

Social Services

Key Areas of Progress

The positive impact of the Adolescent Resource Centre (ARC) and Family Group Conferences is one of the key areas of progress within Social Services. The purpose of the ARC is to provide intensive support to families using the Signs Of Safety strength based model. As part of the support package available to families, the ARC team support young people and their families at times when other services might not be available.

The service includes outreach work, 1-2-1 work at least 2-3 times per week, counselling, therapy, overnight respite and provides opportunities for family support both centre-based and in their own homes (including weekends and evenings). This enables the service to be responsive to the changing need of the families receiving the service. Cases are assessed at the outset to ensure that the criteria to keep the child at home is clear and supported by all professionals and family members. Follow up reviews, attended by the young person, family members and multi-agency professionals (MASMs), are held at least every four weeks to ensure the risks are being managed and the plan is being followed.

Since the service went live in April, 2017, ARC has worked with 44 children and young people and the length of time involved has ranged from one week to 32 weeks. Of the 44 children and young people, 4 were fostered and 3 were accommodated in residential homes during this period. This equates to 16% being accommodated and 84% remaining at home.

The Adult Services budget is showing an underspend of £100,000 at month 9. Although, as in previous years, there has been pressure on the commissioning budgets for services for older people and those with learning disabilities, these pressures have been offset by savings in other areas, notably staffing. The service has also received significant additional grant funding in 2017/18. Activity levels have stabilised in the second and third quarters of the year. This reflects a review of care pathways in the Hospital Social Work teams, relationship management of the market e.g. Provider forums and senior management scrutiny of spend within Adult Services including focus on high cost placements in addition to the introduction of a number of measures designed to control demand and prices.

The Early Help front door, now known as Support4Families, was launched in November 2017. The rate of calls coming through the divert route and impact on Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) contacts is being closely monitored. Early indications are that this has been effective in reducing the number of contacts and has resulted in an increase in the number of families receiving early help. Some themes are emerging and also some issues re: processes – these will be monitored and taken on board for future planning.

Directorate Challenges

There is mounting evidence of increasing numbers of children requiring intervention to prevent significant harm because of multiple complex factors. This is reflected in the number of looked after children in Cardiff continuing to increase during quarter 3 - from 784 at 30th September 2017 to 803 at 31st December 2017.

A recent submission to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry looking at public services for care experienced children and young people on behalf of All Wales Heads Of Children's Services, Welsh Local Government Association and the National Adoption Service concluded that "Councils are doing their best in very difficult circumstances but services are rapidly becoming unsustainable and nearing breaking point. Councils have done everything they can to respond to the growing financial crisis in children's social care, including reducing costs where they can and finding new ways of working. However, they are at the point where there are very few savings left to find without having a real and lasting impact upon crucial services that many children and families across the country desperately rely on".

Unless urgent action is taken to reduce the number of families relying on the children's social care system for support, this gap will continue to grow. The huge financial pressures councils are under, coupled with the spike in demand for child protection support, mean that the limited money councils have available is increasingly being taken up with the provision of urgent help for children and families already at crisis point, leaving very little to invest in early intervention. This observation is clearly reflected in the further key challenges identified below.

The creation of a step change in the allocation of resources to support effective prevention and early help across all age and service groups is also a significant challenge. The challenge to be addressed in relation to effective early intervention is around partners (Health, Education and the Police) recognising their role and responsibilities in intervening earlier to prevent children's needs from escalating to the point that they require statutory interventions.

Regional arrangements for a pilot regional Complex Needs Service for disabled children within the Integrated Care Fund have continued during the quarter with potential models of integration being presented to the Disabilities Programme Board. Work in this area is progressing well, but the challenge is in securing funding to continue the existing change management arrangements beyond March 2018.

The Children's Services budget monitoring position continues to worsen and is projecting a £4.1 million overspend at month 9. Improving the in-year position continues to be a challenge, particularly in view of the need to protect children and the associated costs of children being looked after. As highlighted in previous quarters the most significant factor in the overspend position is costs related to Looked After Children and the increase in the overspend between Q2 and Q3 also largely reflects costs associated with the continuing increase in the number of Looked After Children discussed above.

Workforce succession, retention and recruitment, including preparation for the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 is a continuing issue for the directorate. Whilst it would appear that the improvement shown in reducing social

care vacancies at Quarter 2 has not been maintained in Quarter 3, closer examination shows that some existing staff have been appointed to newly created posts, leaving their substantive posts as vacancies.

The underlying factors affecting recruitment and retention in children's social work remain a challenge and is a challenge across Wales. We also understand that an authority in some difficulty has appointed an agency to recruit a significant number of social workers at enhanced salary and this has destabilised the market for permanent and agency staff. In addition the increasing numbers of Social Worker vacancies in Adult Services is an emerging issue and this also reflects the national picture. Adult Services are currently recruiting externally to mitigate against the potential risk; this is proving successful.

Robust regional workforce partnership arrangements are now in place, and the coming challenge for partner agencies will be to ensure that implementation of the Regional Workforce Board's priorities is effective in promoting cultural change amongst the workforce and enabling a large cohort of employees to meet the requirements of the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 over the next 3 years.