%** decrease in referrals observed within the service. Projected national figures anticipate there will be a **5%** decrease in referrals when compared to national data for 2021-22.



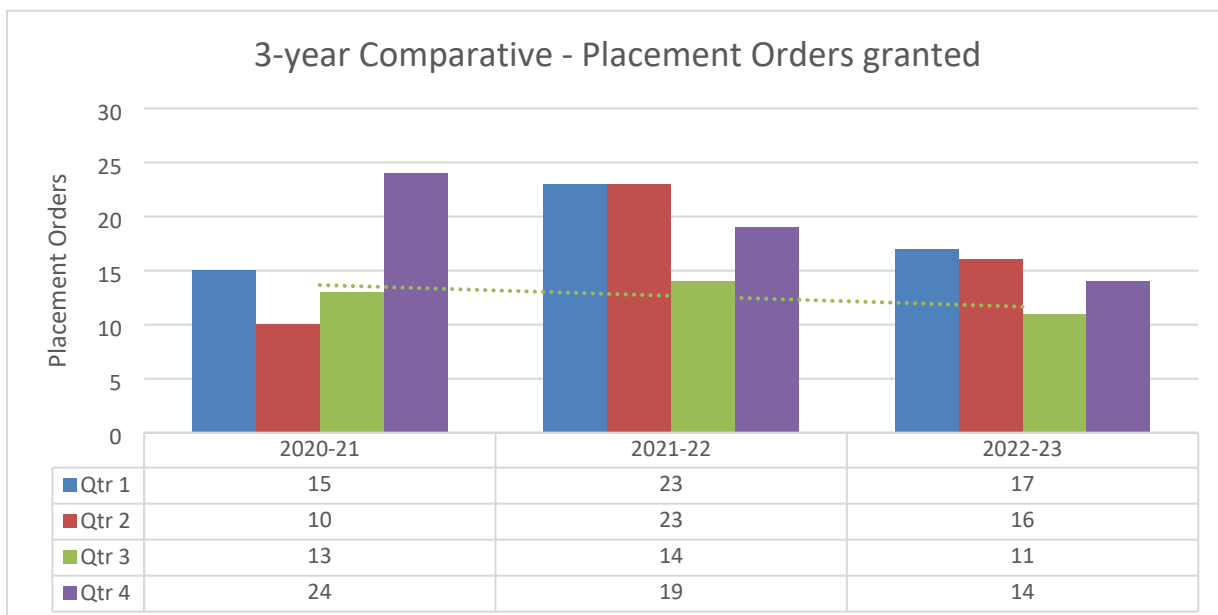
Should be Adopted

SBA decisions for the year April 2022 to March 2023 demonstrate a **31%** decrease when compared to 2021-22 data and a **23%** decrease when compared to 2020-21 data. This mirrors the reduction in referrals over the same periods. As already noted, referrals to the service have increased in the last six months and as such, although data indicates a downward trend, it is anticipated SBA decisions will increase in the coming year.



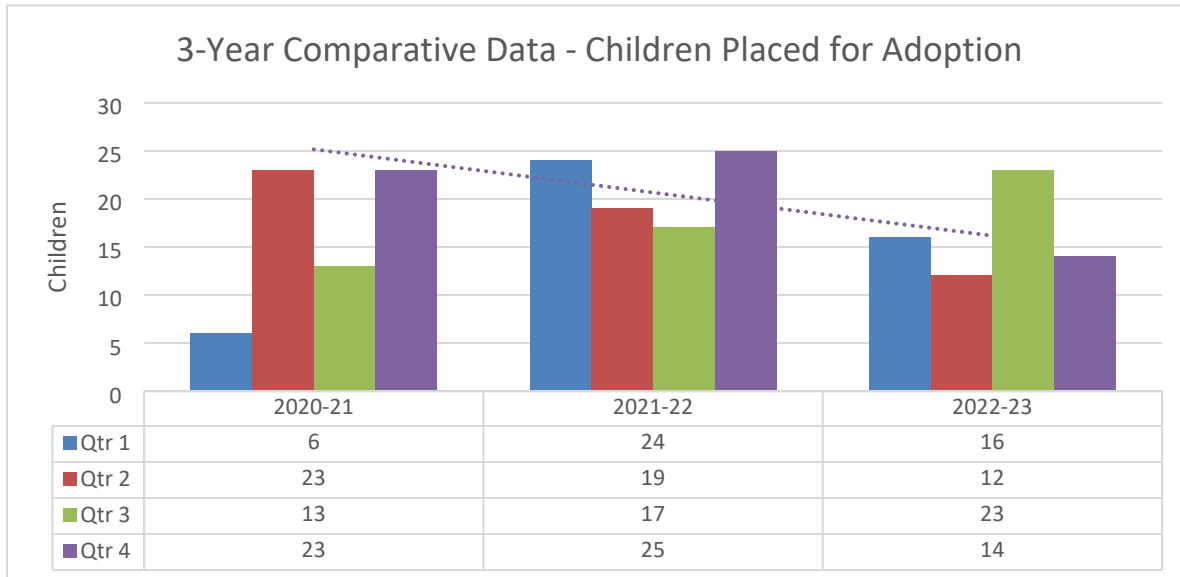
Placement Orders

Placement Orders granted between April 2022 and March 2023 show a **26.5%** decrease when compared to 2021-22 and **6%** decrease when compared to 2020-21. Whilst there has been a reduction in Placement Orders in recent years, the President of the Family Division recently re-launched the PLO and was critical of the drift away from compliance with the 26-week timetable. It will be interesting to observe whether there is a shift in trend towards more Placement Orders being granted if alternative care plans cannot successfully be pursued during the 26-week timetable.



Children Placed

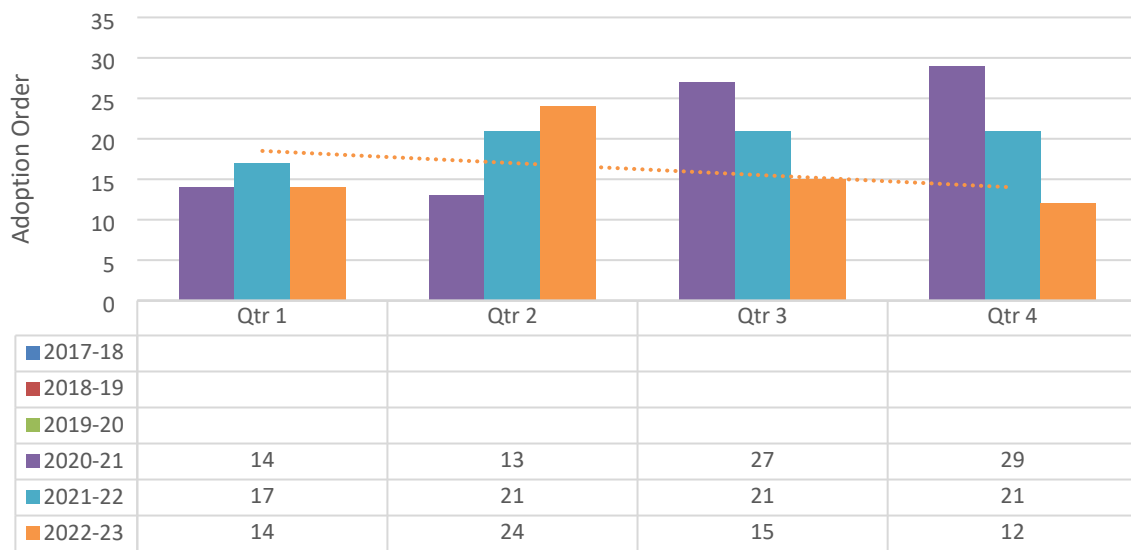
Children placed shows a downward trend when compared at end of year for three years. This is consistent with the decrease in referrals, SBA, PO, and children matched.



Adoption Orders

Over the three-year period 2020 to 2023, Adoption Orders granted show a decrease which is consistent with data for SBA, PO, and children placed. When compared to previous year an **18.75%** decrease is noted. However, when compared to 2020-21 data, Adoption Orders show a **22%** decrease.

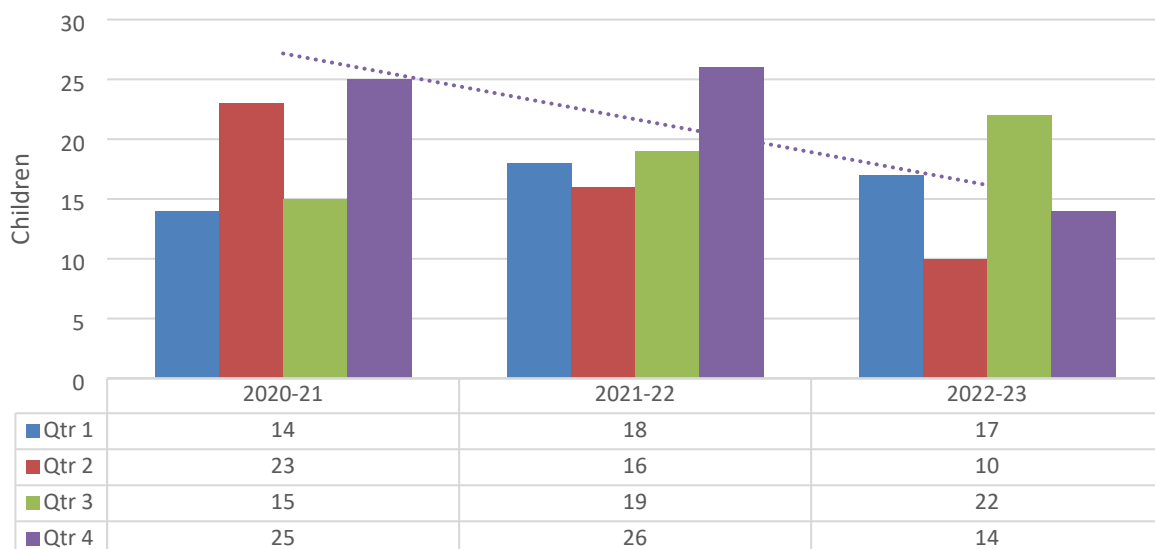
3 Year Comparative Data - Adoption Orders granted



Children matched

A downward trend is noted in the number of children matched when compared at the same point in previous years. This is however consistent with the decrease in referrals, SBA's and PO's granted in the year.

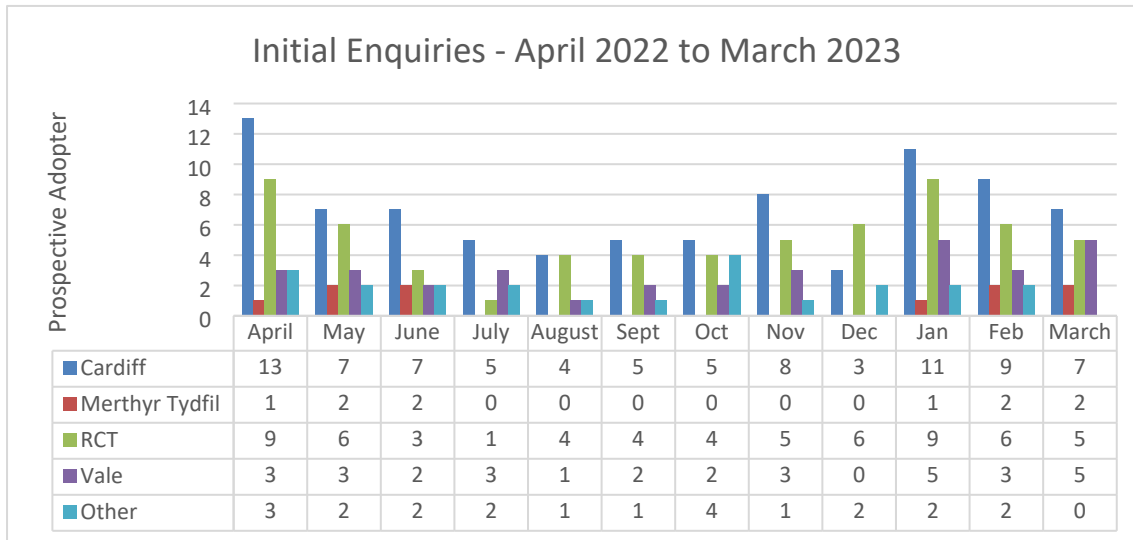
3 Year Comparative Data - Children Matched



Appendix 2 – Recruitment & Assessment

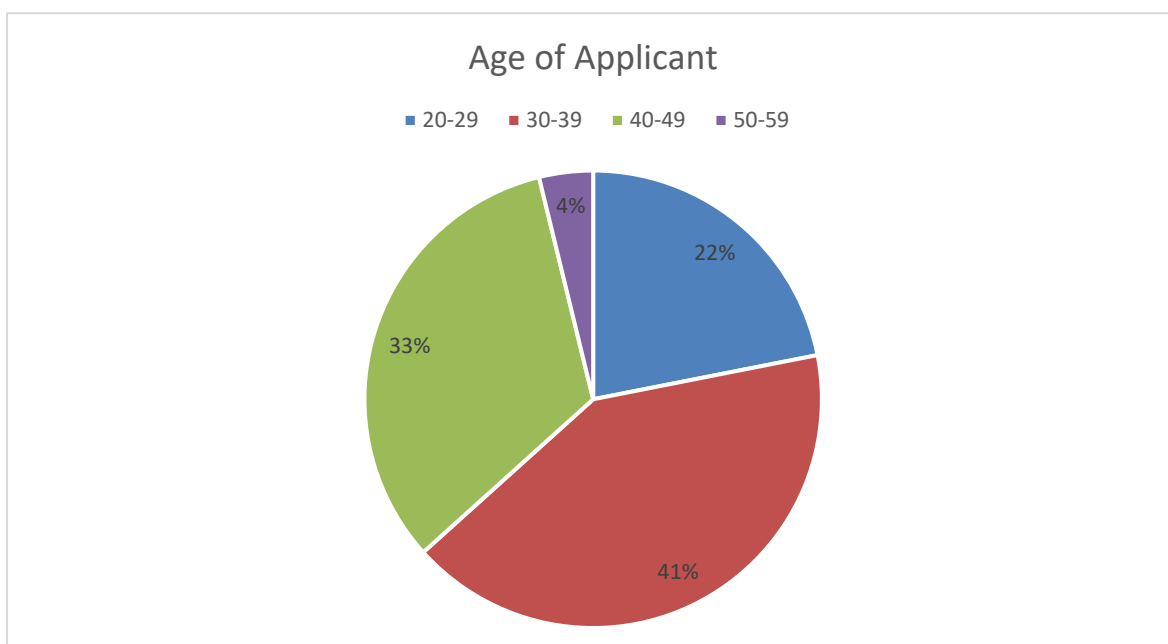
Initial Enquiries

210 enquiries during the period April 2022 to March 2023 indicating a **43%** decrease in enquiries when compared to previous year. A notable decrease in enquiries was observed in Quarter 2 and 3 and is consistent with national data for the same period. Enquiries in Quarter 4 (**69**) demonstrate an increase when compared to **43** in Quarter 3.



