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## **EARLY YEARS, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

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### **Significant Overall Improvement in Performance**

Along with my Cabinet colleague Councillor Susan Elsmore, I am very pleased to advise members that, as measured by a basket of national performance indicators, the City of Cardiff Council's Social Services was the most improved in Wales during 2015-16, having improved by 68% overall. This follows the release earlier this month of the all Wales performance data for 2015-16.

This picture endorses the overall direction we have embarked upon in creating a new single Social Services Directorate during 2015-16 and in resolving a more effectively unified structure at Director and Assistant Director level. The results of more effective senior management grip are clearly beginning to bite, albeit we recognise that there remains much more to do and that there are challenges in sustaining this step-change in performance going forward.

### **Increases in the Looked After Population**

The number of children in the looked after system has continued to increase in Cardiff. This reflects national patterns across England Wales which stem principally from a significant growth in the number of court proceedings, particularly relating to infants and the growing complexity of cases where children have been abused. In Cardiff the judiciary has confirmed that the city presents additional challenges associated with greater diversity and population turnover. In addition, more children who are at risk of sexual exploitation have been the subject of proceedings as a result of our successful Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy.

In June and July 2016 alone, the service admitted an unprecedented 39 children, many not previously known to the service and all at the high end of the complexity spectrum. This has obvious consequences for expenditure and although it is believed that this represented a 'spike' rather than a 'step' in the rate of admission it remains the case that this kind of cost is inescapable once all measures to mitigate admission have been exhausted. Until recently, Cardiff's Looked After Population has been significantly below what would be expected in relation to demography and deprivation; the recent rise has meant that the number of children in the system is now closer to what would be expected, but I am clear that we should not allow this to grow further and that we can do more to reduce the need for admission by substantially enhancing prevention. New developments towards this end are highlighted below.

## **Collaborative Partnerships**

Our relationship with regional partners and with health in particular continues to strengthen, bringing with it a much stronger focus on prevention; in relation to children this is particularly significant in terms of the new approach to support children with emotional and mental health difficulties. Members will be aware that Part 9 of the Social Services and Well Being Act established a new Regional Partnership Board in the final quarter of 2015-16. This Board is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Health, Housing & Wellbeing, Councillor Susan Elsmore, and I am also a member along with the Director of Social Services. The advent of this new board, allied to stronger Directorate leadership, has played a significant part in this improvement in our partnership with health and we look to similar strengthening of our relationships with third sector colleagues and with education.

## **Other Developments**

- **Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)** – this is now up and running on a full joint agency basis and leading already to significantly enhanced partnership in information sharing and in ensuring timely intervention.
- **Preventative Strategy**
  - **Early Help Strategy** – continues to be effectively progressed in partnership with pilot schools, health and the third sector.
  - **Remodelling of Social Work/Signs of Safety** – a substantial programme of development and implementation has now commenced with good support from the Organisational Development Programme. I am very pleased to see this new strategy and approach to practice being rolled out since it will enable us to ensure that social workers can spend much more time with families and support more children to remain with their families.
  - **Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy** – this highly effective strategy goes from strength to strength under the '**Not in Our City. Not to Our Children**' banner with much greater community awareness building very effectively and more children being protected than previously.
- **Agile and Mobile Working** – social work staff in children's services were the first large group of staff in the Council to implement agile and mobile working. With access to high quality equipment, this has transformed their working patterns to enable much better use of scarce social work hours and support more flexible time management.

**Councillor Sue Lent**

**Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member (Early Years, Children & Families)**

28 September 2016