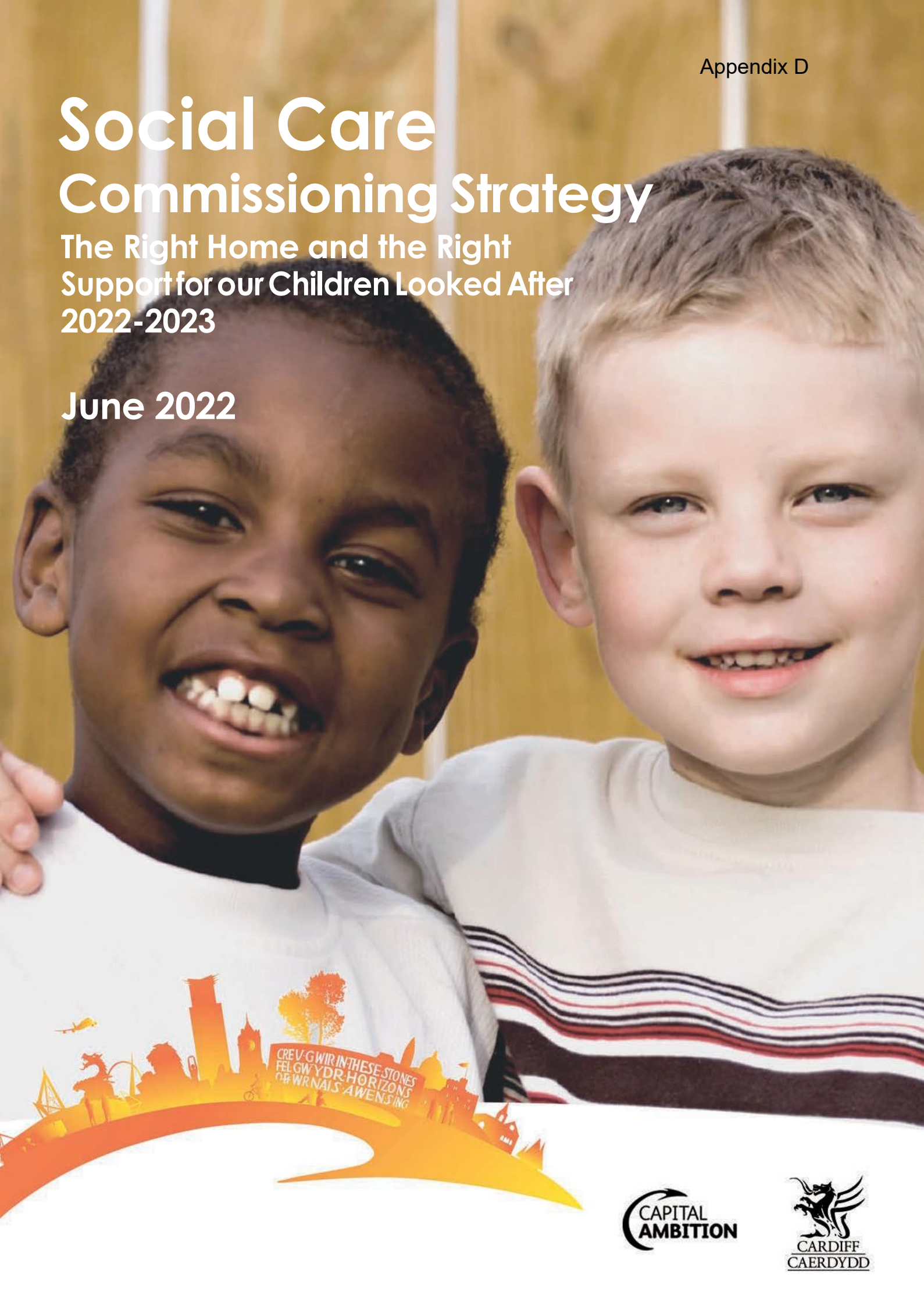


# Social Care Commissioning Strategy

The Right Home and the Right  
Support for our Children Looked After  
2022-2023

June 2022





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# Foreword

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**I am delighted to introduce the June 2022 six monthly update of the 2022-2023 Cardiff's Children's Services Commissioning Strategy for support and accommodation for children and young people and families. The scope of this strategy remains the range of services we need to develop to meet the needs of children, young people and families where:**

- **children are at risk of becoming looked after**
- **children are looked after and**
- **children are leaving care**

In 2022 as the city emerges from the pandemic, it is essential that we consider the steps we need to take to accelerate recovery, whilst at the same time recognising we need to use the crisis as a catalyst to building back Stronger, Greener and Fairer. This objective is the aim of our City Recovery and Renewal Strategy and provides the Council's initial response to the pandemic and the actions we will take to get the city back up on its feet alongside longer-term priorities for renewal.