Age

Of the 210 enquiries, **87** enquirers were aged between 30-39, **69** were aged between 40-49, **46** were between 20-29 and **8** were aged 50-59.



Ethnicity

88% of all applicants identify as WHITE. **12%** of applicants identify as BBAC, ASAB or MIXD.

Definitions are taken from Children looked after census 2021-22, Office for Statistics, Welsh Government as follows:

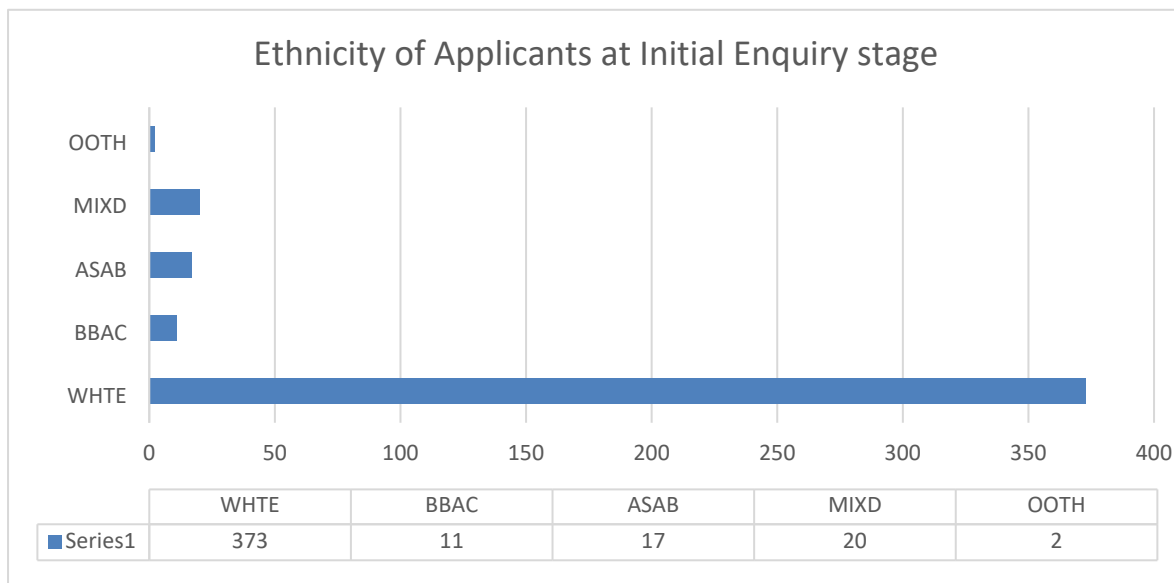
WHITE - White

MIXD - Mixed ethnic groups

ASAB – Asian or Asian British

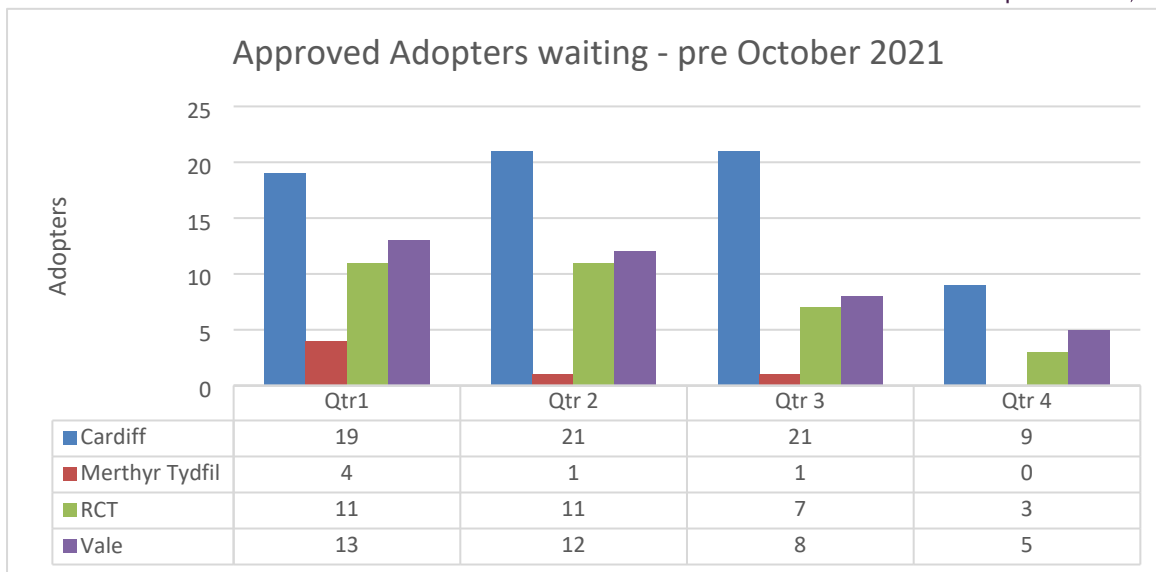
BBAC – Black, African, Caribbean or Black British

OOH - Other ethnic group



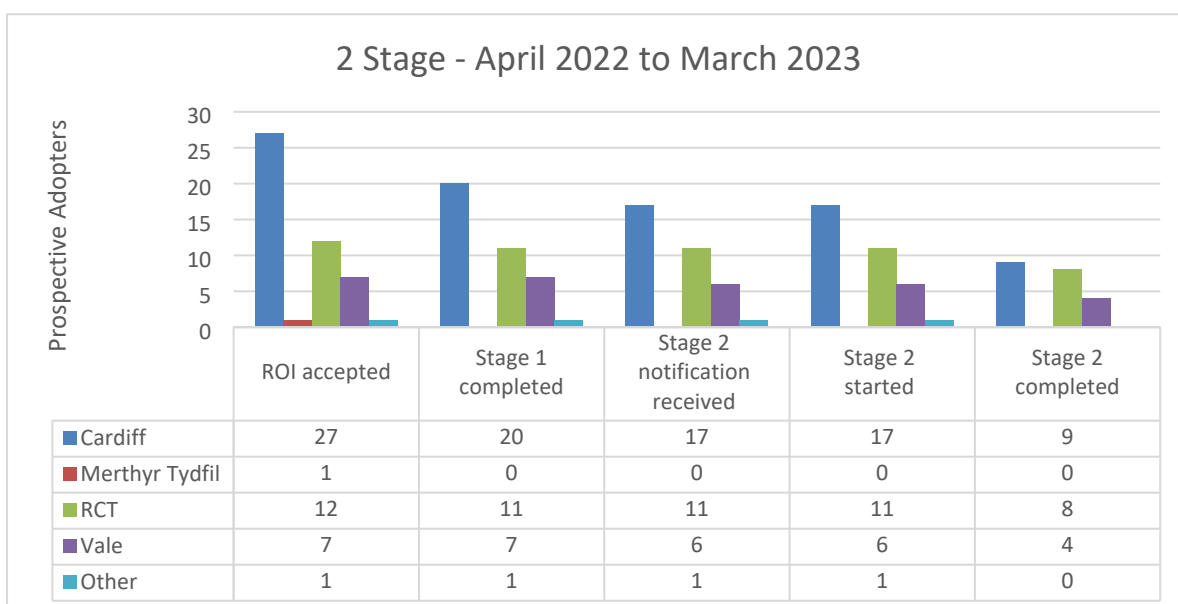
Adopters waiting

For reporting purposes to the National Adoption Service, adopters waiting are split into two separate groups; those who were approved before the 1st of October 2021 and those approved through the two-stage model for recruitment and assessment. Of the **17** adopters still awaiting a strong link or match, delays can be attributed to health, and lifestyle issues.



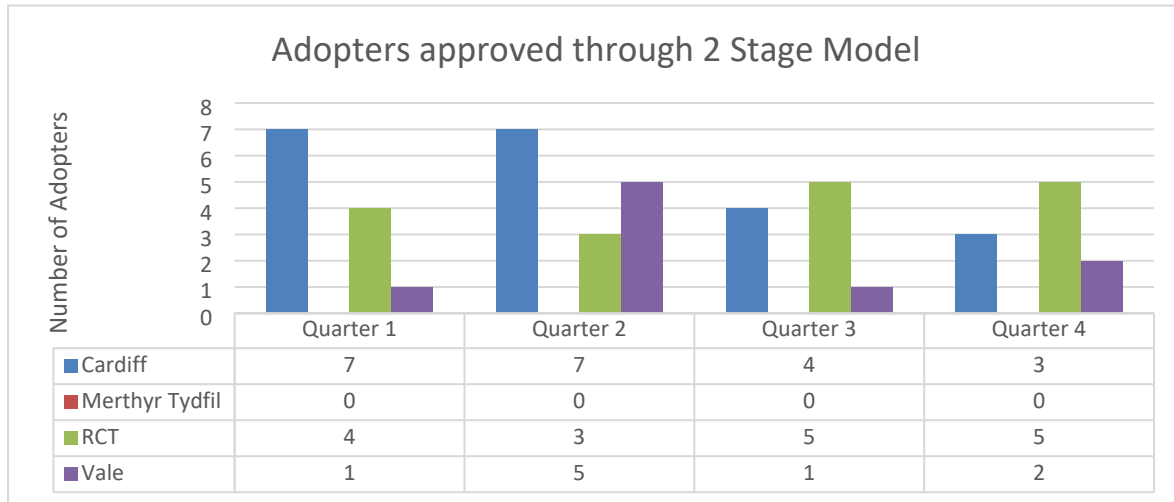
2 stage model

48 Registrations of Interest were received during the reporting period. **39** prospective adopters completed Stage 1 of the process. **35** prospective adopters started Stage 2 of the process and **21** prospective adopters completed the Stage 2 process. Over the reporting year, the service has met 100% compliance timescales for Stage 1 and Stage 2 completion. When calculating the percentage of adoptive families approved after six months of Registration of Interest, this figure decreases to **85%**. Reasons for delay can be attributed to four adoptive households where delays were because of positive DBS, Social Worker absence and/or family illness.



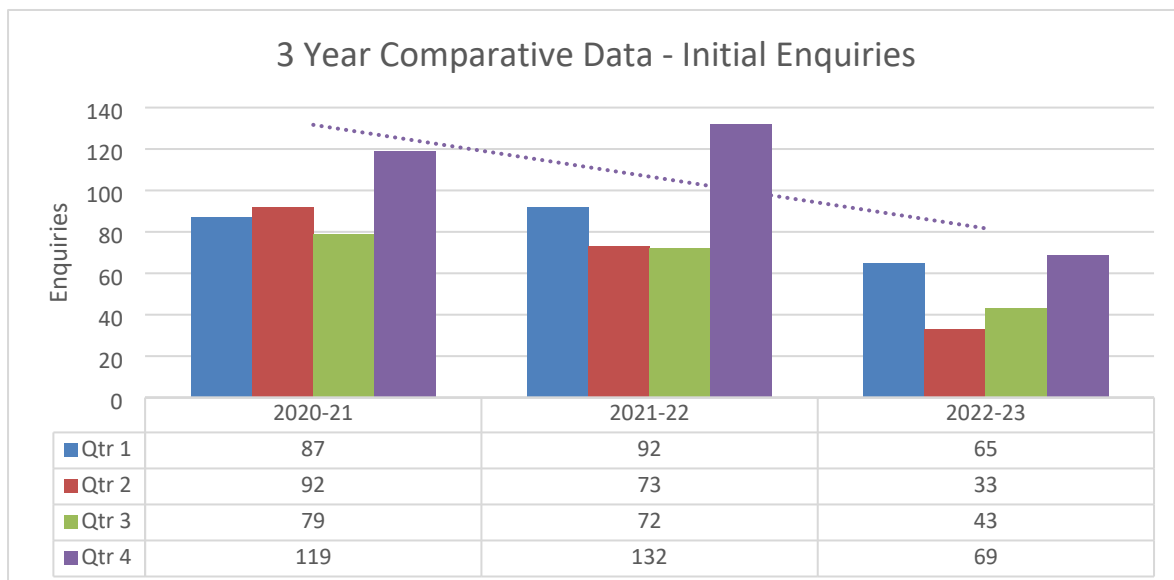
Appendix 3 - Adopter Approvals

47 adopters have been approved during the reporting period showing a **21.6%** decrease when compared to previous year. This is clearly related to the reduction in enquiries.



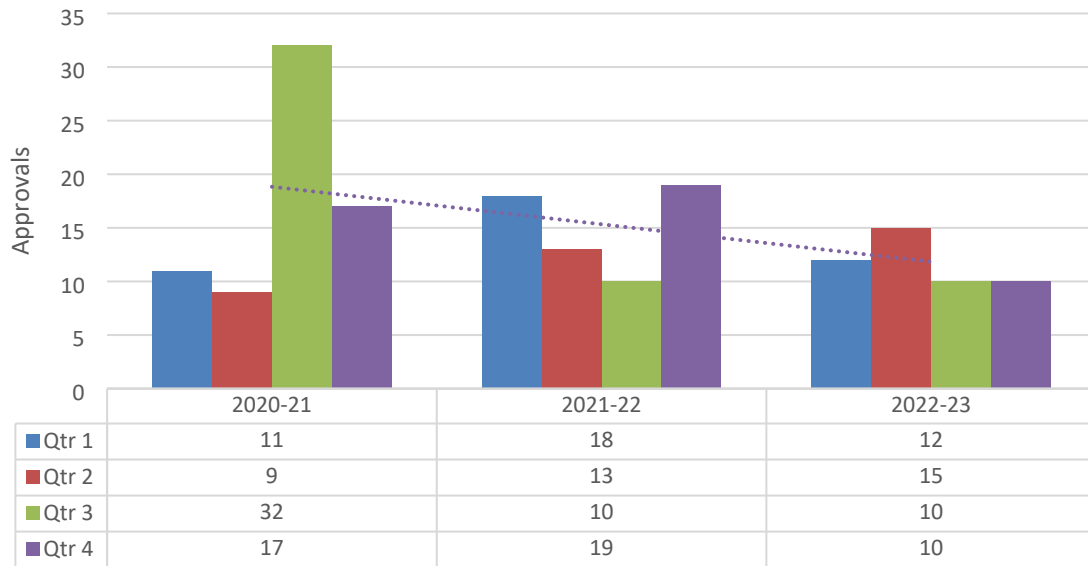
Comparative Data

When compared to initial enquiries in 2020-21 and 2021-22, the service has seen a **44.3%** and **43.9%** decrease in the number of enquiries from prospective adopters. The service will continue to monitor this closely.



Over the past three years, a decline in the number of adopters being approved has been observed. This can be attributed to the decline in the conversions from initial enquiry to approved adopter. The service will continue to monitor initial enquiries closely.

