

CABINET RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT DATED 5th JULY 2018 ENTITLED 'OUT OF COUNTY PLACEMENTS'

R1 All placements must be made in the interest of the Child, minimising the impact on them, their education and well being

Response – This recommendation is accepted

All placements made in Cardiff are, of course made with the interests of the child. To source the right placement, the needs of the child are matched to an appropriately regulated provider. Ideally, there would be a number of options available. However, the shortfall in high quality placements across the UK means it can be difficult to source the right home for a child, particularly in an emergency situation.

Cardiff, in common with other local authorities has experienced a significant increase in both the number, and complexity, of looked after children. The reasons for increased complexity include a range of safeguarding risks which have emerged in recent years including child sexual exploitation and human trafficking. These Adverse Childhood Experiences result in children suffering post traumatic symptoms, attachment difficulties, inability to regulate their behaviour or emotions, self-harm and suicide ideologies, violence and aggression and absconding. Children and young people require specialist care, support and therapy and accessing the right provision, for the right child at the right time is an ever increasing challenge. Care plans will sometimes require that children live away from the area in which abuse or exploitation has occurred. It is important that this option remains open to decision makers.

As identified in the report, when children are placed out of area it can place additional challenges in meeting health and educational outcomes as relationships with services in the placed in authorities may not be as well established. There are statutory arrangements under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014) to ensure that 'out of county' placements are able to meet the educational, health and social needs of looked after children to the fullest extent possible through multi-agency panel arrangements.

The potential for negative impacts on well-being outcomes of a child living away from Cardiff are mitigated through:-

- a) Statutory social work visits;
- b) Statutory reviews by Independent Reviewing Officer;
- c) Support to families to maintain positive contact;
- d) Access to, and active offer of independent advocacy;
- e) Actively planning to bring children back to Cardiff where it is appropriate to do so through a thorough monthly senior management review of the plan for every child placed in an out of area residential placement.

R2 As Cardiff is the fast growing city and is promoting itself as a great place to grow up; placements should be made, wherever possible in Cardiff.

Response – This recommendation is accepted

As a general principal, better outcomes for children can be achieved when placement needs are met within the city. However, the most important factor in meeting the needs of the individual child to be safe and protected from any people who have caused them harm, so in some cases it is the best and safest option to source a placement away from Cardiff.

The service adheres to the principle that wherever possible, children should be placed within the city boundary. As outlined above, this facilitates engagement with the Corporate Parenting Policy and the range of services and support in Cardiff. Children placed in the city can more easily benefit from the local arrangements and agreements that we have established between ourselves and education, health, housing and other key partners.

Risks to achievement of positive outcomes are greater the further from Cardiff the placement as relationships with neighbouring authorities and services may be less well developed. Until recently Welsh Government applied a national performance measure regarding distance of placement from home and all councils were required to report on the number of children placed more than 20 miles from their home address. Although no set distance can be regarded as an 'absolute' in terms of being more or less acceptable, this was clearly an indication of a limit within which councils should try to operate wherever possible. The majority of our out of county children are placed within a 20-mile radius. The number of children placed beyond 20 miles, include:

- a) children in secure accommodation;
- b) children placed in highly specialist therapeutic establishments because of their specific needs;
- c) children placed for adoption;
- d) children placed in highly specialist disability facilities; and
- e) children placed with extended family members or with foster carers who have moved out of area.

R3 Social Services Directorate should undertake a well-being assessment of all of its Children's Services social workers over the next 12 months

Response – This recommendation is accepted

Securing a permanent, high quality, well supported social work workforce is the highest priority for the Social Services Directorate. There is a Workforce Strategy in place for Children's Services and a Recruitment and Retention Strategy. Both will be refreshed shortly to ensure they have the right set of short, medium and long term actions to sustainably address the workforce challenges that the service is facing. It is planned to undertake a baseline assessment of staff morale which can be measured over time as the service moves through the next phase of its change programme.

There is evidence that supervision and appraisal, both of which are key to workforce wellbeing, are taking place within timescales. 100% of Children's Services staff initiated their PPDR within timescale this year. The next priority is to quality assure the processes to ensure the balance between professional oversight, direction, and personal support and development is right. In addition, social workers have been supported to develop professionally through significant investment in signs of safety training.