One of our Key Missions is to create a City for Everyone. This is because we know the impact of the pandemic has not been felt evenly. Those from deprived communities, the young, women and those from a BAME background will feel the effects more than others. This will further widen inequalities that existed before.

As a result, there is a risk that more children experience Adverse Childhood Experiences and more children become looked after. There is also a risk that that the Pandemic means those who are looked after remain so for longer and face further challenges in achieving the positive life outcomes they deserve. Over the months ahead there is an immediate need to ensure we respond to mitigate the risk.

This refreshed version of the Social Care Commissioning Strategy 'The Right Home and the Right Support for our Children Looked After' is now better than ever able to focus on delivering that important objective. In 2022 there is a clear Welsh Government vision for services for looked after children and care leavers which we must deliver. That vision has been clearly set out in The Programme for Government (2021) and the Welsh Government's Children and Young People's Plan (2022). Welsh Ministers are clear in their views that one of our priorities must be to invest public money in accommodation for care experienced children which does not lead to profit.

This strategy identifies the clear local priorities and outcomes we will deliver alongside practice improvements and workforce developments set out in the Cardiff Children's Services Strategy 'Striving for Excellence to achieve that vision.

Striving for Excellence explains that like every Local Authority across the UK, Cardiff's Children's Services continue to face high and increasing demand, increases in case complexity, compounded by challenges in recruitment. Demand pressure is reflected throughout the child's journey, including on services to address children's mental health and emotional well-being. To respond to this, work will continue to shift the balance of care, which will help to ensure that children are supported with the lowest safe level of intervention whilst receiving the right help in the right place, at the right time. A sharp focus will continue to be placed on working with partners to identify and address any safeguarding concerns, particularly protecting vulnerable young people from criminal exploitation and addressing the recent rise in serious youth violence. In terms of recruitment, the Council will place a focus on workforce development by maintaining momentum with improvements to practice and working to attract more and experienced staff to Cardiff.

Both strategies emphasises Cardiff Council's commitment to children's rights to ensures we are in a position to effectively fulfil our role as corporate parents as set out in Cardiff's 'Multi Agency Corporate Parenting Strategy' (2021-2024). The new Corporate Parenting Strategy tells us our children and young people who are looked after want the same life chances as everyone else. They want:

- o Improved emotional wellbeing and physical health.
- o Better connections, improved relationships.
- o A comfortable, safe and stable home whilst in care and after.
- o Educational Achievement, Employment and Training.
- o To be celebrated.

As a result, we are wholeheartedly committed to delivering the following policy commitments. We will:

- Provide children and families with the best start in life through our Early Help and Support Programme.
- Work to keep children safely with their families, supporting their growth and development needs and helping to prevent the need for care.
- Increase the number of children looked after who are placed with their wider families or community, and reduce the number of children placed in, often out of county, residential care placements.
- Increase the number of Local Authority Foster Carers and reduce our reliance on independent fostering agency placements.
- Continue to develop and embed a locality approach to service provision.
- Celebrate the work of our staff.
- Continue to develop and support the workforce.
- Work with schools and the health service to deliver an enhanced and joined-up approach – from school counselling to crisis support – for children and young people who are suffering with poor mental health.
- Deliver the new strategy for continuing to improve the Youth Justice Service.
- Protect vulnerable young people from exploitation and address the recent rise in serious youth violence through developing a robust, integrated, data-led approach across Council and partner services that work with young people.
- Deliver the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-24 to ensure children in our care are safe, receive the support they need, have high aspirations, can express their views and are ready for independent living.
- Enable all young people who are known to Children's Services to be empowered to play an active and central role in planning for their transition to adulthood.
- Use the information, intelligence and data we have across the Council and public services to develop a 'Single View' of the contacts each child or young person has with our services.