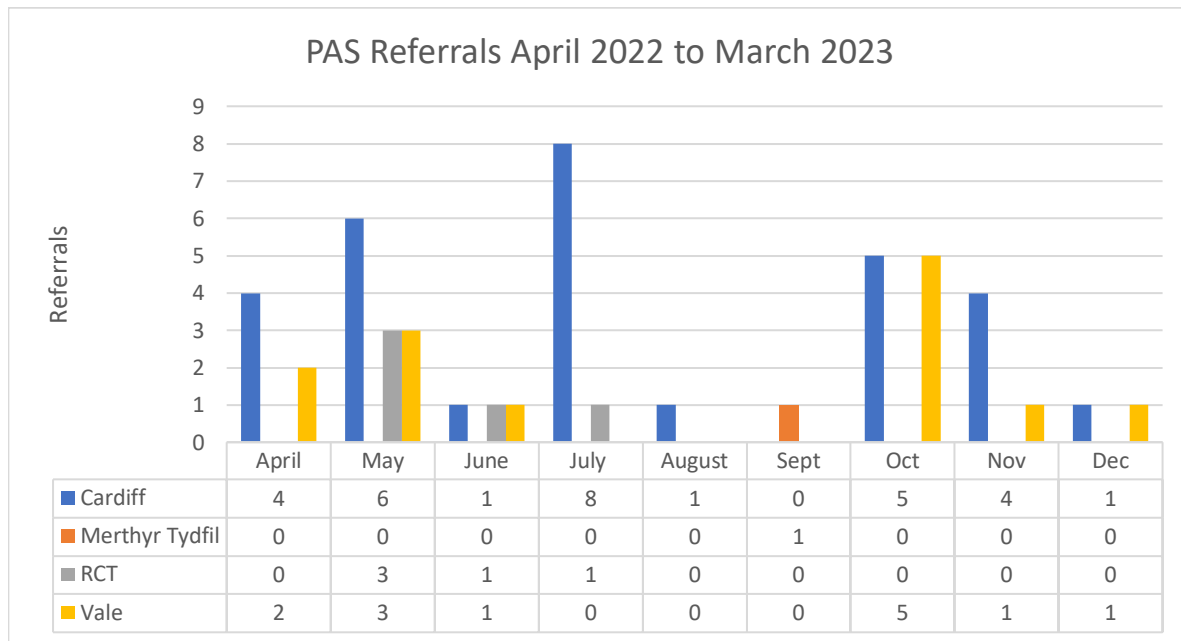
3 Year Comparative Data - Adopter approvals



Adoption Support

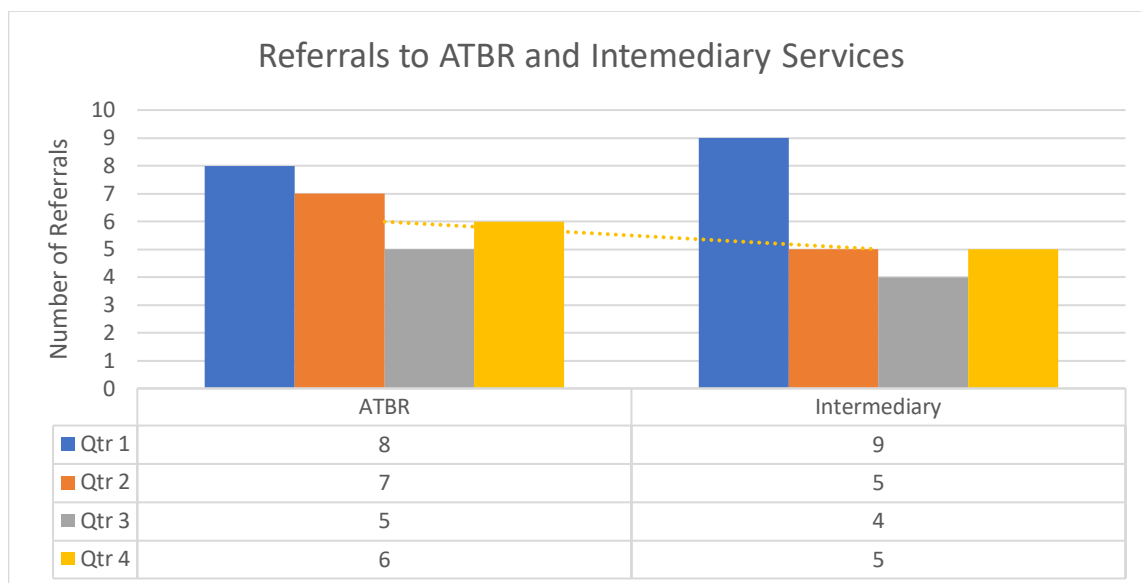
Referrals

70 new referrals for Post Adoption Support were received during the reporting period (April 2022 to March 2023) which is consistent with the number of referrals received in the previous year.



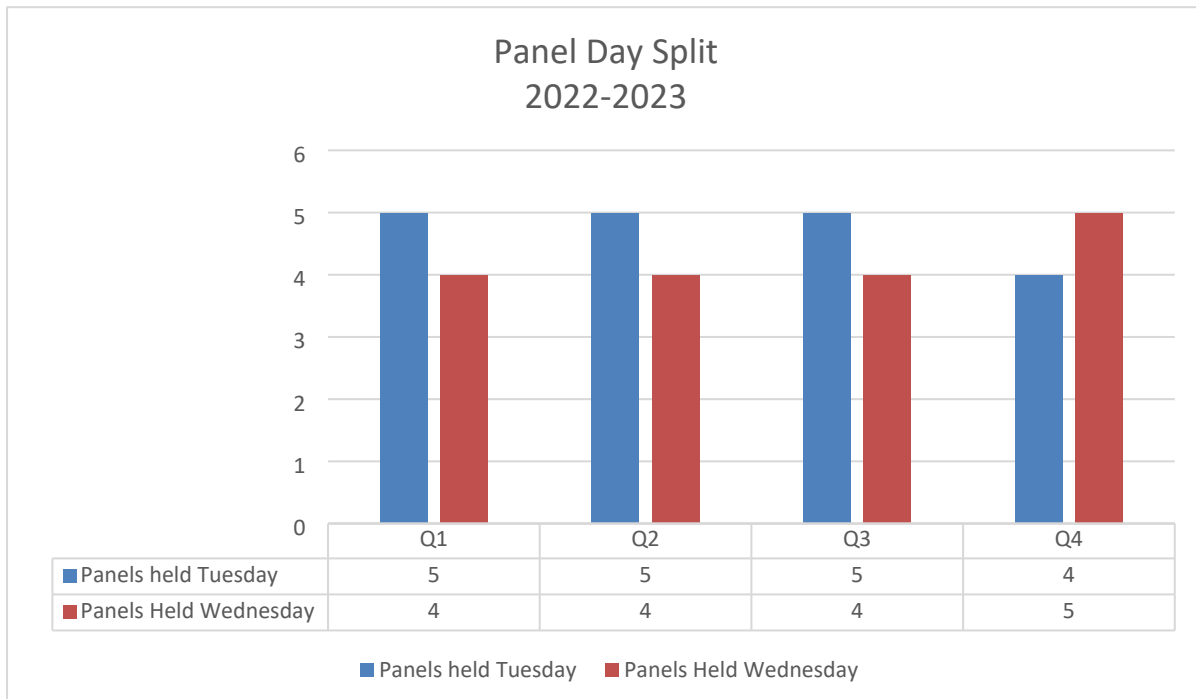
Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Services

49 referrals were received for Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Services and are consistent with previous year.

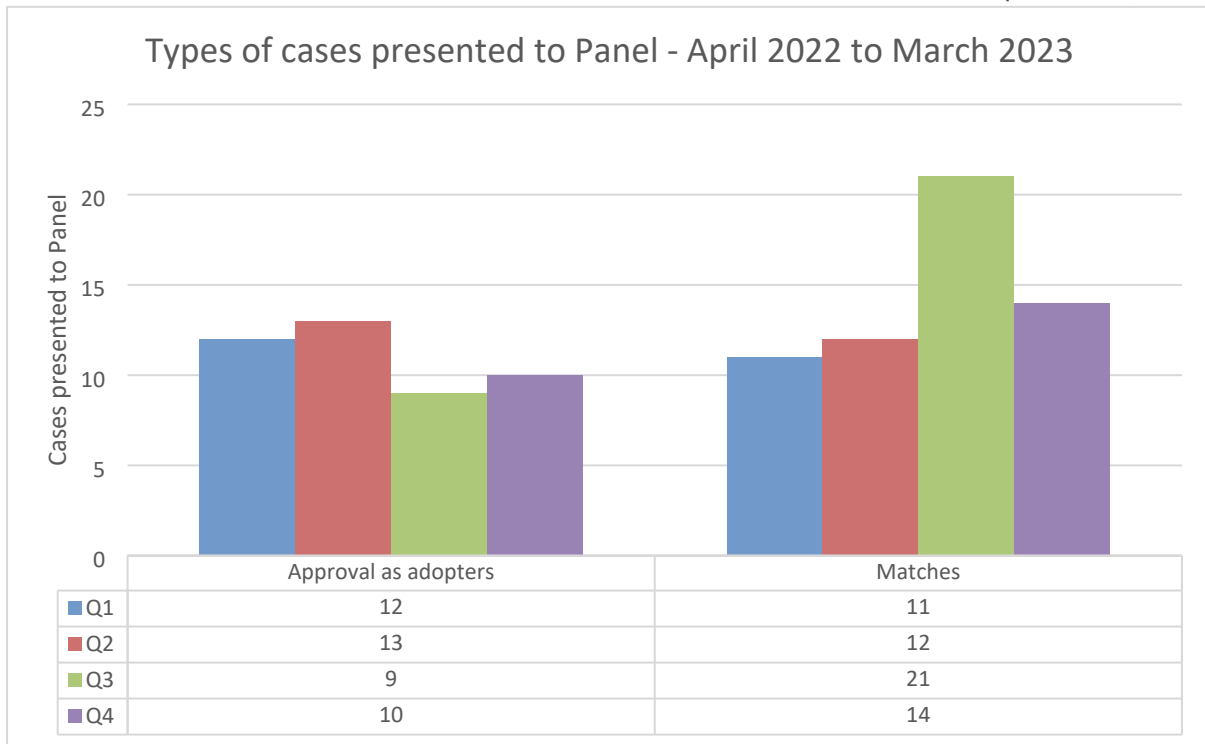


Appendix 4 - Panel

48 Panel were scheduled for the period April 2022 to March 2023. As a result of the decline in both adopter enquiries and children referred to the service, **36** panels were convened.

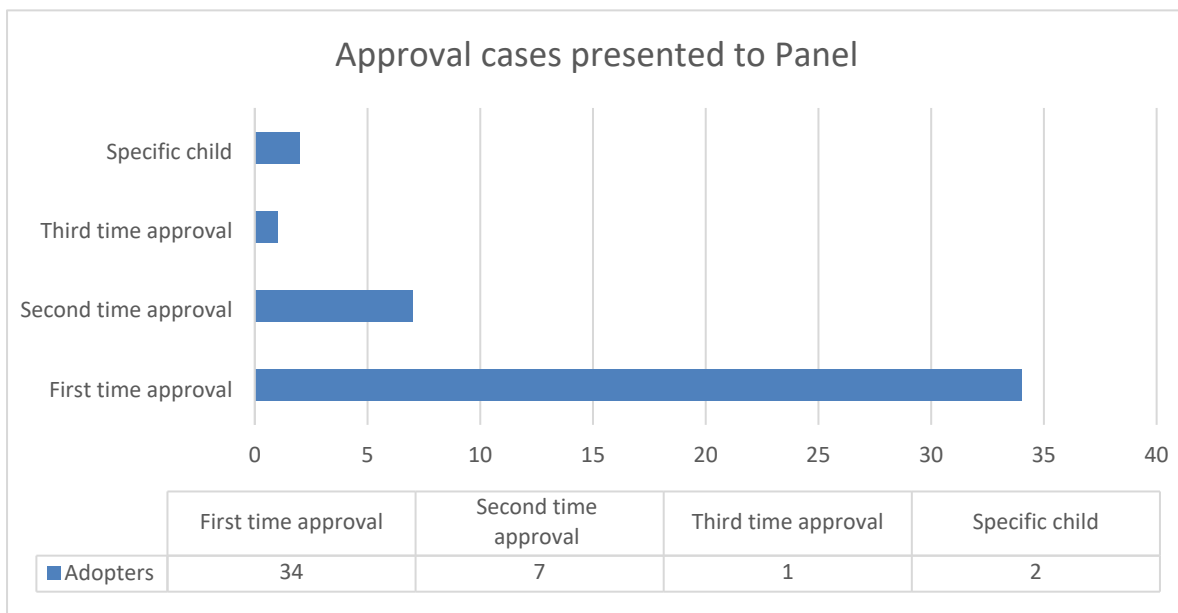


102 cases were presented to panel, **44** cases were for adopter approvals and **58** cases were for the matching of children with prospective adopters.



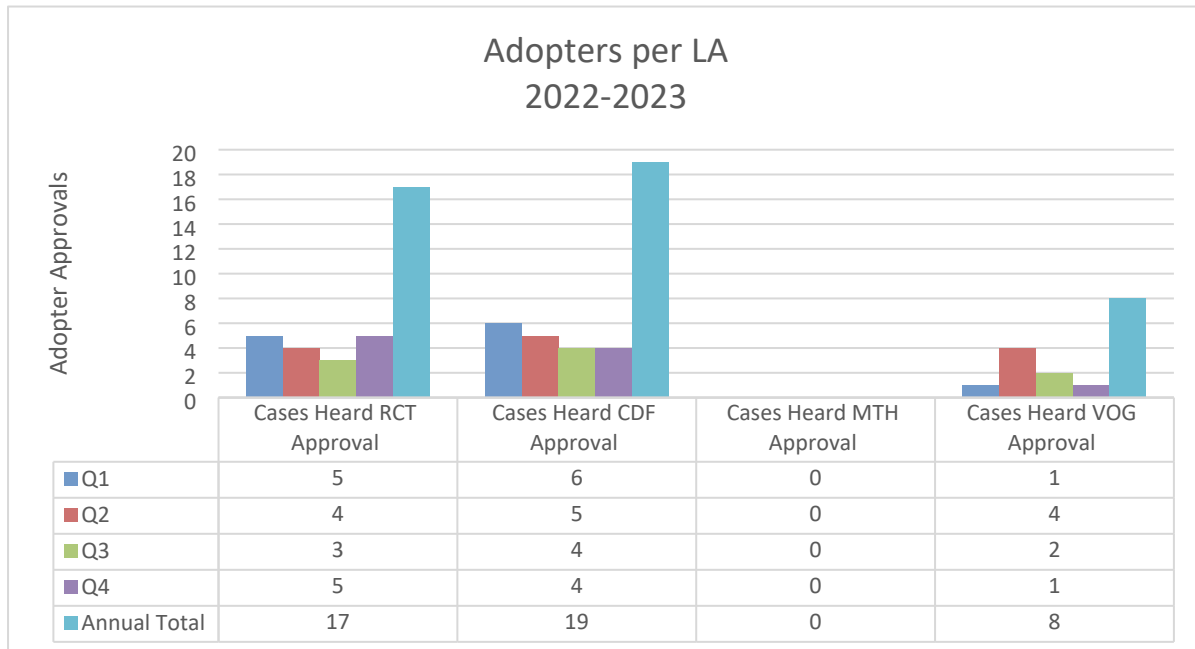
Adopters

Of the **44** households which were presented to panel for adopter approval, **7** adoptive households were presented to Panel for a second time approval, **1** adoptive household was presented to Panel for a third time approval and **2** adoptive households were presented to Panel for a specific child.



