
EARLY YEARS, CHILDREN & FAMILIES STATEMENT

It gives me great pleasure to be able to make this statement at the conclusion of the administration in relation to my Children's Services cabinet responsibilities, particularly because I am able to state with confidence that Children's Services at the end of 2016-17 is much better placed than it was at the beginning of the administration.

The scale and depth of the challenges facing the service at that time are well known to everyone - this was a service close to intervention. As assessed by the Director of Social Services, Tony Young, the service was struggling on many levels:

1. Inconsistent leadership arrangements and an unstable senior management team.
2. A lack of strategy for direction.
3. There was no clear approach to measuring performance.
4. Key performance indicators were poor.
5. Children experienced poor care planning and drift.
6. Partnership arrangements were poor.
7. Poor recruitment and retention of social workers.

By contrast, we are now in a very different place. One in which Social Services, supported by the professional leadership of a single Statutory Director in Cardiff last year, was the most improved in Wales and performance on most measures is good or very good in comparative terms. For children's services specifically:

- A positive inspection for Children's Services and the Youth Offending Service (January 2016)
- A wholesale three phase restructure
- The introduction of MASH in what is recognised as a very short period
- The development of a comprehensive Early Help Strategy that is embraced by all partners and integrated with the wider CS change programme
- A re-boot of partnership working which has placed Children's Services at the leadership centre for the first time
- The pioneering of agile and mobile working in a very short timeframe and at scale within the Council
- A relocation of staff in under 12 months
- The development of an integrated multi-agency Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Prepare the service for the implementation of The Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014; (April 2015)

- Kick-start a wholesale re-modelling of social work delivery and practice
- Leading a regional partnership programme of service re-engineering for children and adults with complex needs
- The development and launch of a high impact CSE Strategy;
- A range of asset disposals and re-provision across several service areas
- The implementation and refresh of a successful recruitment and retention strategy
- Launch of a new fostering campaign.

It is accepted that all of this work and more has been conducted within this administration and more importantly widely welcomed by partners and staff.

The challenges, particularly in financial terms continue to grow beyond the scope of any single council or organisation to remedy without major government investment and policy change. In that regard, Cardiff has also been able to play a fuller part on the national social services policy stage where previously it was invisible both in officer and member terms.

Much as the future looks worrying for children's services across the UK, I am confident that in light of the substantial investment (31 new posts) in children's services, Cardiff is as well placed as it can be, at the conclusion of this administration, to protect children and support vulnerable families more effectively than ever before.

Councillor Sue Lent
Cabinet Member, Early Years, Children & Families
23 March 2017