We will ensure that we work alongside children, young people and families in designing and developing what we do. We will develop local services, which are within the boundaries of Cardiff and work with housing, health, education and other partners to develop the right quality and range of support.

The services we wish to develop are based on a clear assessment of current and future needs. This strategy provides an analysis of the numbers and needs of children at risk of becoming looked after and children who are looked after by the Council.

The strategy will inform the way we work with a range of providers and the social care market as a whole, providing clear direction and a framework for engaging with service providers so that they can respond effectively to the strategic priorities identified. The strategy will also inform implementation plans that will deliver the actions required to achieve the priorities in a timely way. It

will provide the Council's Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee with a clear way forward to improve outcomes for children, young people and families in respect of support and accommodation.

Most importantly, the strategy provides the basis for our children, young people and families to achieve better outcomes, and live better lives as a result.



**Councillor Ash Lister**  
**Cabinet Member for Social Services (Children)**

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# Introduction

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**Cardiff Council are pleased to present our commissioning strategy for children and young people who are in the care of the Council and require additional support and accommodation.**

We have worked together with children, young people, parents and carers, to understand their experience and what matters to them. We have met with key Providers from the independent and third sector to ensure we understand their offer and to develop an ongoing dialogue take place to shape what is available.

This commissioning strategy sets out our clear direction for the future. It outlines our vision, describes the policy and legal context, analyses our current data and outlines our future priorities. Our priorities are the key issues that need to be addressed in the forthcoming years in order to respond to the needs of our most vulnerable children, young people and their families. This includes ensuring there is sufficient capacity and an appropriate range of provision to meet their needs.

## **Purpose – Why have a Strategy?**

The purpose of the strategy is to describe Cardiff Council and key priorities. Its aim is to ensure sufficient options for supporting vulnerable children, young people and their families. As such it outlines the work we want to undertake to develop local and regional services to support our children, young people and their families.

## **Our Vision**

Cardiff Children's Services Strategy (2019-2022) outlines a dynamic and progressive vision for children's social services. The strategy is currently being reviewed to reflect the distance already travelled and to include the new initiatives being implemented to provide families with the right support, from the right person at the right time, in the right place and at the lowest safe level of intervention.

The focus continues to be on 3 key areas:

- **Practice:** Developing our practice and procedures.
- **People:** Supporting a permanent workforce.
- **Place:** Ensuring a range of support in the community and a variety of homes for children are available in Cardiff.

It states:

"In all cases, we will adopt in the city a 'Think Family' approach which looks at the family as a whole and co-ordinates support across the public services, tailored to each family's needs and strengths. Supporting Vulnerable Children and Families Parents have the most significant influence on children and on their future lives. Outcomes for children are best when they are supported to grow and achieve within their own families, own communities and in Cardiff. "

This will be supported by a range of services which places an emphasis on prevention and early intervention to give children the best possible outcomes and better manage the pressure on public services.