Approvals by Local Authority

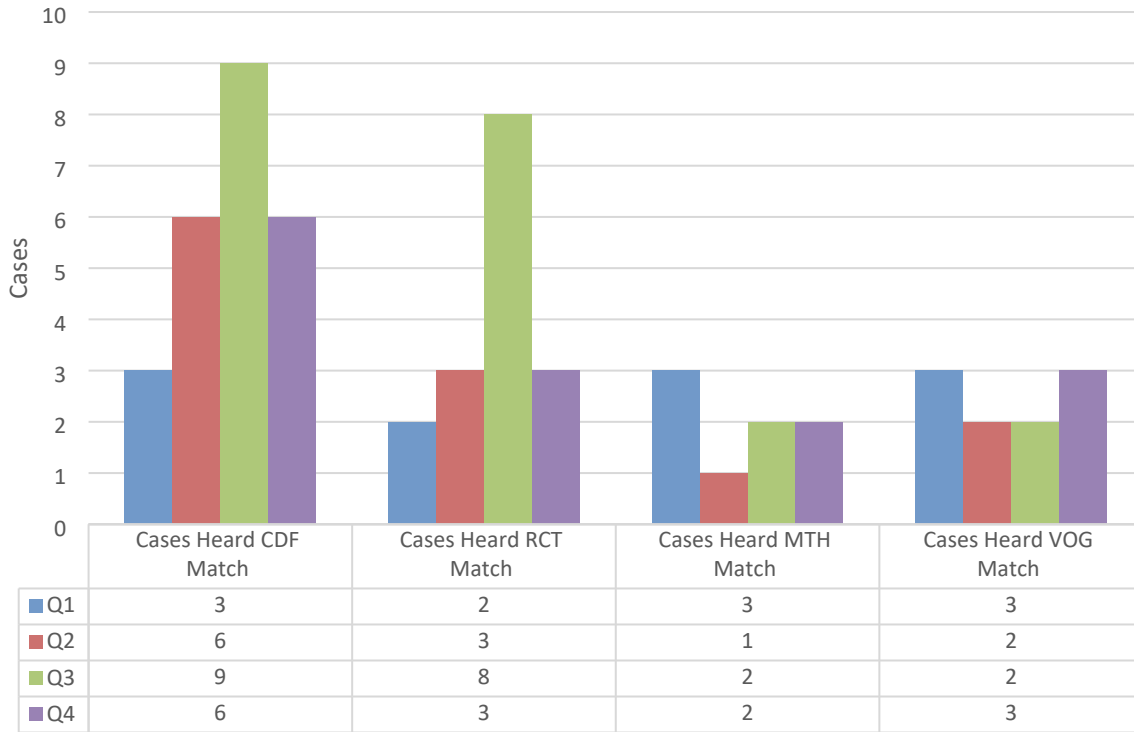
43.2% of approvals were ratified by Cardiff Council, **38.6%** of approvals were ratified by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and **18.2%** of approvals were ratified by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.



Matches by Local Authority

58 matches were presented to the Panel during the reporting period broken down as follows: **41.4%** Cardiff, **27.6%** Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC, **17.3%** Vale of Glamorgan and **13.7%** Merthyr Tydfil CBC.

Matches per LA 2022-2023



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APPENDIX C

An Inquiry Report of the:
Joint Scrutiny Committee

DRAFT

**REPLACEMENT LOCAL
DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

December 2023



Cardiff Council

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FOREWORD

To be completed



Councillor Joel Williams
Chair, Policy Performance &
Review Scrutiny Committee.



Councillor Owen Jones
Chair, Environmental
Scrutiny Committee.



Councillor Peter Wong
Chair, Economy & Culture
Scrutiny Committee.

December 2023

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To harness the power of Scrutiny Member voices and experience to add value and encourage ambition in the RLDP Preferred Strategy, focusing on district and local centres, securing planning obligations, and managing transport impacts, by:
 - a. Understanding national and local policy priorities.
 - b. Engaging expert and stakeholder voices.
 - c. Researching good practice examples, which are capable of being replicated in Cardiff.
 - d. Identifying policy 'hooks' needed in the Replacement Local Development Plan to deliver:
 - i. **Securing Planning Obligations**
 - A strengthened SP6 by:
 - Exploring how current policy and process in respect of planning obligations and section 106 agreements could be strengthened.
 - Exploring how communication and narrative on planning obligations could be simplified, more accessible and transparent.
 - Addressing issues in relation to carbon neutral and biodiversity requirements.
 - Making recommendations on how future/associated SPG could be framed.
 - ii. **Transport Impacts**
 - A strengthened T5 that ensures adequate travel infrastructure is proposed in new developments, which fully addresses the needs of communities and transport providers without negatively impacting on biodiversity and nature.
 - iii. **District and Local Centres**
 - Planning Retail Policies that promote and protect vibrant, viable, busy and relevant district and local centres.
 - Planning Retail Policies that enable and support strong SPG that promote and protect district and local centres.

2. To make evidence-based recommendations to shape the RLDP Preferred Strategy.

Output/ Outcomes:

- Gathering additional expert and stakeholder views and good practice evidence.
- Ensure the RLDP Preferred Strategy delivers in accordance with the Well Being of Future Generations Act requirements.
- Recommendations to the Cabinet that shape the RLDP Preferred Strategy.
- Deliver a unified voice across all Scrutiny Committees.

Members of the Task Groups:

Statutory Obligations

Councillor Joel Williams (Chair)

Councillor Saleh Ahmed

Councillor Jane Henshaw

Councillor Peter Jenkins

Councillor Margaret Lewis

Councillor Helen Lloyd-Jones

Councillor Peter Wong

Transport

Councillor Owen Jones (Chair)

Councillor Andrea Gibson

Councillor Peter Jenkins

Councillor John Lancaster

Councillor Helen Lloyd Jones

Councillor Margaret Lewis

Councillor Rhys Taylor

Councillor Peter Wong

District & Local Centres

Councillor Peter Wong (Chair)

Councillor Mike Ash-Edwards

Councillor Helen Lloyd Jones

Councillor Gary Hunt

CONTEXT FOR INQUIRY

The Cardiff Local Development Plan (LDP) is the Council's key land use planning document. It will set out policies and proposals for the future development and use of land in Cardiff up to 2036, in line with legislative requirements. When adopted it will replace the existing structure and local plans for the city and form the basis for decisions on individual planning applications.

The LDP Preferred Strategy Report was open for public consultation for a 10-week period from 27 July to 5 October 2023. This consultation is an important stage in the preparation of the plan and offers everyone with an interest in the future development of Cardiff an opportunity to influence the plan before the Council finalises its proposals. As well as an online 'Virtual Consultation Room', the Council arranged a series of public events throughout August and September both community based and drop in sessions.

A cross-committee Task and Finish group was created under the auspices of PRAP to give a single response from Scrutiny on the LDP preferred strategy as part of the consultation process. Membership of the task group was invited from across the scrutiny committees, with the report going back to the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

The Preferred Strategy Report is not the full draft plan but sets out the key issues and options within the LDP and the Council's broad proposals for addressing these.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

- HF.1.** The findings and recommendations of the previous Supplementary Planning Guidance Inquiry (October 2022) are relevant to the RLDP Preferred Strategy, particularly:
- a. LDP policies need to be evidence-based, precisely written, detail the Council’s specific requirements, the rationale for these, and the criteria where the Council will make an exception and not apply the policy. They have to contain detailed definitions, thresholds, numbers, percentages, targets and measures as relevant, set out the impact seeking to avoid (harms) and consequences if not avoided.
 - b. SPGs cannot be used to make or amend policy – therefore the LDP policies have to contain wording necessary to ensure requirements met. SPG provide technical guidance to support LDP policy. They must be strongly worded and strongly linked to the LDP, stating which LDP policy and paragraph it is supplementing and that it is a material consideration. They should use positive, precise language, evidence and explain how thresholds, numbers, percentages, targets and measures are calculated, evidence and explain how the impact seeking to avoid is measured and how consequences of not avoiding harm, the harms arising, are measured, and provide details on exceptional circumstances and how these are worked out and applied.
- HF.2.** Local authorities need to conform to the Welsh Government framework and direction as otherwise their LDP will not pass Examination. Therefore, Cardiff Council needs to ensure the RLDP policies and associated SPG incorporate and reflect Welsh Government’s framework and direction.
- HF.3.** Crafting RLDP policies must focus on resisting harmful development and encouraging development that is in the best interests of the people who live and visit the area. Planning policies must ensure appropriate information is provided to planners and planning committee members to enable them to exercise judgement effectively.

KEY FINDINGS

SECURING PLANNING OBLIGATIONS

Existing Policy & Practice

- KF.1** The system of planning obligations is a sound one, delivering benefits for councils and communities. S106 agreements are legally binding, enforceable, fair and relevant to the planning proposal. Clarity of what the Council will seek through planning obligations from developments is set out in Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). The SPG also provides detail of thresholds that will be sought for particular requirements, such as affordable housing or education contributions.
- KF.2** S106 agreements must address the impact of a development and not seek to enhance an area. There is a risk of s106 planning obligations becoming a wish list as the list of possibilities keeps growing. The more costs there are to delivering a scheme, the less money is available for affordable housing.
- KF.3** It is unclear which high level Council plans and strategies provide the context and priorities for determining planning obligations. The Cardiff Infrastructure Plan should be a clear, concise and focussed strategic document setting out the whole picture. However, it is difficult to locate, and experienced technical staff employed by developers have difficulty understanding the Councils' aspirations and priorities. The Planning Advisory Service has produced a self-evaluation tool that may prove useful to planners in reflecting on how Cardiff is performing in this area.
- KF.4** S106 contributions agreed with developers are not always index linked currently. It takes up to a year to secure a s106 agreement and therefore the Council should include a clause in all agreements that contribution values are index linked.
- KF.5** There is no interest paid on s106 monies held and no investment gain added to s106 projects. Any interest accrued on invested s106 monies improves the Council's capital financing position.
- KF.6** S106 monies can remain unspent for many years. It is difficult to justify why this is the case and the Council was recently exposed in the press as holding £23.2 million of unspent s106 funds. All s106 agreements have a clause for the developer to request monies back should the Council not use it. Some authorities charge a 5% monitoring fee to facilitate s106 spend.

- KF.7** An alternative to s106 agreements is use of the Community Infrastructure Level (CIL). Some Welsh councils use CIL, as does Bristol City Council. CIL is applied per square metre of development; however, the point of collection does not determine how the money is spent. The Council does not currently apply CIL however Bristol considers it an important source of funding, allocating monies (per £) to strategic infrastructure (80p) local area committees (15p) and administration costs (5p).
- KF.8** There is a clear requirement for a dedicated staffing resource to lead on s106 agreements. S106 lead officers should be clearly identifiable and visible to all stakeholders. Cardiff has such a resource in place however there is an opportunity to raise the profile and co-ordination responsibilities of s106 lead officer(s) both internally and externally.
- KF.9** There is a role for a community engagement officer on large development sites, to ensure effective integration of new and existing communities. Funding for this role should be considered a legitimate s106 request.

Improving Policy & Processes

- KF.10** It appears that currently, Directorates work in silos. The RLDP presents an opportunity to improve round table representation in a joint effort to understand the priorities, particularly for larger developments. Currently no internal cross-cutting meetings take place. Where planning obligations are concerned, issues could be identified early for tackling planning obligation contributions. For example, are roads wide enough for waste removal collections? This also provides a chance for Directorates to develop internal agreements between departments on where the budget line sits.
- KF.11** Whilst individual developers and external witnesses stated that they had a good working relationship with Planning, they suggested that further work on building closer working relationships across developers and commercial agencies could be developed too.
- KF.12** The need for s106 discussions to start earlier in the planning process was highlighted across all witnesses. In trying to make a scheme work, it is important that all services are involved and there is complete transparency early on. There is a need for everyone being in a room together early. Early and positive engagement with officers is key to agreeing off-site alternatives/contributions in lieu.

- KF.13** The Council appears to have a lack of legal resources to draft s106 agreements in a timely manner. Developers would pay their own legal teams to draft the agreement if the Council agreed and thereby speed up the process.
- KF.14** In light of this, it was suggested that there is an opportunity for Cardiff to lead the way on developing a standard S106 template for S106 agreements. The s106 agreement could set out the timescales / phasing of the planning obligations in relation to the development itself. It would also present a clearer picture of what is required from the development, by both the Council and the developers. The section 106 template would also enable improved monitoring of the planned phasing and triggers to ensure the delivery is on track. If it fails to be delivered, planning enforcement can be used to enable delivery.
- KF.15** To improve the current process, there is a need for enhanced monitoring. A review of the annual monitoring report could have a much better monitoring framework within it – how much is being secured? Look at timeliness of spend - how much is the Council spending? Is the Council being negotiated down in certain areas? Where and what is the Council doing about that? Do our policies need reviewing in light of this?
- KF.16** In relation to “green issues” including biodiversity and carbon neutral initiatives, other local authorities stated that many councils were in the same position on this, and not much progress had been made. Further guidance and direction was awaited from Welsh Government on this issue. Stakeholders were generally supportive of the principle of green issues being part of any SPG, but with the caveat that, should the Council wish to adopt this as a priority, it should not simply be added to the list, but be part of any review into priorities – with the council being clear as to why this is now a priority, and what effect this would have on other priorities.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- KF.17** Much work in this area has been addressed by the SPG Task & Finish Group report of 2022, which can be found in the link here - [Ref: RDB/SW/DB/10 \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#).

