
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES STATEMENT

It gives me great pleasure to be able to make my third statement as Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children's Services.

I continue to remain very pleased and encouraged with the commitment and dedication displayed by staff who not only work in challenging times, but continue to develop new services and inspire others to take a lead from Cardiff's Children's Services.

You will be pleased to note that work to develop the Integrated Autism Service (IAS) in the Cardiff and Vale region has been underway since October 2016 and on the 27th of September 2017, I had the pleasure of launching the new service. Thanks to the funding commitment from Welsh Government to develop an Integrated Autism Service, we are now able to truly develop better services for people with autism. The service brings together all existing provision across Health, Social Care, Education and the Third Sector for people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan and aligns them with the Welsh Government national Integrated Autism Service specification.

The service will provide diagnoses for adults who suspect they have ASD and outcome-focused support for adults with ASD and parents and carers of children with ASD. It will also provide specialist advice to existing agencies around autism. This support will be accessed via a single point of entry into the service which will include self-referral.

In addition to the launch of the integrated autism service, the month of October marked two years since officers from Children's Services established a Professional Interest Group (PING) in Cardiff to tackle the then emerging Child Sexual Exploitation of children in our city. What began as a collection of individuals dedicated to working together, sharing knowledge and supporting each other in a shared aim to tackle this abuse, has flourished into a forum whose collective expertise and influence has grown.

To mark two years of the PING, I was delighted to welcome partners and professionals to the annual PING celebration event on the 2nd of October. Professionals joined us from across the country in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration to find answers to very difficult questions. *How do we best support children and young people to recover from traumatic experiences? What is the best way to respond to children who go missing from their homes and schools?*

What can we do better to keep 16 and 17 year olds safe? How do we protect vulnerable young adults who are targeted for grooming and exploitation?

We all know that child sexual exploitation is a criminal act that it has a devastating impact on children and young people often throughout their adult lives and it is right that the national profile of this issue is increasing. There has been a leaning towards assuming that only very small numbers of children, in particular areas, are affected, but recent investigations around the United Kingdom have shown that this is not the case. These investigations and reviews have brought to light just what a complex social issue this is and how it cannot be addressed by single organisations working in isolation.

I am pleased to report that in Cardiff we have recognised for a long time that it is only through a resolute determination by all those professionals and organisations who are in contact with children, to work together to a joint strategy which was approved by cabinet in October 2015, that we can effectively deal with the complex issues that CSE involves. The meeting on the 2nd of October was a symbol of the commitment and determination of individuals and organisations in Cardiff and beyond to, side by side, do everything they can to put a stop to sexual exploitation. The passion, commitment and presence at the meeting signified how far we have come in acknowledging that child sexual exploitation is a stain on cities and communities across the country and will not be tolerated; not in our city, not in our communities, not to our children.

Whilst the service continues to work under incredible pressure and demand, I am pleased to note that we are at the forefront of developing new and effective services to some of our most vulnerable children.

Councillor Graham Hinchey
Cabinet Member Children & Families
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