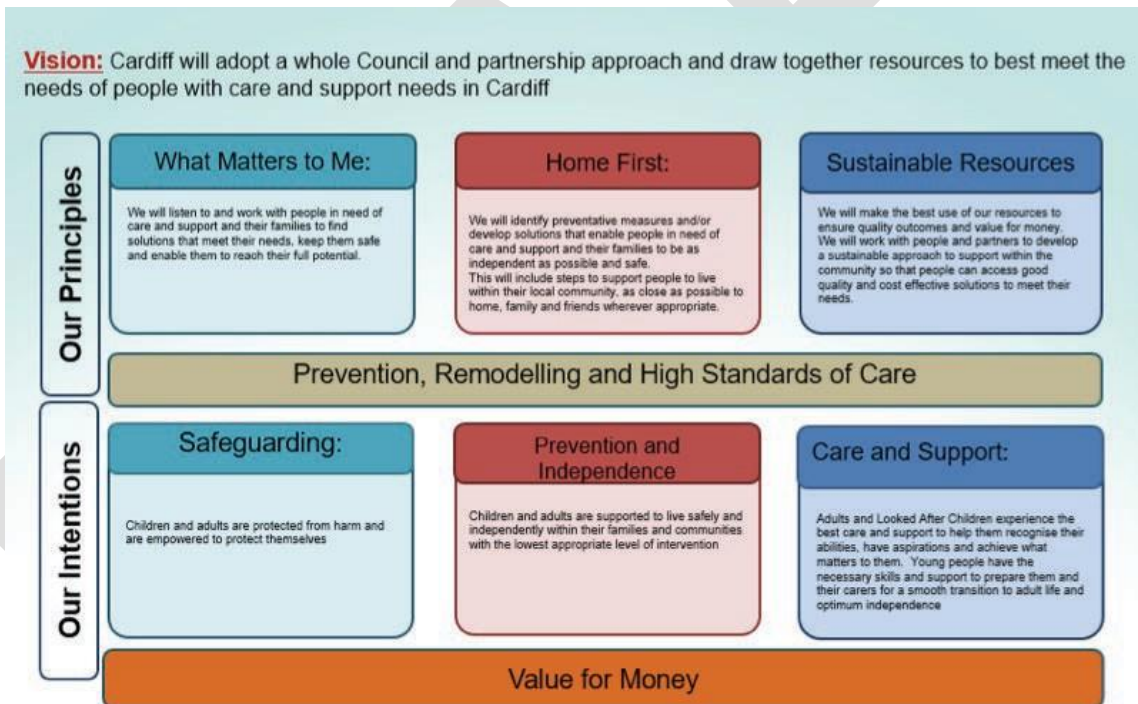


# “Being in care made my life better by having a safe house and a bedroom”

This commissioning strategy contributes to this vision by looking to facilitate with partners a range of services and options which improve outcomes and support more children and families to stay together whilst providing the highest quality services when that is not possible. Wherever appropriate the term ‘home’ is used as our children and young people prefer this term to ‘placement or unit’.

## Aim – What do we want our strategy to do?

Our aim is to build, reshape, and expand our current provision, services and homes for children to improve the outcomes of our most vulnerable children, young people and families. Implementation of this strategy will be in line with the key principles in the Cardiff Social Services Strategic Commissioning Framework in the following diagram.



“I want to be listened to”



# The Cardiff Children's Services Strategy

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Children's Services has reviewed its 3 year strategy for 2019-22 and developed a new "Striving for Excellence" Strategy for 2023-26. This 3 year strategy outlines key priorities and changes that will take place over the next three years. This commissioning strategy delivers a key priority within the overall strategy for Children's Services. The sum of this effort will deliver the Council's Capital Ambition commitments that Cardiff 'is a great place to grow up for the most vulnerable children'.

## Supporting Children, Young People and Their Families – Our Model

Parents have the most significant influence on children and their future lives. We are adopting a 'Think Family' model, which looks at the family as a whole, and co-ordinates support across the public services, tailored to each family's needs and strengths. This approach is informed by our awareness of the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) on both the children and parents we work with and our interventions are evidence-based and informed by the impact of trauma.

## Supporting Children, Young People Closer to Home

We will, whenever it is safe to do so, support children and young people to remain with their birth family or extended family and avoid the need for children and young people to become looked after. We are committed to developing services that wrap around families, extended families and carers to respond to needs earlier and prevent their escalation.

It is our priority to ensure we will find safe ways to work alongside families to enable them to parent their children and protect them from harm. We also recognise we need to support good substitute family care (foster care) when it is not possible for a child or young person to remain with their own families. In most circumstances, it is important that children and young people maintain positive contact with their own families, friends, school and communities. This is why we are committed to developing services closer to Cardiff. On the occasions when it is not possible for children to be safe and protected in or close to Cardiff we will commission the highest quality service. The safety and well-being of our children and young people will always have the highest priority.

**"Staff are very supportive and I can always talk to someone"**

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## Supporting Children, Young people and Families – Intervening Early

We want to shift the balance of care so that by intervening earlier we prevent the escalation of need. Our aim is to support more children, young people and families through early help services and to reduce the number of children who become looked after. We will be commissioning the right services to the right capacity and at the right stage of the child's journey so we are able to meet needs through the least intensive intervention and as early as possible. This ambition is reflected in our Early Help Strategy.