- KF.18** There was clear support for the SPG in this area, with many witnesses stating the policy is robust. However, they suggested that the SPG could be enhanced further – particularly around viability.
- KF.19** Other local authorities' SPGs are a lot more concise, and stakeholders suggested that Cardiff could take the opportunity to revisit the size and length of the document. Stakeholders highlighted that the current SPG document includes a great deal of detail of national and local policy which is arguably beyond what would be expected to be in SPG on S106.
- KF.20** Bristol stated that a SPG document takes a year to secure agreement and therefore it is important to draft a policy as foolproof to change as possible. E.g., ensure it includes clauses to ensure contribution values are index linked.
- KF.21** The SPG should set out clear expectations of what is expected from developments and can deal with specific requirements where off-site mitigation would be more appropriate / feasible for particular sites.
- KF.22** It is critical that the SPG is clear, accurate and there is openness between the developer and the council. Developers will always push barriers and it is only 75% into a project that the developer is in profit.
- KF.23** The SPG can also provide detail of thresholds which will be sought for particular requirements such as affordable housing, or education contributions.
- KF.24** Formulae in the adopted SPG linked to number of dwellings (for things like on-site provision of public open space) can break down when dealing with high-density urban sites.

Viability

- KF.25** Planning obligations policy is robust, however should be enhanced further, particularly around viability. The viability report is a useful tool that provides more information with which the Council can negotiate with developers. Viability assessments allow planners to take a balanced view on s106 contributions, which is particularly important on brownfield sites.
- KF.26** There is a Welsh Government pre-application pack, that now requires greater viability assessment up front, and therefore there should be less challenge expected by developers. Housing officers are of the view the Council is not allowed to publish details of viability assessments.

- KF.27** There is currently no financial involvement of the Council's finance experts at the viability stage. Should there be?
- KF.28** Viability assessments take a very long time to be reviewed, adding more cost to the project and delaying the start of a development. Delays are one of the biggest issues faced by developers because there are cost implications that need to be addressed.
- KF.29** The viability assessment may need to address a restricted time for the development to be delivered, with clear processes for dealing with the timescales for implementation.
- KF.30** The length of time taken to complete the viability assessment process needs to be reviewed. The Council may need to be more robust about who it appoints to undertake reviews on its behalf. Currently, viability assessments take a very long time to be reviewed as the District Valuer Service used by the Council is over subscribed. There can be conflict between who is writing the viability report on behalf of the developer and who the Council uses to verify the viability report.
- KF.31** There is an opportunity for greater scrutiny of viability assessment reports. Bristol City Council has adopted a full council resolution that viability appraisals be made public and available for scrutiny, and now schemes are always considered by committee.
- KF.32** The cost of viability assessments is a factor in the affordability of projects. Developers' agents report that care should be given to front-loading obligations that put an additional strain on viability, and a balance may need to be struck between timeliness and the overall cost of the obligations. Where s106 calculations are unrealistic smaller developers must pay for a viability assessment in order to demonstrate that the scheme cannot afford the calculation proposed by the Council. Note that Bristol City Council has its viability appraisals assessed by a third party, with costs charged to the applicant.
- KF.33** The process of viability reporting and assessment would benefit from streamlining. A good way forward would be the production of a standard viability model and template for use across Wales.

Affordable Housing

- KF.34** There is an overwhelming demand for affordable/social housing in Cardiff. This is not an unusual picture in Wales or across the UK and other local authorities are

facing the same challenges in this area. There is a need to explore ways in which the Council could “unlock” other available options.

- KF.35** It is important that the Council has a separate, stand-alone affordable housing policy, as the rules change frequently. A stand-alone policy (or a review of this policy if already in place) needs to be regularly reviewed and redrafted as rules change.
- KF.36** Stakeholders highlighted that current policy is less robust on affordable housing and questioned whether S106 is the right vehicle to deliver - could the Council increase affordable housing levels rather than expect a range of S106?
- KF.37** Viability assessments result in affordable housing being challenged, particularly on brownfield sites. Witnesses stated that some small developers may design out affordable housing from their schemes, stating in the viability report that the scheme would pose a management issue. When purchasing homes, affordable housing is watered down due to the viability argument put forward by the developer.
- KF.38** Cardiff's 2017 SPG sets out that the Council will pay £60,000 per affordable housing unit, and that this sum will be reviewed annually. However, it has only been reviewed once since 2017.
- KF.39** The use of discounted market rents as a form of affordable housing has been used in areas such as Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham, with a 20% discount to market rent, which is owned and managed by the private sector.
- KF.40** The RLDP provides the potential to revisit/review shared ownership schemes and other measures that allow people to afford to buy/rent properties. One witness suggested that if the affordable housing builds could be levelled up, it may encourage the development of more affordable housing on the same quality standards as a private home. It is acknowledged that WHQS applies to social housing.

Communications, Accessibility & Transparency

- KF.41** Key stakeholders have difficulty accessing information on s106 agreements. There is great public interest in s106 obligations and clarity of communication about what the Council will be seeking through planning obligations is important. Stakeholders must be able to find information easily. Such information needs to be available, publicly communicated and obvious. It is not clear where the public can have sight of Cardiff's s106 planning obligation register.

- KF.42** Members are currently seen as the route to communication with residents on s106 agreements, and it is assumed that members both drive and monitor s106 spend in their wards.
- KF.43** The Council's website would benefit from a dedicated planning obligations/ s106 page. Evidence gathered suggests the following information is made accessible on these pages: overarching vision (high level Council plans; SPG etc); outcomes of viability assessments; an annual statement of new s106 contributions secured; what these contributions are; what has been spent so far; what the contributions have been spent on; in-year regular updates to include details of how and where s106 (and any other) monies are being spent on a development; details of what these are; what has been requested; a "flow of funds" showing outcomes of what the money has been spent on.
- KF.44** Public opinion would benefit from a better understanding of developer contributions. Developers consider there is little public visibility of which services have been paid for with s106 monies. Therefore, a clearer narrative is required explaining that development generates s106 monies from developers, which in turn pays for improved community services.
- KF.45** To improve community integration, and public understanding of developers funding of s106 agreements, the Council should ensure site boards are erected at an early stage following the granting of planning permission. These boards should state clearly that planning approval has been granted on the basis that the developer will provide X, Y & Z facilities/services (with sums allocated alongside), as set out in the s106 agreement.
- KF.46** Developers consider an online toolkit would be useful, as found in several other authorities. This could be used as an early reference point, to calculate what a developers s106 contributions per square foot might be. The toolkit could also set out the Council's priorities.

TRANSPORT

Strategic Direction

- KF.47** Local and national policy has been strengthened to support the development of sustainable transport and active travel. However, the application of these policies in relation to new developments is variable and the local authority's enforcement of policies/legislation or any planning conditions needs to be strengthened.

KF.48 Early consultation on design and master planning of new developments, must involve stakeholders and transport providers to ensure that provision/infrastructure meet the needs of the local community.

Location of New Developments

KF.49 To increase active and sustainable travel uptake, there needs to be a careful planning when developing transport interchanges.

KF.50 The Council's Active Travel Network map sets out the Council's long-term aspiration for a connected network and it must be taken into consideration when determining the location of new developments (with adequate contributions from the developers to construct those networks as appropriate).

KF.51 There have been lost opportunities to restore historic travel corridors, with previous sites allowing developers to build houses over them e.g., Ferry Road.

Design Requirements

KF.52 New developments must have local amenities provided as soon as possible; this will help reduce the need to travel.

KF.53 Prioritisation of sustainable transport in new developments would be welcomed. This could be achieved through re-allocation of road space for active travel and public transport and bus gates.

KF.54 Separate pavement and cycle ways are required to avoid conflict between different users and support public safety and confidence.

KF.55 Secure by Design policy can hinder the opportunity for providing more active travel infrastructure.

KF.56 New developments must have dedicated parking provisions for those with disabilities and include EV infrastructure.

KF.57 The separation of walking and cycling means they are of significant width (at least rural road width) impacting on habitat connectivity and general loss of natural areas currently devoid of significant visible urban infrastructure.

KF.58 There is limited active travel information on new developments regarding active travel routes and distances times to key amenities.

Connectivity

KF.59 In line with local and national policy, the Replacement Local Development Plan needs to ensure connectivity between sustainable transport and active travel.

KF.60 Travel infrastructure in new developments must link to existing network infrastructure and community services.

Access to Parking

KF.61 Secure cycle storage is needed in the city centre and other key locations to address the fear of bike crime and encourage active travel from new developments.

Challenges in providing sustainable transport services

KF.62 There are inconsistencies in when transport infrastructure is considered within development planning. Providers highlight need for the Council to better engage with transport providers to identify and determine the types of transport infrastructure and services that will need to be provided or made available at new developments.

KF.63 There is a need to ensure planning conditions that meet the active travel and sustainable transport infrastructure needs of users and providers, are effectively negotiated, and enforced by the local authority.

KF.64 Section 106 monies from city centre developments are often used to support open spaces, which are very limited. These monies should be used to improve sustainable transport initiatives in the city centre instead.

KF.65 When designing transport infrastructure, ecological requirements, and any potential ecological implications, need to be included from the outset.

Improving take up of sustainable and active travel

KF.66 New developments present an opportunity for the local authority to stimulate behaviour change by improving the accessibility of sustainable and active travel, including the provision of discount / incentives to use public transport.

KF.67 Early provision, and communication, of sustainable transport/active travel and promised local amenities in new developments would potentially reduce private car use.

KF.68 Provision of uninterrupted bus lanes and buses having priority at junctions may improve travel time and therefore make bus services more reliable.

KF.69 The local authority must recognise that any changes to policies, which support a modal shift e.g., introduction of road user charging and increased car parking charges, will likely result in public resistance.

Exploring biodiversity issues versus transport need

- KF.70** There must be strong policy that reinforces the protection of green space and reduces the possibility of selling land to developers.
- KF.71** Multiple schemes for active travel and transport can fall under “permitted development”, resulting in concern that relevant environmental considerations are not being made as they would in general planning applications.
- KF.72** Continuous footpaths and cycleways could encourage active travel, they should also be supplemented with wide green verges that support biodiversity.
- KF.73** Provision of lighting on active travel routes has a detrimental impact on ecology and dark corridors for wildlife. If possible active travel routes should not impact negatively on the environment.
- KF.74** New developments when determining transport infrastructure, must fully consider the constraints imposed on existing vegetation and soil and must seek to minimise their loss and detrimental impacts on their functionality.
- KF.75** Inclusion of generous and continuous soft landscape verges in new developments that help mitigate environmental losses and create a more user-friendly environment are preferred but this needs careful forward planning. Often in developments, verges are very narrow (2.0m or less) and not continuous (fragmented by access points and car-parking). Where the width and continuity of verges cannot be optimised due to overriding design considerations, specialised landscaping features can be used to help establish trees.

DISTRICT & LOCAL CENTRES

Retail Planning Policy Framework

- KF.76** Welsh Government sets a clear framework and direction for retail planning policy, based on a Town Centres First policy, with the aim of ensuring centres are viable, vibrant, attractive and accessible by all modes of transport, including public and active travel. Post covid, Welsh Government has stressed the need for planning policy to enable centres to be social and economic hubs, with a range of retail and non-retail uses that serve local communities, including residential and co-working spaces. Welsh Government has also worked with the Welsh Retail Consortium on a plan to support retail in centres, *Together for Retail*, which encourages the use of

vacant units for worthwhile purposes to ensure centres are attractive and have footfall.

- KF.77** The *RLDP Vision, Issues and Objectives* acknowledges the need for greater flexibility in centres, post-covid. The *RLDP Preferred Strategy* reflects the Welsh Government framework, including Building Better Places, with district and local centres referenced in several objectives and strategic policies. It sets out objectives to protect and enhance centres and encourage flexibility. Importantly, it also sets out it is seeking to encourage investment and renewal of the physical fabric of centres.
- KF.78** Members heard from Tom Evans, Vice-Chair Planning Officers Society of Wales, that it is important Councils fully assess and identify within their RLDP those centres considered most appropriate to designate as social and economic hubs. This will assist the Council to focus investment into these chosen locations and will provide a framework to manage applications. Retail Planning Policies and associated SPG should be crafted to encourage vibrant, vital, attractive and accessible centres, enabling an appropriate retail/ non-retail balance and improving the quality of the centre environment.
- KF.79** Members heard that it is important the RLDP provides ‘teeth’ for policy needs across Council Directorates; planning alone cannot achieve everything but the RLDP is at the policy pinnacle and so sets the direction and tone for policies across the Council. Members note the Corporate Plan 2023-24 and Recovery & Renewal Strategy 2021 explicitly set out the Council’s support for district and local centres, with a District and Local Centres Strategy being developed.

Retail Landscape

- KF.80** Members note that there has been transformative change in the retail sector and landscape, with structural change arising due to changes in human behaviour over the last few years. Members heard from Cardiff Council officers that there has been less appetite from retailers for major stores, with a move towards medium-scale provision. Members welcome this, as enabling plurality of provision for local communities is both important and in line with the 15-minute city approach.

Retail Planning Policies

- KF.81** Members note the Council is intending to carry forward existing retail planning policies R1, R6 and R7, with existing retail planning policies R4, R5 and R8 carried

forward with minor amendments to reflect updated evidence and revised policy wording. Members note the findings and recommendations of the Nexus Planning Retail and Leisure Study (January 2023), hereafter referred to as the Nexus Study, and that the Council agrees with the recommendations and will be amending retail planning policies accordingly.

KF.82 Members heard from Tom Evans, Vice-Chair Planning Officers Society of Wales, that it is important Councils think about the proactive steps they can take to achieve vibrant, vital, attractive and accessible centres and craft planning policies that will encourage this – not just retail development but other development such as health facilities, community facilities, leisure uses and also residential, for example.

Retail Strategy

KF.83 Members note the Nexus Study (January 2023) highlights the need to ensure the RLDP Retail Strategy wording reflects the greater flexibility required post-covid. Having reviewed other local authority LDP wording, Members offer the following examples for consideration for adaption for use in Cardiff:

- a. Bristol Council¹ - *'aims to support Bristol's network of centres and **secure the sustainable distribution of the diversity of town centre uses**'*

Policy text

Retail development, offices, leisure (including food and drink), entertainment and night-time uses, arts, culture and tourism uses will be primarily located within or, where appropriate, adjoining the centres in the identified network and hierarchy serving Bristol.

Centres will also be **suitable locations for community uses** including surgeries and public service facilities.

Light industrial or small-scale distribution uses may also be appropriate in centres where they would contribute to their function and diversity.

Development will be expected to be of a **scale and intensity appropriate** to the position in the hierarchy and to the character of the centre.