R4 Social Services Directorate must develop and fully implement a social worker recruitment and retention strategy to encourage new applicants and support to retain staff by 31st March 2019

Response – This recommendation is accepted

As indicated above, the development of a single and coherent workforce strategy is a key priority for the directorate and work on this has begun. A renewed and refreshed Recruitment Campaign was launched in April 2018. Since then 37 Individual Adverts (76.5 posts within the 37 adverts) have been placed with 45 interviews taking place and 34 appointments being made. In particular, the Looked After Children's Service has been successful in recruiting a new Team Manager, two new Principal Social Workers and 8 social workers being appointed, however, many of these posts have been filled by workers coming from other parts of the service. Particular pressures remain within the intake teams and children in need teams who undertake child protection investigations and court work.

The refreshed workforce strategy will set out a range of effective actions to:

- a) Review and recommend on the offer (financial and non- financial) to children's social workers in Cardiff, compared to the rest of Wales and other core UK cities;
- b) Develop a career progression scheme to support social workers from their time as students (reviewing the options for sponsorship schemes), through the consolidation phase of their practice, into senior roles within the Council;
- c) Enhance relationships with universities, and maximise practice teaching and placement opportunities;
- d) Support people already working for the Council to gain a social work qualification;
- e) Continue to review and develop skill mix to ensure that work which does not need a professionally qualified social worker is undertaken by the right person in their team.

R5 As corporate parents, all staff and Councillors must work in collaboration with all partners to ensure the safeguarding of all children.

Response – This recommendation is accepted

The Council has a Corporate Parenting Strategy, progress against which is presented annually to Council. Delivery of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities is overseen by the Corporate Parent Advisory Committee (CPAC). CPAC members each take a lead on a specific area of work, working alongside designated senior offices to develop each area. The priority areas are:

1. Effective early intervention and prevention, safely reducing the number of looked after children –
2. The experience of looked after children and outcome - Promoting permanency, providing high quality placements, provide young people leaving care with appropriate preparation for adult life, taking account of all of their needs including their wellbeing -
3. Specialist services - Continue to improve services for children with disabilities, including short break care, and improve and support the emotional health and mental wellbeing of looked after children -
4. Education - Improve the education attainment and achievement for all looked after children -
5. The role of the Corporate Parenting within the Council - Strengthening the role of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee within the Council -

R6 The new management team for People and Communities, to work with the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee to, review the structure and operation of the service to ensure that it works with all parts of the Council in undertaking their corporate parenting duties, by 31 March 2019.

Response – This recommendation is accepted

The Director of Social Services and Assistant Director of Children's Services are reviewing the structure and operation of Children's Social Services to ensure the operating model improves outcomes for children. The benefits of working collaboratively towards a One Council approach as part of the People and Communities directorate are evident in the work to integrate early help and family support approved by Cabinet in October 2016. These benefits of working collaboratively are also integral to the work to develop homes for children in Cardiff.

R7 It must task officers to review the early help service and reorganise the management and control of all early intervention and prevention initiatives to enable them to be under the control of children's services within the next 12 months.

Response – This recommendation is accepted in part.

Cabinet approved a new model of early help and family support in October 2018 which will be managed within the People and Communities Directorate. Professional oversight and accountability for the governance of the service is with

the Director of Social Services in accordance with statutory duties for early intervention and prevention.

R8 A strategic approach to commission placements, to improve outcomes and safely reduce the number of children being looked after, must be developed and implemented as soon as possible.

Response – This recommendation is accepted

The Social Services Directorate Management Team is working with the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) to develop a placement commissioning strategy by March 2019.

R9 It tasks officers in the Social Service Directorate to review the Placement Commissioning arrangements by 31 March 2019.

Response – This recommendation is accepted

Work has been undertaken to ensure compliance with the 4Cs requirement.

R10 It continues to implement the Signs of Safety framework, within the next 12 months and provide evidence of its impact.

Response – This recommendation is partially accepted.

Evidence from Councils where Signs of Safety has been successfully implemented and embedded indicates a longer timescale is needed to really embed transformed practice.