### Better Outcomes – what success looks like?

'Striving for Excellence' aims to shift the balance of care and achieve the following outcomes for the children, young people and families of Cardiff. We will:

- Safely reduce the number of children and young people looked after,
- Increase the number of children and young people supported to live safely with their families,
- Reduce our reliance on out of area placements,
- Increase the number of kinship carers,
- Increase the number of local authority Foster Carers,
- Work differently with Independent Fostering Agencies,
- Develop the range of residential placements to meet more complex needs,
- Develop our commissioning and procurement capability and capacity,
- Develop further our understanding of our vulnerable children, young people and families.

Achievement of these outcomes is how we will evaluate the impact of this strategy



# Commissioning Strategy

## - The Welsh Context - The Law

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The main pieces of legislation related to this strategy are the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) Act 2014, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (SSWBA) 2014 requires on local authorities and health boards requiring them to promote the well-being of those who need care and support or carers who need support. It outlines key duties to ensure:

- People have control over what support they need, making decisions about their care and support as an equal partner,
- New proportionate assessment focused on the individual,
- Carers have an equal right to assessment for support to those who they care for,
- Easy access to information and advice is available to all,
- Powers to safeguard people are stronger,
- A preventative approach to meeting care and support needs is practised,
- Local authorities and health boards come together in new statutory partnerships to drive integration and service change.

There are some elements of the SSWBA that directly relate to children, young people and their families including the following duties on local authorities to ensure:

- That there is sufficient accommodation for all types of children who are looked after.
- That placements are made within their own areas, unless it is not reasonably practical to do so or there are overriding reasons for placing the child out of authority, the primary reason being safeguarding.
- Support is within the service, and the location that best enables them to achieve positive well-being outcomes. For most children this means in or close to Cardiff as this means they can maintain their relationships with their family, friends, school, community and health services.
- All decisions on the right accommodation / placement and support service will be made with the child or young person's best interest.
- Care and Support planning including achieving permanence is a key consideration from the very start.

The overarching principles for the SSWBA are:

- To support people who have care and support needs to achieve well-being.
- People are at the heart of the new system by giving them an equal say in the support they receive,
- Partnership and co-operation drive service delivery.
- Services will promote the prevention of escalating need and the right help is available at the right time.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a duty on Public-bodies, including health and social services, to make sure that when making their decisions they take into account the impact they could have on people living in Wales in the future. This Act requires them to:

- Work together better.
- Involve people reflecting the diversity of our communities.
- Look to the long term as well as focusing on the now.
- Take action to try and stop problems getting worse, or even stop them happening in the first place.

Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 set the new statutory framework for the regulation and inspection of social care services, in other words how social care services are going to be assessed for their quality and impact they make.

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# Removing Profit from the Care of Looked After Children

## A Vision to Transform Children's Services

The Programme for Government 2022-2027 contains a number of commitments that taken together describe a new vision to transform children's services. The delivery of these commitments will effect change across the whole care system in Wales.

A key component is the commitment to remove private profit from the care of looked after children. The Welsh Government's Children and Young People's plan published on St David's Day 2022 sets out two key objectives:

- To build residential homes for children with complex needs in Wales. So that children and young people can be close to their home area.
- To continue to work and engage with private providers of children's residential and foster care, about the move to a not-for-profit system of care in Wales.

The First Minister and the Deputy Minister for Social Services are clear that the commitment to eliminate profit is a top priority for delivery during this Senedd term.

The commitment itself builds on the long-held view of Ministers and aligns with calls made by the Children's Commissioner for Wales and Voices from Care. It is a response to listening to children and young people who tell professionals that they feel upset at being looked after by profit making organisations, where they feel 'bought and sold'.

**"Not comfortable as we have to share a bedroom. 4-7yrs"**



## The Multi-Agency Programme Board

Chaired by the Chief Social Care Officer for Wales, Albert Heaney, a multi-agency Programme Board has been established to implement this commitment, so that the duties on local authorities in relation to looked after children are not contracted out to for-profit companies but remain with public sector and not-for-profit providers.

Representatives from the private sector children's care homes and fostering organisations alongside representation from the Public and Third sector providers, have been brought together to work with the government, local authorities, Care Inspectorate Wales, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and Voices from Care.