¹ [Bristol Local Plan Review: November 2022](#) Draft Policy SSE1 – Supporting Bristol's Centres – network and hierarchy

- b. Kingston Council² - *There is a need to ensure that the borough's town centres remain **resilient and adaptable** to challenges facing the high street. Whilst protecting both the retail and commercial function of the borough's town centres is crucial, we will seek to ensure that centres are able to **evolve and adapt** over time so that they continue to support the communities in which they are situated.*
- c. Vale of Glamorgan³ - *'the Council will adopt a **more flexible** approach to the application of Policies MG14 and 15 to give consideration to the **individual impacts** of the proposals and give weight to **the benefits** that can be secured from other non-A1 uses that can benefit the overall vitality and viability of our retail centres.... due to the current national context and the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on the retail sector it is considered reasonable and appropriate for Development Management decisions to take a flexible approach to change of use proposals where it is considered the proposal would **benefit the centre** and contribute to the vitality, viability and attractiveness of the centre.'*

KF.84 Members highlighted that Swansea Council's LDP Review Report July 2023⁴ points out the need for local planning authorities to determine what constitutes a development of a '**significant scale**', given that Welsh Government's Future Wales strategy sets out that **significant** new retail facilities must be located within town centres. Members note the response from Cardiff Council officers that '*Significant new retail facilities are large scale retail developments and shopping centres and any new retail developments that because of their popularity/appeal are likely to attract large numbers of customers and have the potential to result in increased travel by unsustainable modes of transport. The first location for 'significant' new retail facilities is the central shopping area, which is at the head of the retail hierarchy, followed by lower order centres, and edge of centre, in line with the 'town centre first' approach.*'

² [Kingston's Local Plan 2023-2041 \(amazonaws.com\)](https://www.amazonaws.com) Point 8.30

³ [Retail Development SPG English - March 2023 \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

⁴ [Swansea LDP Review Report July 2023.pdf](#) point 4.4.33

R1- Retail Hierarchy

KF.85 In addition to the Nexus Study (January 2023) recommendations, Members heard there is a need for a vision statement for each centre that suits its geography, is realistic and sets out a compelling and fit for purpose approach. These should reflect the views of local stakeholders, as well as be intelligence-led.

A vision statement about each of the identified centres will be included in the next version of the local plan. Your comments about the role of these centres will be taken into account in shaping those statements, along with the outputs of recent community engagement. Local communities, business organisations or neighbourhood plans may have already prepared visions for these locations which can form part of these statements.

KF.86 Members are clear that these vision statements need to be included in the RLDP to enable them to be borne in mind when considering planning applications; therefore, these would be in addition to the District and Local Centres Strategy, which Members were informed would sit below the RLDP, and so would not have the same weight as the RLDP when considering planning applications.

Sequential Approach/ Test

KF.87 This Inquiry's review of other local authorities has identified that it is possible to tighten Cardiff Council's existing sequential approach by strengthening wording, setting thresholds and clarifying that preference will be given to locations that are accessible and well connected to existing centres:

- a. Swansea Council⁵ – existing LDP states that developers must **review all potentially suitable sites, including conversion/ re-modelling, demonstrating flexibility** and that the **onus of proof** that sites within centres have been thoroughly assessed **rests with developer**
- b. Avison Young⁶ - their report reviews existing retail planning policies and recommends making sure planning policies are written to ensure the sequential test **applies to leisure** as well as retail, given interconnectedness of these nowadays, and that they clarify that assessment of edge-of-centre and/ or out-of-centre locations should **give**

⁵ [Swansea Local Development Plan 2010-2025.pdf](#) points 2.8.7 and 2.8.8

⁶ [eb34-retail-and-town-centre-planning-policy-advice_april-2021.pdf](#) (stroud.gov.uk)

preference to those which are accessible and well connected to town centres

c. Bristol Council⁷ –

Policy text

The vitality and viability of the defined centres will be supported and enhanced. The network and hierarchy of centres as set out in this local plan will form the focal point for uses, services, and facilities serving the surrounding population.

In order to safeguard and enhance the network and hierarchy of centres any proposals for additional main town centre uses outside the defined city, town, district and local centres will be **subject to the requirements of the sequential test and where applicable an impact assessment.**

Planning applications for 'main town centre uses' which are not in a defined centre or not in accordance with the policies of this plan will be subject to the following sequential approach to establish that there are no available or suitable sites or premises in sequentially preferable locations. The order of preference for such uses are as follows:

- i. Within designated centres ('in centre')
- ii. In locations on the edge of designated centres ('edge of centre')
- iii. **Accessible sites which are well connected to a designated centre**
- iv. **Other locations that are accessible by walking, cycling and public transport**
- v. Out of centre development of main town centre uses will only be acceptable where:
 - a. It can be demonstrated that there are no available suitable sites or premises in sequentially preferable locations.
 - b. The proposal is of a small scale (**floorspace no greater than 200m²**) and aimed at providing for local needs.

The sequential approach applies to new floorspace, extensions to existing floorspace, changes of use and applications seeking to vary previously approved details.

The primary shopping areas as shown on the Policies Map, will continue to be the focus for new retail development.

Proposals for main town centre uses outside the defined city, town, district or local centres will be subject to an **impact assessment** where the floorspace of the proposed development exceeds the following **thresholds**:

- i. Outside Bristol city centre: greater than 500m² gross floorspace.
- ii. Outside a town or district centre: greater than 300m² gross floorspace.
- iii. Outside a local centre: greater than 200m² gross floorspace.

The impact assessment thresholds above related to town, district and local centres will be applicable for proposals within 800 metres of the boundary of the relevant centres.

Elsewhere the threshold of 500 metres applies.

⁷ [Bristol Local Plan Review: November 2022](#) Draft Policy SSE1 – Point 9.20

KF.88 Swansea Council’s existing LDP makes it clear that ‘*A departure to the defined hierarchy will only be considered if convincing evidence is submitted in support of a proposal to demonstrate that such development is **justified as an exception**, and that there would be no material adverse impact caused by the development to the attractiveness, vitality or viability of any Centre defined in the Retail Hierarchy. The policy identifies a **number of specific exceptional circumstances** where, subject to a specific need being identified, an out of centre retail or leisure proposal may be appropriate.*’⁸

KF.89 Members are aware from the previous SPG Inquiry (October 2022) that specifying exceptional circumstances strengthens planning policy. However, Members are alert to the need to very carefully craft policies to ensure only development that is of benefit is supported, in particular by ensuring that unacceptable harms are detailed, and that appropriate evidence is required; these factors are considered below.

KF.90 Members sought the views of Cardiff Council planning officers on Swansea Council’s existing LDP wording and note their view that it could be possible to adapt and use parts of this policy, with additional criteria.

R4 – District Centres and R5 – Local Centres

KF.91 In addition to the Nexus Study (January 2023) recommendations, Members explored how best to frame policies to promote flexibility, encourage beneficial development and resist harmful development to ensure viable, vibrant, attractive and accessible centres. Drawing on the work of the SPG Inquiry (October 2022), Members looked at the following key mechanisms, which enable a multi-pronged approach to appropriately managing development: use of thresholds; delineating unacceptable harms; and enhancing evidence levels required.

Thresholds

KF.92 Members heard the current LDP R4 and R5 policies do not specify thresholds but the Food, Drink and Leisure Uses SPG (November 2017) specifies that ‘*within existing District and Local Centres, where the proportion of non-shopping uses exceeds 60%, an application for a change of use of an active A1 retail unit for food, drink and leisure uses will be less favourably considered*’ and that the LDP monitoring indicators include less than 40% A1 as a trigger.

⁸ [Swansea Local Development Plan 2010-2025.pdf](#) point 2.8.16

KF.93 This Inquiry's review of other local authorities' retail planning policies has identified that some of these specify more detailed thresholds, for example delineating between use classes, primary and secondary frontages and/ or between ground floor and upper floors e.g.

- Swansea⁹ – A1 minimum 50% primary frontage, 35% secondary frontage.
- Vale¹⁰ – non-A1 ground floor – no more than 35% primary frontage, no more than 50% secondary frontage.
- Pembrokeshire¹¹ – non-A1 – no more than a third Primary Frontage.
- Bristol¹² – promotes active ground floor uses.

KF.94 These examples are provided to illustrate the ways other local planning authorities have approached thresholds. Members believe this is an area that warrants consideration: the inclusion of appropriate thresholds in the RLDP, as opposed to solely in SPG, will strengthen the Council's ability to manage development, as a threshold in an SPG that is not also in an LDP does not carry weight. However considerable thought and evidence is required to ensure thresholds are set an appropriate level and in an appropriate way, to ensure the Council has a flexible approach, whilst managing adverse impacts. In addition, Members are clear that thresholds on their own will not achieve beneficial development and that it is important they are not seen as a target to aim for; there is a need to marry them with clear approaches to unacceptable harm and evidence requirements. However, Members believe that they are an essential component in a multi-pronged approach to managing development.

Unacceptable Harm

KF.95 Members are aware from the previous SPG Inquiry (October 2022) that it is essential that LDP policies set out the impact the policy is seeking to avoid (harms) *and* the consequences if these harms are not avoided, in order for the LDP policy to be as strong as possible. Members note relevant SPG should provide evidence and explain how the impact seeking to avoid is measured and how consequences of not avoiding harm, the harms arising, are measured.

⁹ [District Centres Local Centres and Community Facilities.pdf](#)

¹⁰ [Retail Development SPG English - March 2023 \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](#)

¹¹ [Interim Advisory Note on Development in Town Centres - Pembrokeshire County Council](#) September 2022

¹² [Bristol Local Plan Review: November 2022](#)

- KF.96** The current LDP and Food, Drink and Leisure Uses SPG (November 2017) set out amenity grounds, including noise, disturbance, anti-social behaviour, litter, fumes and smells, as well as unacceptable harms such as dead frontages, crime and fear of crime, overconcentration of similar uses, traffic, parking and access, opening hours and health and wellbeing.
- KF.97** Having considered the findings from the review of other local authorities' retail planning policies, Members believe there is scope to reflect on and tighten the wording on amenity considerations and unacceptable impacts in the RLDP policies and related SPG. Members note Swansea Council recognises that its criteria need to be reviewed considering the approaches to revitalise town centres set out in Welsh Government guidance, such as Building Better Places, and Members recognise this is also the case in Cardiff.
- KF.98** There is a need for clear and robust development management criteria to deal with important local implications of non-retail use. However, there is a need to ensure these criteria are nuanced to take into account the differing impact of proposals e.g., Members heard from Tom Evans, Vice Chair – Planning Officers Society Wales, that there is a need to think about the size of units and the impact of the proposed use on the centre – a smaller unit would have less impact from 'dead' frontage than a larger unit. This is particularly true for residential proposals, as set out later in these key findings.
- KF.99** Members also note that it is possible to have LDP policies that provide the overarching framework for the retail/ non-retail balance, with further detail provided in a related SPG that can set out in more detail how specific use classes will be viewed, as is currently the case in Swansea¹³ and proposed in Bristol¹⁴ and Kingston¹⁵.
- KF.100** Members reviewed the Vale of Glamorgan Council's recent Retail Development SPG and include their wording on unacceptable impact, in the hope this is of use when phrasing the RDLP policies and related SPG:

¹³ [Swansea Local Development Plan 2010-2025.pdf](#) RC9 and [District Centres Local Centres and Community Facilities.pdf](#)

¹⁴ [Bristol Local Plan Review: November 2022](#) 9.23

¹⁵ [Kingston's Local Plan 2023-2041 \(amazonaws.com\)](#) Draft Policy KE5

unacceptable impact¹⁶ - *In this regard considerations would include:*

- *Customer profile / use of the premises and whether it would increase footfall in the centre*
- *Hours of operation / use reflecting the wider function of the centre throughout the day / evening and weekend*
- *Shop frontage and advertising – proposals should have ‘active’ frontages that enhance the public realm of the centre*
- *External impacts – traffic, congestion, servicing vehicles, noise, pollution, anti-social behaviour*
- *Providing local employment or services*
- *Enabling the beneficial use of upper floors to the benefit of the wider retail centre*
- *Meeting an evidenced social need not currently met in the locality (e.g., childcare services, health care, leisure activities etc).*

Impacts - *developments will need to satisfy other policy considerations such as design, impact on neighbouring amenity, environmental impacts, traffic, congestion and parking. Furthermore, consideration will need to be given to the context and current state of the retail centre to ensure that a proliferation of a particular use (such as A3 take-away food outlet) does not undermine the overall role and function of the retail centre.*

Evidence Levels

- KF.101** Members are aware from the previous SPG Inquiry (October 2022) that it is important relevant SPG set out the methodology used to ascertain thresholds, numbers, percentages, targets and measures and the evidence required for these, including for unacceptable harms and harms arising, and for exceptional circumstances. Swansea Council's relevant SPG provides a useful example of this.¹⁷
- KF.102** The other main area where evidence is required, in relation to District and Local Centres, is marketing information required when a change of use from A1 is proposed. Members believe there is scope to tighten the marketing wording in the RLDP policies and related SPG, with the Vale of Glamorgan wording providing a useful example of how this could be achieved:

¹⁶ [Retail Development SPG English - March 2023 \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

¹⁷ [District Centres Local Centres and Community Facilities.pdf](#)

Marketing¹⁸ - Applicants should submit a marketing report with such applications outlining the following:

- Details the existing use or the previous use of the site / premises if vacant;
- The length of time the unit has been vacant for (if applicable);
- Details of the marketing strategy employed and its duration, including the type of use the unit was marketed for, the price / contract terms, any incentives offered, details of the site / premises particulars including its condition / state of repair, copies of advertisements placed;
- Details of the amount of interest in the unit during the marketing period – this should detail the number of queries, the type of uses sought by potential purchasers, and if known, the reason for not pursuing an initial enquiry.

To demonstrate the marketing strategy was meaningful and realistic as a minimum the marketing strategy followed should:

- Have been undertaken for a 12-month continuous marketing period;
- Have a sale / rental price that reflects the market conditions for the current use and condition of the site / premises. If the building or site requires extensive conversion/repairs, the price should be based on the unconverted state unless the works are to be undertaken prior to completion. The price should not include any potential residential or other non-A1 use values.
- Have 'active' marketing on site, be listed on appropriate marketing websites, use a local / regional property agent to market the site, including direct mailing to targeted businesses, and advertised in appropriate marketing literature.
- Applicants should be prepared to offer the property or site on both a leasehold and freehold basis in order to widen appeal and help ascertain the level of interest.

KF.103 Members sought Cardiff Council planning officers' views on the above marketing wording and note their view that this approach is useful in the Cardiff context.

Residential

KF.104 Members recognise the desire to increase densification and footfall in centres and the need to meet housing demand, and that providing homes at or near centres constitutes the most sustainable forms of development, providing access and good connectivity to facilities and services for recreation and meeting day to day needs.