Phase one of the project commenced in April 2016 and focused on the introduction of the model and setting the foundations across the service. During phase one, significant progress has been made in the delivery of learning and development of all staff, focused and structured training has been delivered as well as bespoke tailored support provided to teams and individuals

A refresh of the Signs of Safety Implementation Plan is underway to ensure it is focussed on the right systemic changes to support practice improvement. Independent quality assurance work is underway to ensure there is clear evidence to support the next phase of implementation. Signs of Safety Awareness Briefings have been delivered to key partner agencies. Signs of Safety training will be

R11 It tasks officers to review, current demand, in to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub to ensure the consistent use of criteria by partners

Response – This recommendation is accepted

The development of a Gateway for early help and family support provides an opportunity to review the operation of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and its relationship with the children's services intake and assessment teams. Really clear criteria for accessing each part of the system, including the MASH, will be developed in the implementation phase.

R12 Officers must ensure that the placement of 0-5 year olds, out of county, is only undertaken when it is in the best interests of the Child.

This recommendation is partially accepted

The placement of 0-5 year olds out of area, will only take place in exceptional circumstances and will always be in the best interests of the child.

R13 To develop and implement a Placement Strategy which should include, to recruit and retain Foster Carers, including, continuous advertisement programme, additional support, allowances, and retainers, to be in place within the next 12 months

Response – This recommendation is accepted

In June 2018 a project was established in order to respond to this recommendation as part of the Improving Outcomes for Children programme. This project is developing an effective business model for the Fostering Service in Cardiff focusing on the following aspects of the service:

- the marketing of the service and the recruitment of foster carers;
- the operating model of Cardiff's fostering team;
- the support provided to foster carers once they have been approved;
- the need to reduce the cost of fostering to the Council by rebalancing between independent foster agencies and the in-house foster care service.

The Project reports to the Child Placements Board chaired by the Director of Social Services, and is developing a business model for delivery from April 2019.

R14 It ensures that a review of all vacant fostering placements, Agency, Council and Kinship options, is undertaken to verify that there is appropriate matching and stable placements for all children being Looked After.

Response – This recommendation is accepted

The fostering project is progressing this recommendation.

R15 Officers are to develop and implement a building programme of homes for children in Cardiff, utilising every possible agency, as an Invest to Save project, within the next 12 months.

Response – This recommendation is accepted

A Project Team has been established to attend to this recommendation; it reports to the Child Placement Board.

The Project is working to deliver the following objectives:

- A clear commissioning strategy for securing children's placements in place by March 2019;
- to open new children's homes in the City, so Cardiff children can access to the right type and level of support;
- to develop the provider market to deliver the type of provision, we require in Cardiff;
- explore all opportunities to secure the right provision in the most cost effective way, for example, an ICF proposal has been approved for the development of a 'high needs' home jointly with the Vale of Glamorgan.

R16 It ensures that future annual placement budgets must reflect anticipated number of Looked After children at future year mid-point, to help ensure that Social Services do not over spend

Recommendation – This recommendation is partially accepted

The Council has provided significant levels of additional funding to Children's Services in recent years with a net increase to the budget of £5.8 million (11.86%) in 2018/19. This will continue to be a priority for the Cabinet, however any specific decisions on funding must be taken as part of the overall Council budget having taken account of the available resources and the full range of spending commitments.

R17 Savings accrued from returning children back to Cardiff are reinvested into preventative and early help initiatives

Refer to the response to R16 above.

R18 Officers investigate whether Greenhill School could admit Girls to minimise out of County Placements

Response – This recommendation is accepted in principle

It is understood that the 'Development of the Schools Estate' — will attend to the need for a higher level of suitable provision for children with additional learning needs

R19 Action Plan - The Cabinet Member ensures that an action plan is developed to ensure the implementation of these recommendations within an agreed timescale as part of the response to this report.

Response – This recommendation is partially accepted

The actions identified already form current or emerging priorities for the Improving Outcomes for Children Programme. There are detailed action plans for each of the priority areas (Workforce, Practice, Fostering and Residential placements) with timescales consistent with the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group