The board recognises this is a challenging commitment to deliver. There are a range of areas requiring examination in relation to defining not for profit, legislative change, competition and business considerations, developing models of service delivery such as Foster Wales and building future models including social enterprise and other models. All of this needs to be worked through while ensuring stability of the market and avoiding disruption to existing placements for children.

There are currently two work streams in progress; one which deals with technical matters relating to definitions, legislation and competition, and the second, about ways in which the public and not-for-profit market can be grown in the context of managing the transition and improving placement sufficiency.



# Together We are Stronger

## Working in Partnership

**The legal, policy and local strategic context all stress the importance of partnerships and working differently across public sector partners, the third and independent sector.**

Our work with partners is a central tenet in our delivery of more care support and accommodation options in order to see an improvement in outcomes for children and young people.

The Social Services and Well-Being Act describes the outcomes, which all partners need to work together to achieve for Children and Young people;

- Being Safe,
- Having somewhere suitable to live,
- Being involved in decisions that impact your life,
- Having friends,
- Being part of good, strong communities,
- Having every chance to do well in education, training, worked-based earning and employment,
- Feeling good about your life,
- Being able to grow up happily and successfully,
- Being well looked after,
- Having access to appropriate health care.

The No Wrong Door approach brings together services and asks services to wrap around children, young people and their families, rather than asking those in need of care and support to understand a complex system. Building upon this, the NEST (Nurturing, Empowering, Safe, Trusted) Framework promotes a person-centred, values-led, integrated whole system approach; supporting early help, the right help, and at the right time with the aim of improved mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Collaboration across services including public and third sector will facilitate a whole system approach and provide inclusive services for all those children, young people and families who may need them, rather than specialist interventions for specific groups.



Figure 1 NEST diagram showing key areas, stakeholders and themes around early support and prevention.

Cardiff Children's Services place a strong emphasis on the importance of working together in partnership. We recognise that Public and third sector partners including teachers, health practitioners, doctors, nurse, allied health professionals, mental health practitioners, social workers, youth workers, third sector practitioners, early years practitioners and play workers will work together to deliver a joined-up approach to enable the right conversations to take place at the right time, between the right people and for solutions to be found at the earliest possible stage, particularly for the most vulnerable children and families.

This commissioning strategy, and the work that follows will be an expression, in practice, of this vision for partnership working. Joint planning and delivery with our partners is essential to delivering the best outcomes for children.

## **Cardiff – A Child Friendly City**

Cardiff is one of five Cities in the UK developing, in partnership with UNICEF UK, as a 'Child Friendly City'. This means we place the rights of children and young people at the heart of all our policies and strategies; we involve children and young people in decision-making and commit to addressing barriers, which limit their lives. This development will involve all partner organisations placing Children's Rights at the centre of the commissioning approach.

## **Working with Providers**

This strategy also signals the ongoing desire of Cardiff Council to work collaboratively with providers to ensure an open and mature relationship. This proactive dialogue will engage providers in the development of key aspects of commissioning and enacting the Welsh Government's not-for profit vision, including the development of future provision and the analysis of current needs. They continue to have an important perspective to bring to the shaping of future provision.

## **Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs)**

Cardiff is a member of this important national consortium which is a strategic commissioning alliance between Welsh Local Authorities to support commissioning needs in respect of fostering and residential homes for children. Where it makes sense, Cardiff will be a key partner in developing regional and national solutions for children's provision.

## **Foster Wales**

Foster Wales was launched in July 2021. It is the nationwide collective of the 22 Local Authority fostering teams. Its objectives include:

- Co-ordinating national and local foster care marketing and recruitment.
- Managing and using the fostering National Performance Management framework.
- Coordinating national retention initiatives such as the National Commitment.
- National workforce improvement initiatives such as foster care Learning and Development.
- Continuing work in respect of harmonisation of foster carer payments.
- Promoting best practice standards and quality improvement across the sector.
- Foster Wales has a close working relationship with the National Adoption Service (NAS).

## **The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative**

This is a collaboration between Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) and Merthyr Tydfil Local Authorities. It delivers all the functions related to securing and supporting permanence adoptive families for children when an adoption order is the care plan endorsed by the Family Court.