¹⁸ [Retail Development SPG English - March 2023 \(valeofglamorgan.gov.uk\)](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

- KF.105** There is a need to think about what sort of residential the Council wishes to encourage in centres, as some residential can be appropriate but the juxtaposition of residential and centres' uses needs to be carefully balanced, with amenity considerations.
- KF.106** Members heard from Tom Evans, Vice-Chair, Planning Officers Society Wales, that it is very important Councils undertake analysis to reach a position where there is clarity in regard to where residential use can be tolerated within centres. This would include understanding the form and number of units needed to maintain the vibrancy and vitality of a centre. There can be significant variation in this regard, and it is therefore important to look at the characteristics of each centre and to have an analysis of each centre to understand appropriate scale for residential and of conversion of retail to residential.
- KF.107** Members heard that, whilst residential is typically on upper floors, there may be opportunities for ground floor uses to co-exist in a retail centre, but this will require a clear policy framework and understanding of the specific character and form of the relevant retail and commercial centre, as there is potential for ground floor residential to cause harm in some locations whilst in other locations, it may be beneficial.
- KF.108** Members heard that key issues to consider with regard to residential use are loss and dilution of active frontage, contribution to vitality, viability and attractiveness of centres, compatibility with other uses in the same building as well as neighbouring properties, as well as unacceptable harms and amenity considerations, as detailed in the section above.
- KF.109** Members considered the approach to residential use in the following local authorities: Swansea Council, Pembrokeshire Council, Flintshire Council, Wrexham Council, and Bristol Council, and note Cardiff Council planning officers' view that the Bristol Council approach to residential uses in centres is the most appropriate to Cardiff and a practice that has policy support in the current LDP.

Residential Uses ¹⁹

New residential development which makes positive use of upper floors of properties and on underused and vacant space away from commercial frontages will be encouraged within centres.

¹⁹ [Bristol Local Plan Review: November 2022](#)

Residential development

Within the primary shopping areas, changes of use of ground floor frontages to residential development (that require planning permission) will not be appropriate.

In wider centre boundaries, changes of use to ground floor residential development in centre boundaries may be acceptable where:

- It has been demonstrated after a suitable period of appropriate marketing that there is no realistic prospect of securing an active use in the unit; and
- where this would not, individually or cumulatively, detrimentally impact the vitality and viability of existing commercial and retail uses through fragmentation of the commercial function.

Major development proposals will be expected to contribute to environmental enhancement and public realm improvements within the city centre, and town, district and local centres and parades.

Other Non-Retail Uses

KF.110 Members were particularly struck by the work underway by Bristol Council to include the following in their retail planning policies:

- a. Support for the Evening and Night Time Economy²⁰.
- b. Support for temporary, meanwhile uses²¹.
- c. Inclusion of Agent of Change principle²².

KF.111 Members were interested to understand Cardiff Council planning officers' views on the above and note their response that Cardiff's centres could benefit from the approach set out by Bristol Council, ensuring the vitality of centres extends through the daytime into the evening and night time and increasing viability and diversity of centres.

KF.112 Members were also interested in Wrexham Council's policy on loss of local services, which has recently been through Examination:

Policy R7: Loss of Local Services²³ Outside of Wrexham Town Centre, District, Local, Village and Neighbourhood Centres proposals that entail the loss of a community facility, including shops, commercial facilities and public houses and/or non-commercial facilities, including libraries and

²⁰ [Bristol Local Plan Review: November 2022](#) Draft Policy SSE3

²¹ [Bristol Local Plan Review: November 2022](#) Draft Policy SSE5

²² [file \(bristol.gov.uk\)](http://file.bristol.gov.uk) [Bristol Local Plan Review: November 2022](#)

²³ [Wrexham County Borough Council - Latest News \(objective.co.uk\)](#) underline is Inspector's addition; strikethrough is their deletions.

village halls/community centres shopping, commercial facility or public house will only be supported where:

- The use is no longer viable and all reasonable attempts to sell or let the business have proved unsuccessful; or
- A similar service is available within reasonable walking distance; or

It can be demonstrated that the existing provision is surplus to the needs of the community. 6.156 It is important that the daily needs of communities both commercial (e.g., shopping and public house) and non-commercial (e.g., library and village hall/community centre) are reasonably met in their locality. Provision of these services locally will reduce the need to travel and help sustain local communities.

- KF.113** Members sought the views from internal witnesses and note their response that existing LDP policies (C2 and R5) protect existing community facilities and local shopping facilities, but that Wrexham Council extends this definition to include shops, commercial facilities and public houses and provides criteria that need to be addressed which must be met to support the loss. Members note officers continue that *'It can prove extremely difficult to compel such uses to be retained in some cases e.g., business in single ownership difficult where the local shopkeeper/owner or publican chooses to retire and repurposes the use for their own living accommodation'*. However, Members believe this example would not form the majority of instances and so there is merit in exploring how to make the RLDP wording on loss of local services as robust as possible.
- KF.114** Members note that Public Health Wales has developed a template²⁴ for local authority planners to use to develop effective development management approaches to hot food takeaways.
- KF.115** Members note that Kingston Council has a policy²⁵ restricting the oversaturation of betting shops.
- KF.116** Members asked Adrian Powis and Shelly Lynch, Co-Operative Funeral Services, for their views on how the changing nature of centres affects their services, for example the increase in cafes and restaurants and note their view that these changes have a positive impact with the increasing footfall helping to increase awareness that the

²⁴ [Microsoft Word - Wales HWHW SPG Template v4.docx \(nhs.wales\)](#)

²⁵ [Kingston's Local Plan 2023-2041 \(amazonaws.com\)](#) Draft Policy KE9

Co-Operative Funeral Services is located in the centre and that people remember this when these services are needed.

R6 Out of Centre

KF.117 In addition to the Nexus Study (January 2023) recommendations, and this Inquiry's findings on the Sequential Test, set out above, Members explored how best to manage out of centre developments and avoid the loss of needed industrial land and businesses areas. Members heard from Tom Evans, Vice-Chair, Planning Officers Society Wales, that:

- a. it is important to understand that out-of-centre has a role and a function.
- b. LDPs need to address this and set out the role and function so there is a framework for development.
- c. It is very important to have an up-to-date evidence base on existing landbanks of industrial and business areas and future demand for this, to understand whether there is a surplus.
- d. If there is a surplus, it is important that the planning system ensures the effective utilisation of land that could otherwise remain vacant.
- e. If evidence shows there is a need for specific alternative uses such as residential or certain commercial uses, it is important that policies are clear that the surplus land is being protected for these alternative uses.
- f. If evidence demonstrates that certain existing business and industrial land provides an important role for economic growth (for investment by new business as well as allowing extension of existing enterprises) policies must be clear to protect these areas for existing uses
- g. Where there is no clear evidence available, policies will need to be sufficiently flexible in their approach to the re-use of surplus land, to avoid under-utilisation of land.

KF.118 Members note Cardiff Council officers recognise the need for planning policies to be slightly firmer and more proactive, with plans for existing business and industrial land, setting out acceptable uses, to ensure these sites are protected and are developed in line with the Council's overall aims.

- KF.119** Members note that Swansea Council's existing LDP²⁶ contains a section on managing development proposals for established out of centre retail developments, which may be of use to Cardiff Council planners when drafting the RDLP policies.
- KF.120** Members note that it is possible to estimate the impact different types of retail stores will have on existing stores. Members found this interesting, that it is possible to differentiate the impact by clientele and distance from existing provision, and pondered whether the methodology would be of assistance to the Council in estimating the impact of proposed out-of-centre provision.

R7 Strategic Sites

- KF.121** In addition to the Nexus Study (January 2023) recommendations, Members note that, going forward, the Council can continue to use its placemaking role to assist in ensuring that new centres are appropriate, e.g., not enabling a large car park, working to promote local character and distinctiveness. Members note that the existing LDP has ensured retail provision is master planned for the strategic sites, with planning agreements capturing the Council's requirements e.g., NE Cardiff planning agreements specify retail floor space of 1,500 sq. metres, which is smaller than large supermarkets, and non-food retail floor space of 1,000 sq. metres.
- KF.122** Members heard the Council is not receiving applications for big box retail parks; instead, it is receiving applications for medium-sized sites. However, Members are mindful that the RLDP runs to 2036 and that the market may shift again; Members therefore believe that it is prudent to phrase retail planning policy to ensure it can deal appropriately with a range of site sizes.

Relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance

- KF.123** Having reviewed the existing Food, Drink and Leisure Uses SPG (November 2017) and taking into consideration the other findings of this Inquiry, it is clear to Members that the existing SPG will need to be significantly amended, in light of
- a. Welsh Government's more recent relevant publications
 - b. the findings of the SPG Inquiry (October 2022) and
 - c. any changes made to retail planning policies.
- KF.124** In particular, Members note the following are required:
- a. Citation of all relevant LDP policies and paragraphs

²⁶ [Swansea Local Development Plan 2010-2025.pdf](#)

- b. More precise and positive language and phraseology, as detailed in the SPG Inquiry (October 2022)
- c. Setting out thresholds and the methodology for calculating these
- d. Consistency in terminology for unacceptable harms and clarity about how these are assessed and/ or measured.
- e. Setting out exceptional circumstances and how these are worked out and applied.

Use of Planning Conditions

KF.125 Members note that planning conditions can be used to prevent future, unwanted, changes of use, including sub-division, unification, and restricting types of use to protect existing provision. Members note the current LDP and related SPG highlights planning conditions may be used and Cardiff Council planning officers' response that they have been used to control the types of uses, goods sold, size of unit, operating hours and to prevent sub-division.

Use of Local Development Orders

KF.126 Members are aware that the Welsh Government's Technical Advice Note 4²⁷ sets out that '*local authorities are encouraged to consider how Local Development Orders (LDOs) can assist in the regeneration of retail and commercial centres*'. Members sought witnesses' views on this and note:

- a. Swansea Council does not currently use these but will look at their potential as part of preparing its RLDP; Tom Evans stated that his initial thoughts are that there are concerns with them as they remove the ability of planners and Members to reach a judgement on proposals, as proposals no longer need to go through the Planning Committee route.
- b. Cardiff Council planning officers' view that, whilst LDO's are useful in particular circumstances, there is a reluctance to adopt LDOs due to concerns about loss of control, loss of planning fees, delay, and complication.

²⁷ [Technical advice note \(TAN\) 4: retail and commercial development | GOV.WALES](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having considered the evidence presented to this Inquiry, the Joint Scrutiny Committee makes the following recommendations to Cabinet:

R1. Utilise the recommendations of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee's Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) Inquiry (October 2022) when drafting RLDP policies and related SPG.

(HFs 1 – 3)

SECURING PLANNING OBLIGATIONS

R2. Develop/invigorate internal processes to co-ordinate s106 activities across the authority.

This should include:

- A review of the Council's aspirations and priorities in relation to planning obligations and s106 to ensure that priorities are focussed, clear and understood by all. It is important that affordable housing is included as part of this review, and that "wish lists" are minimised – what does the Council NEED in terms of developments? **(KF2; KF33)**.
- Review and streamline the viability process to speed up this process, which was highlighted as a particular challenge for all **(KF25 - KF32)**.
- An appraisal of s106 contributions held by the authority to ensure that they are index linked **(KF4 and KF5)**; and are spent in a timely manner **(KF6)**.
- Establish an internal cross-cutting working group to improve round table representation. **(KF10)**
- Ensure that Finance are included in discussions with the internal group and that they are included as experts at the viability stage **(KF26)**.
- Establish a working group with developers and commercial agents to further improve working relationships and dialogue. **(KF11)**
- Consider the development and use of standardised s106 agreements with a view to simplifying the viability process, enable improved monitoring, enforcement etc. **(KF14)**
- Review current monitoring of planning obligations/s106. This includes tightening up of the annual monitoring report framework **(KF15)**

- R3.** The Council ensures dedicated and identifiable s106 officers are visible and accessible to stakeholders and ensure there is timely periodical monitoring to ensure s106 legal agreements are adhered to. This role should include:
- These officers being clearly identifiable and visible to all stakeholders **(KF8)**.
 - Act as a community engagement officer on large development sites, to ensure effective integration of new and existing communities. **(KF9)**.
 - Be responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring the work highlighted in this report.
- R4.** The Council revisit Supplementary Planning Guidance to ensure it is concise, robust and evidence based to ensure a seamless planning process. This should include:
- Further enhancements to the SPG, particularly around viability **(KFs 16 & 17)**.
 - Revisit the size and length of the current document, with a view to making it more concise; clear, accurate and transparent **(KFs 19 & 22)**.
 - Review the document to ensure that it includes clauses to ensure contribution values are index linked **(KF 20)**.
 - Set out clear expectations of what is expected from developments **(KF 21)**
 - Provide detail of thresholds which will be sought for developments **(KFs 23 & 24)**.
- R5.** The Council continues to explore the delivery of affordable housing but commits to exploring additional avenues for meeting housing needs. This may include:
- Exploring ways in which the council could unlock other options available to it in relation to affordable housing **(KFs 30, 35, 37 & 40)**.
 - Ensure that any affordable housing policy is regularly reviewed **(KF 35)**.
 - Review whether s106 is the right vehicle for delivering affordable housing **(KF 36)**.
 - Review the current status of affordable housing priority (with a view to giving it a higher status) and adjust the policy accordingly. Review the viability process in relation to affordable housing, with the aim to minimise the “designing out” of affordable housing by developers at this stage **(KF 37)**.
 - Undertake a review of the value of affordable housing unit, and adjust the policy accordingly, with regular reviews set out clearly in the monitoring framework **(KF 38)**.

R6. The Council reviews and improves accessibility and transparency of s106 agreements in Cardiff. This should include:

- Easy to find key documents, plans, information on developments and details of s106 commitments and spend **(KFs 3 & 41)**.
- Better access to information for Members and the public, to include a Protocol for communicating with Members, developers etc. **(KFs 42 & 44)**.
- Build on current mechanisms in place to develop further active community involvement and integration **(KF 45)**.
- The Cardiff LDP Website have dedicated planning obligations/ s106 pages **(KF 43)**. This could include.
 - Overarching vision (High level plans; SPGs etc).
 - Annual statement of new contributions secured; what these contributions are; what has been spent so far; what the contributions have been spent on.
 - In-year regular updates to include details of how and where s106 (and any other) moneys are being spent on a development; details of what these are - what has been requested; what has been contributed; what has been spent.
 - A “flow of funds” – showing outcomes of what the money has been spent on.
- Tools for assisting developers – set out planned phasing and triggers; what the priorities are; greater clarity on/ability to calculate these amounts **(KF 46)**.

TRANSPORT

R7. The Replacement Local Development Plan’s SP5 (Securing New Infrastructure) has specific provisions to ensure that new developments, irrespective of their size, location, or land use, make appropriate provision for infrastructure. In line with recommendations made on the Shaping Cardiff Post Pandemic Recovery Inquiry, SP5 must include clear, concrete conditions negotiated with developers that adequate transport infrastructure i.e., bus stops, turning circle etc, must be in place on developments as soon as they are publicly occupied, to encourage uptake of sustainable transport and active travel routes.

(KFs 47,48, 50, 52, 60, 63, 66 & 67)

R8. The Replacement Local Development Plan’s SP3 (Ensuring a Master Planning Approach) must clearly specify that when new developments are agreed, developers must engage and consult with transport providers, and relevant community groups (as directed by the Council) during the master planning stage. This early and consistent consultation will ensure proposals for development sites meets both provider and user needs’ and assist the council in delivering the transport modal shift, and ensure any new development is linked to, and contributes to the improvement of, existing developments and infrastructure.

