

COUNCIL: 25 NOVEMBER 2021

CHILDREN & FAMILIES STATEMENT

Demand Pressures in Children's Services

Children's Services are continuing to experience high levels of demand and complexity, with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) receiving an average of almost 100 contacts a day over the last year. This is also an all-Wales issue and work is ongoing with partners nationally and across the whole system, including the judiciary, as it is recognised that this is not a problem that Children's Services can fix alone. The demand and the complexity of issues are being experienced across the whole of the service, including demands on foster and residential placements.

Welsh Government Funding

In recognition of the challenges posed by the demand and complexity being experienced, the Welsh Government has provided a temporary Covid-19 Recovery Fund to assist with addressing immediate issues. We welcome this additional financial support from Welsh Government and our plan for how this funding will be used in Cardiff demonstrates our commitment to prioritising the needs of children and young people and their families, as well as those that care for them.

There are challenges around the use of this money over the next five months – for example, recruitment pressures mean that the Council cannot simply appoint more social workers to meet the rising demands in the short term. Instead, innovative solutions need to be found quickly to meet the demands. I firmly believe that the solution to addressing the wider Covid-19 impacts which are putting additional longer-term pressures on families and the social care system is to deliver our Children's Services Strategy with renewed impetus and on a larger scale, and this is what this additional money will be used to support. I welcome further dialogue and look forward to continuing to work on future budget settlements. Future funding at appropriate levels would enable us to implement sustainable services post-April 2022.

Social Worker Recruitment Update

Work to recruit social workers continues and considerable progress has been made in recent months, with the percentage of vacancies falling from 29% in June 2021 to 22% in September 2021. In Quarter 2 of 2021/22, 20 new social workers took up their posts, of whom 14 were newly qualified students.

The recruitment of experienced social workers is a national issue and the Council is working with local authorities across Wales to identify and implement national solutions. Key members of staff have been identified to take part in a workforce recruitment fayre, which is linked to the Community Care recruitment campaign that sets out what it is like to deliver social work services in Cardiff. The work to support prudent social work (i.e. social workers only do what only social workers can do) is a key element of the Cardiff offer to social workers.

Cardiff Family Advice and Support (CFAS)

The Family Gateway, Family Help and Family Help Disability Teams all continued to see increases in both the volume and the complexity of calls and referrals last month. The Family Gateway alone saw an 11% increase in calls. There continues to be a particular focus on supporting children and young people's mental and emotional well-being. This is being achieved through partnership working with our Primary Mental Health Workers to identify emerging wellbeing concerns and provide appropriate means of support and intervention.

In recognition of the importance of youth participation, the team is collaborating with ProMo Cymru and a group of young people to develop a promotional campaign, which aims to promote the support available to other young people via a series of articles, blogs and artwork that will be published on the Sprout website. The campaign will go live at the end of November 2021.

Cardiff Parenting

Using the Child Development Fund from Welsh Government, new psychology-led parenting practitioners and a new psychologist have joined the Cardiff Parenting Team. The induction and training of these new staff is underway so that they can begin casework as soon as possible.

Covid-safe group parenting programmes are now being offered across Cardiff for parents of children of all ages – number are restricted, but parents are offered a choice of face-to-face or virtual engagement. The team has also been able to restart some crèche provision while parents attend groups. Small baby groups are also running in Flying Start areas for parents and babies to attend together.

The Childcare Offer

Almost £3.5million has been spent during 2021 on childcare places and 'additional support' costs, and 410 childcare providers are now signed up to provide the Childcare Offer. The Council's Childcare Offer Team continues to work closely with Welsh Government officials on the development of the digital service and the piloting of the new system is due to commence in early 2022. Additional capital funding has also been secured from Welsh Government to ensure that all Childcare Offer providers have suitable ICT equipment to utilise the online digital service. A grant application process for this purpose is being launched this month.

Cardiff Youth Justice Service

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) for England & Wales wrote last month to both the Independent Chair of Cardiff Youth Justice Board and the Operational Manager for Cardiff Youth Justice Service. Following a review of progress made in Cardiff, the YJB has agreed that Cardiff Youth Justice Service should be de-escalated from a stage 3 to a stage 1 priority Youth Offending Team (YOT) in recognition of the progress that has been made in our improvement journey and the senior leadership provided to support the operational management of the service.

The YJB recognised the positive developments that have been made to governance arrangements in Cardiff through the work of the new Independent Chair and management board and the performance sub-group. These arrangements have allowed effective oversight of the HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) improvement plan, providing both operational support from partners when needed and escalation to the management board when appropriate. Good progress has also been made against the key recommendations arising from the previous HMIP inspection report.

The YJB will continue to engage with Cardiff Youth Justice Service through attendance at meetings of the management board and performance sub-group, and review what level of support is appropriate. The YJB commended Cardiff's progress to date and the way in which we have approached our improvement journey and focused on the needs of children, families and our communities.

National Care Leavers Week

National Care Leavers Week took place on 25-31 October this year. The week aims to raise awareness of care leavers and to celebrate and recognise their achievements. As part of the week, the Personal Adviser Team organised a range of activities for young care leavers to get involved in, including bowling, indoor rock climbing, Ninja Warrior and a tour of the Principality Stadium. Snippets of the activities have been promoted across social media channels using the hashtag #NCLW2021, including quotes from the young people who attended.

This year's theme was #WhatLeavingCareShouldBe, which encourages the care-experienced community, young care leavers, and individuals who work with children looked after to give their view on what leaving care should look like. The team consulted informally with young people during the week to gather their thoughts and feedback on leaving care. During the week, requests were also made to partners, businesses, third sector organisations and the local community to help support children looked after and care leavers. Feedback obtained during the week will be used to help improve and develop services for children looked after and care leavers in Cardiff.

Corporate Parenting Engagement Session

The Bright Sparks group, which is comprised of children looked after and care leavers, has recently held an engagement session with the Chair of the Council's Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee. I am pleased that Bright Sparks group members also played an integral role in the planning of the event.

The engagement session helped to give our young people a voice and will assist in strengthening the work of the Committee. It provided an opportunity for young people to take part in a range of activities, helping the Chair gain more of an understanding of the issues impacting children looked after and care leavers in Cardiff, and helping our young people to gain more of an understanding of the Committee's role. The session also provided an opportunity to help understand how young people would like to engage with the Committee in the future.

Councillor Graham Hinchey
Cabinet Member for Children & Families
18 November 2021