# What key Stakeholders told us?

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**This section sets out the messages received from key stakeholder regarding our Children Looked After.**

## **What's important to Children and Young people?**

From the information gathered from the consultations, surveys and engagement exercises with children and young people in care, key messages have been identified as follows:

- Children and young people told us that they want us to act on what they have already told us.
- They do not like the term 'placement' or 'unit'. They want a place they can call 'home'.
- They want somewhere they can make their own decisions about how it looks. A place that is their sanctuary and comfortable.
- Children want to feel included and understand why they are in care.
- Young people want regular review of contact arrangements.
- They want to understand why decisions have been made.
- Children and Young people want to be trusted and feel involved in activity planning.
- When care planning they want staff to be aware of gender differences.
- They want more opportunities to benefit from being in the outdoors.
- They want better access to mental health services.
- They want to build relationships and a sense of family.
- They want at least one strong enduring and dependable relationship, so that they can unload, unpack and process the things that cause them stress.
- Most children and young people have good relationships with their carers.
- The vast majority feel safe in their setting.
- Most feel positive about their futures.
- They want to have a secure future when they leave care. To earn a decent income, have independence and the things they never had, but are worried about the cost of living. They want to be able to care for themselves.
- They would like access to the internet.
- They want their belongings to be kept safe when they move between homes and never placed in bin bags.
- Most children and young people want to stay in their local area.
- They want to remain close to their families, friends and local communities.
- They want to remain in contact with carers after they have left for ongoing support.
- They want to feel like their peers and not stand out or be stigmatized by their experiences.
- They see school and college as a positive. It is a place where they can just be a teenager like everyone else, talking about and doing teenage stuff, getting up to everyday mischief. Whether a good or bad teenage experience, it is the same as those around them.
- The new Corporate Parenting Strategy was launched during the 2021 setting out five key priorities based on the views and experiences of children looked after. They are:
  - Improving emotional wellbeing and physical health.
  - Better connections, improved relationships.
  - A comfortable, safe and stable home whilst in care and after.
  - Educational Achievement, Employment and Training.
  - Celebrating our children and young people



There are some important themes within these messages which need to inform our commissioning strategy going forward. These themes could be summarised as 'meaningful involvement', 'having positive experience', 'their emotional well-being' and their desire to 'stay close to home'.

We have used the following engagement mechanisms to understand the views of children and young people:

- Bright Spots Survey of 255 children looked after (September 2018)
- Cardiff Council Social Services Annual Report consultation (April 2019)
- Consultation with children and young people living in Cardiff Council Residential Provision (May 2019)
- Child Friendly City Consultation (July 2019).
- Corporate Parenting Strategy Consultation (September 2020)
- Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee engagement with Bright Sparks (2021)
- Bright Sparks Participation update to the Corporate Parenting Committee (September 2021)

## What our providers tell us?

The Council has been engaging individually and in workshops with Fostering and Residential Providers.

The overriding message was a willingness to work even more closely in partnership, with the Council. A number of important messages emerged through the discussions:

- Providers have a range of experience, skills and knowledge that can help in the development of services.
- There is a willingness to engage in shared learning and development.
- There are opportunities for us to link up engagement with children and young people.
- There is a shared challenge on recruiting Foster Carers.
- Providers would like a more planned approach for young people leaving care.
- A need for an ongoing dialogue.
- Providers want to understand how needs and demand is changing.
- Some children and young people have more complex needs and they need to understand this further.
- There could be further improvements in the placement process.
- The importance of the partnership between the Council and Providers.
- Providers are willing to consider alternative commissioning arrangements including providing services into Council owned buildings.
- Significantly, they told us they are finding it difficult to secure properties within Cardiff. Properties must be:
  - Capable of meeting needs,
  - Meets the requirements of the provider's asset management strategy,
  - Conforms to the Welsh Government's Standard Viability Model and Acceptable Cost guidance,
  - Be capable of being developed to comply with statutory Housing and CIW requirements.
- This is even more difficult in Cardiff than surrounding areas as the housing market is so competitive.
- During the year there have been a number of external provider performance issues and providers entering escalating concerns. Some of those issues were as a result of COVID-19 and its impact on staffing.
- Some placement searches are returning zero providers in response to tenders for individual children.