(KFs 47, 48, 40, 52, 59, 60 & 62)

R9. In line with transport legislation and policy in Wales, more emphasis must be put on s106 monies allocated to city centre developments being utilised for improvements to sustainable and active travel corridors, when possible.

(KFs 47, 50, 59, 60, 63, 64, 66 & 67)

R10. The Replacement Local Development Plan’s SP19 (Protecting, Compensating and Enhancing Green and Blue Infrastructure and Biodiversity), must ensure that any roads, cycleways and pavements will take into account any existing areas of biodiversity, including how maintenance and management of the areas that remain will be undertaken.

However, the Strategic Policy must remain flexible to local issues and must stipulate that when this work is managed, close working partnership is required with local.

(KFs 55, 65, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74 & 75)

R11. In line with local and national strategic direction, the Replacement Local Development Plan’s SP4 (Securing Good Quality & Sustainable Design) must specify that developments must include the following features which any relevant SPG²⁸ will provide further details of :

²⁸ In line with the Welsh Government’s LDP Development Manual and Cabinet accepted recommendations from the SPG Task and Finish Inquiry in 2022, the finalised transport policies in the RLDP should provide a clear and strong substantive policy hook to a relevant SPG that will provide specific details on the application of the policy. It is expected that the SPG will specify or cite the specific LDP policy or paragraph that it links (hooks) to and will be expanding on. A strong SPG should specify minimum standards, thresholds, numbers, percentages targets and measures, how these are worked out, and evidence why these are chosen or required. Furthermore, the relevant SPG should provide evidence on the impact that the policy is seeking to avoid and details of harms it will bring if what is required is not followed. A detailed outline checklist on what is required to ensure a relevant

- Provision of sufficient community EV charging points.
- Active travel signs/way markers, which provide route and distance information to nearest amenities.
- Quality, secure cycle storage at home (particularly for HMOs) and at local amenities.
- Sufficient road space to accommodate buses passing on main/arterial routes through new developments.
- Protection of historic travel corridors; whether in use or not, to allow their reinstatement at a later date if necessary.

(KFs 48, 56, 58, 60, 61 & 62)

DISTRICT & LOCAL CENTRES

R12. Accept and implement the recommendations of the Nexus Planning Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (January 2023), as set out in Section 10 of their report, when drafting the RLDP retail planning policies, in particular, but not limited to:

- Nexus’s suggestions to amend the clause in R4 and R5 to resist continuous stretches of 3 or more units to ‘non-retail, leisure or community centre uses’ and, in centres where this is a particular concern, to add a specific clause resisting runs of 3 or more residential units,
- Nexus’s recommendation to reference in R6 the 2,500 sq m (gross) threshold for requiring retail impact assessment (Paragraph 4.3.26 of PPW11, 2021).

(KFs 81, 83, 85, 91, 117 & 121)

R13. local authorities to robustly word RLDP retail planning policies, including:

- Enabling non-retail uses that achieve similar things for centres that A1 usage does e.g., footfall, active frontage/ window display, vibrancy.
- strengthening the wording of the retail strategy and sequential test.
- setting an appropriate threshold for retail/ non-retail use in centres, as part of a multi-pronged approach to managing development.
- drawing on the Vale of Glamorgan Council’s ‘unacceptable harms’ wording and its’ ‘marketing’ wording.

SPG that is strongly linked to the RLDP polices is currently being finalised as part of the accepted T&F recommendation.

- framing residential use policy in terms of ‘tolerating’ residential use at appropriate locations if proposal is of an appropriate size and scale and not detrimental to the vitality, viability, attractiveness or accessibility of a centre.

(KFs 76, 83, 84, 87 – 100, 102, - 109 & 116)

R14. Consider whether to include reference to the following areas in the RLDP retail planning policies and, if so, consider the examples of retail planning policies in other local authorities highlighted in this report’s Key Findings:

- Evening & Night Time Economy Uses.
- Temporary Uses.
- Agent of Change, and
- Loss of Local Services.

(KFs 110 – 113)

R15. Use the examples cited in this report’s Key Findings of retail planning evidence requirements in other local authorities to strengthen the evidence base required, including:

- developing a Vision Statement for each centre, which will be included in the RLDP, that is intelligence-led and includes stakeholder engagement.
- in the RLDP, delineating and evidencing the impact on centres and local communities if unacceptable harms are not avoided, with further technical details and methodology to be contained in relevant SPG.
- undertaking analysis to determine what level and type of residential use is tolerable in centres, to ensure evidence is available to support development control.
- as a minimum, in the RLDP, adopt the Vale of Glamorgan Council’s evidence requirements regarding the marketing required when a change of use from A1 is proposed.
- undertaking an analysis of demand for industrial land and business areas and, where this evidence shows there is a surplus, develop plans setting out specific alternative uses to ensure the identified surplus land is protected for these alternative uses and not available for speculative development.

(KFs 85, 86, 95 – 102, 106 & 117)

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

1. The Welsh Government (WG)²⁹ requires all councils to have a Local Development Plan (LDP). The document is the Council's key land use planning document, which sets out policies and proposals for future development and use of land in Cardiff between 2006 - 2026, in line with legislative requirements. Once adopted the LDP will replace the existing structure and local plans for the city and will form the basis for decisions on individual planning applications.
2. The LDP is a statutory requirement which identifies opportunities for investment and regeneration including the provision of new homes, jobs, community facilities and transport infrastructure. The Plan also identifies land that requires protection for its conservation importance and measures necessary for safeguarding our environment. It needs to balance sustainable development and conservation, whilst delivering the community's vision for the future of Cardiff.
3. In preparing the LDP, the Council must take account of a wide range of legislation, policies and other initiatives at European, national and local levels of government, including:
 - The Wales Spatial Plan
 - South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA) Regional Transport Plan
 - South East Wales Regional Waste Plan
 - South East Wales Regional Technical Statement for Aggregates.
4. The LDP is tasked with:
 - Delivering sustainable development
 - Reflecting local aspirations for the city, based on a vision agreed by the local community and other stakeholders.
 - Providing a basis for rational and consistent development control decisions
 - Guiding growth and change, while protecting local diversity, character and sensitive environments
 - Showing how and where change will occur over the plan period.

²⁹ The Planning & Compulsory Order Act 2004

5. The Preferred Strategy therefore aims to give a broad outline of the intended level of growth in Cardiff and how it can be sustainably delivered. The strategy is a result of carefully considering a number of different factors including:
- The national and regional policy framework;
 - A sound understanding of the local context- identifying key data and issues which the plan must take account of from the evidence base;
 - The Council’s Community Strategy and LDP vision and objectives;
 - Considering the merits of different growth options; and
 - Considering the merits of different spatial options- where the best places are to accommodate new development needs.
6. The Scrutiny inquiry final report will be considered by the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 13 December 2023 and offered for Cabinet consideration on 14 December 2023. Subject to Council approval, work will continue on developing the Deposit Local Development Plan. The revised timetable is as follows:
- a. Consultation on Deposit Plan – July to September 2024
 - b. Examination – May 2025 to October 2025
 - c. Adoption – November 2025
7. The Local Development Plan regulations require the Council to publish its pre-deposit proposals for public inspection and comment.

APPROACH TAKEN

In March 2023 the Chairs of the five Scrutiny Committees agreed that a cross committee Joint Task & Finish group should be established to scrutinise the Preferred Strategy. Nominations were sought from all committees. In April a session was held between the nominated members and Planners, to ensure everyone's understanding was the same of the process to date and the proposed timeframe going forward. The group next met again in early July after the Preferred Strategy had been agreed by Cabinet in June Council in June 2023, to agree the focus of the work of the Task and Finish Group. At the workshop in July round table discussions were held and the top three issues to consider on more detail being statutory obligations, transport and district and local centers. Councillors were also asked which task group/s they wished to participate in. Following the summer break in September the three subgroups consulted with members regarding the terms of reference for each of the groups and stake holder workshops, evidence gathering, and desktop reviews took place during October. Some of this work was frustrated by the calling of continuous strike action throughout September, October, and November, which impacted on the meetings that were able to be held in a face-to-face context initially. The report was written in November to be agreed by the overarching Task & Finish Group and then by each Scrutiny Committee in December before being presented to Cabinet in December, to allow time for recommendations to be considered for inclusion in the Deposit Plan. Therefore, there was limited time to consider the issues in detail and the work of the task groups needed to be focused.

The **Planning Obligations** task group examined how current policy and process could be strengthened; how communication and narrative on planning obligations could be simplified, more accessible and transparent; and how carbon neutral and biodiversity requirements might need to be addressed. The broad range of external and internal witnesses highlighted many positives about the Council's planning service and how it currently approaches s106 agreements. The evidence has been informed by witnesses' experience of working with many local authorities, both in Wales and England. There were also many observations as to how Cardiff Council could improve policy and process as it moves into the detailed phase of developing the replacement Local Development Plan for deposit.

The **Transport** task group reviewed how transport and active travel infrastructure on new developments (LDP policy T5 Managing Transport Impacts) could be improved without negatively impacting on nature and biodiversity. Witnesses from both transport providers and

community groups were invited to attend focus groups and commented on the lack of engagement and communication from an early, master planning stage to ensure the needs of both groups were considered at the earliest opportunity and to encourage take up of sustainable and active travel opportunities. A desktop review of the policy gaps was also undertaken to support the development of recommendations.

To inform the Inquiry, Members of the **District & Local Centre's** task group were provided with information on the policy framework for retail planning policies in Cardiff, including the policy context from Welsh Government, the existing LDP policies and relevant SPG, the review of the existing LDP and Annual Monitoring Reports, the RLDP Vision, Objectives and Issues, the RLDP Preferred Strategy (consultation draft), the Nexus Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (January 2023), the Corporate Plan 2023-24 and the Cardiff Recovery and Renewal Strategy (2021). Members also considered pertinent findings from the previous Planning Inspectorate Examination of Cardiff's proposed Deposit Plan, 2015. Also, Members were provided with a summary of relevant findings from the recent *Shaping Cardiff's Post Pandemic Economic Recovery Inquiry* (January 2023), which included findings on high streets and district and local centres post-covid, and the previous *Supplementary Planning Guidance Inquiry* (October 2022), which included findings on how to ensure tight LDP policies and strong SPG. In addition, desk-based research was undertaken to identify examples of retail planning policies post-covid from other cities in the UK that meet the Welsh Government's policy direction. A gap analysis was undertaken comparing these examples with the existing LDP retail planning policies, to identify where existing policies could be strengthened and amended in the new RLDP, to meet Welsh Government and Cardiff Council's RLDP policy direction. Members also considered publications from the Welsh Retail Consortium, the Association of Convenience Stores, and the Local Government Association, regarding the role of local authorities in assisting high streets and ensuring access to local services.

The key findings from task group activities have been used to inform the development of the recommendations that have been submitted in this report.

Further details and the evidence gathered during October by the three task groups is available on request.

WITNESSES TO THE INQUIRY

Statutory Obligations Subgroup

External:

- Jim Cliffe, Planning Obligations Manager, Bristol City Council
- Mark Harris, Policy Advisor, House Builders Federation
- Jo Curson, Director of Development, Wales & West Housing Association
- Prof Neil Harris, School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University
- Andrew Woods, Director, Expedite and Urban Centric
- Tom Evans, Head of Planning, Swansea City Council and Chair of Planning Officers Society Wales

Internal:

- Simon Gilbert, Head of Planning
- Alison Draper, Development & Regeneration Team Leader, Housing
- Brett Andrewartha, School Organisation Planning Manager, E&LL
- Anil Hirani, Operational Manager - Capital, Corporate & Treasury, Financial Services
- Vesna Cole, Solicitor, Governance & Legal Services

Written Responses:

- Caroline Jones and Andrew Weeks, Savills
- Chris Spiteri, Director, Property Index
- Dr Roisin Willmott, Director, Royal Town Planning Institute

Transport Subgroup

External:

- Gareth Stevens – Cardiff Bus
- Alex Corsi – Adventure Travel
- Christian Reed – Stagecoach Bus
- Ryland Jones – Sustrans
- Chris Roberts - Cardiff Cycle City
- Kirsty James – RNIB
- Dan Thomas – RNIB
- Ceri Cryer – Age Cymru
- Mike Jones Pritchard – Tongwynlais Community Council

Internal:

- Jenn Griffiths – Access Forum

Written Responses:

- Kelsey Barcenilla – Transport for Wales
- Justin Groves – County Ecologist
- Ed Baker – County Tree Officer

District & Local Centre's Subgroup

External:

- Carrie McCambridge – Operations Manager, South Wales, Co-Operative Food
- Adrian Powis – Operations Manager, Cardiff, Co-Operative Funeral Services
- Shelly Lewis – Regional Manager, South Wales, Co-Operative Funeral Services
- Tom Evans – Vice-Chair, Planning Officers Society Wales

Internal:

- Cllr De'Ath – Cabinet Member, Transport and Strategic Planning
- Simon Gilbert – Head of Planning
- Stuart Williams - Group Leader – Strategic Policy
- Caren Richards – Team Leader – Strategic Policy
- Jon Day – OM Tourism and Investment

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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review, and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review, and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without modification. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet / Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal power of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. standing orders and financial regulations; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The role of the Policy Review & Performance Committee is to scrutinise, monitor and review the overall operation of the Cardiff Programme for Improvement and the effectiveness of the general implementation of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, including:

- Council Business Management and Constitutional Issues
- Cardiff Council Corporate Plan
- Strategic Policy Development
- Strategic Programmes
- Community Planning & Vision Forum
- Voluntary Sector Relations
- Citizen Engagement & Consultation
- Corporate Communications
- International Policy
- Cardiff Local Development Plan
- Equalities
- Finance and Corporate Grants
- Organisational Development
- Cardiff Efficiencies Programme
- E-Government
- Information and Communication Technology
- Council Property
- Commissioning and Procurement
- Carbon Management
- Contact Centre Services and Service Access
- Legal Services
- Public Services Board

To scrutinise, monitor and review the effectiveness of the Council's systems of financial control and administration and use of human resources.

To assess the impact of partnerships with and resources and services provided by external organisations including the Welsh Government, joint local government services, Welsh

Government Sponsored Public Bodies and quasi-departmental non-government bodies on the effectiveness of Council service delivery.

To report to an appropriate Cabinet or Council meeting on its findings and to make recommendations on measures which may enhance Council performance and service delivery in this area.

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee Membership



Councillor Joel Williams
(Chairperson)



Councillor Mike Ash-Edwards



Councillor Bernie Bowen-Thomson



Councillor Joe Carter



Councillor Jasmin Chowdhury



Councillor Jane Henshaw



Councillor Graham Hinchey



Councillor Garry Hunt



Councillor Leonora Thomson

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