This feedback clearly shows the market of providers wanting to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the Council, looking at shared challenges and looking for solutions that best meet the changing needs of children and young people in Cardiff.

Our vision is to have a vibrant provision in Cardiff able to meet the changing needs of our children and young people in a flexible and responsive way.

## What our Staff tell us?

Engagement with staff has further helped in terms of understanding the changing needs of our children and young people. Key messages included:

- Demand is increasing.
- It is more difficult to find suitable homes for our children and young people.
- There are more sibling groups needing support.
- Some children and young people have more complex needs.
- We want to be able to offer more support to families.
- We want to help bring families together again.
- We need to improve our processes.
- Priority areas for engagement with providers include: teenagers, sibling groups, step down from residential, disabled children and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.





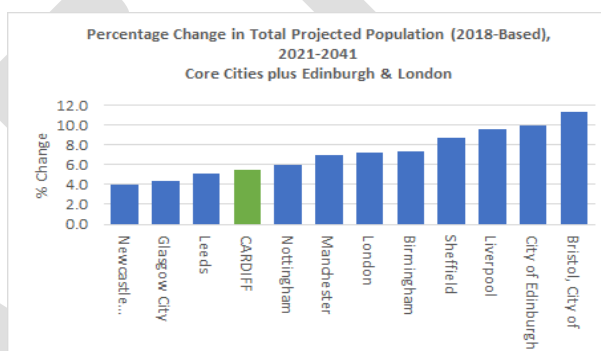
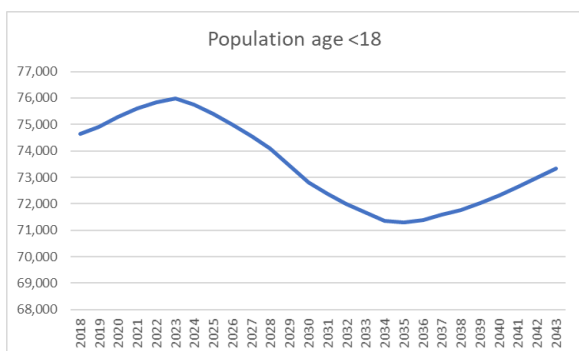
# What the data tells us?

In this section we will review some of the key data related to Children Looked After in Cardiff.

## Cardiff's population is changing

At the time of writing the last version of this strategy, Cardiff's population was expected to increase faster than other City in the UK, including a sharp 18% increase in the population of children and young people over the next 20 years.

This is no longer the case. Projections now indicate that the recent downward trend in births (2010 – 2020) will continue for approximately the next 10 years, and then follow a slight upward trend.

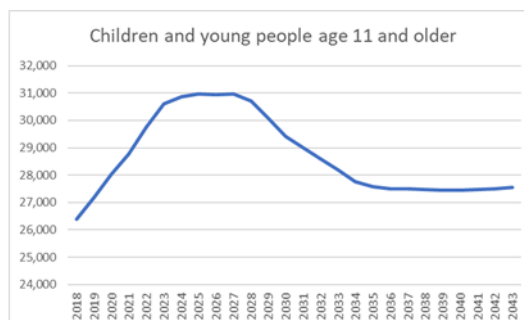
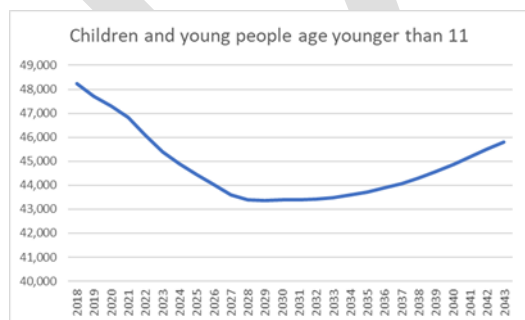


Source: 2018-based projections for local authorities Welsh Government

The number of children aged 0-18 is projected to peak in 2023 at 75,980, before decreasing to 71,295 in 2035. Increasing to 73,345 by 2043 (2018-based population projections). Remaining lower than the current population.

The projections are likely to reflect decreasing fertility, along with increased life expectancy, meaning that older people remain living in Cardiff properties for longer.

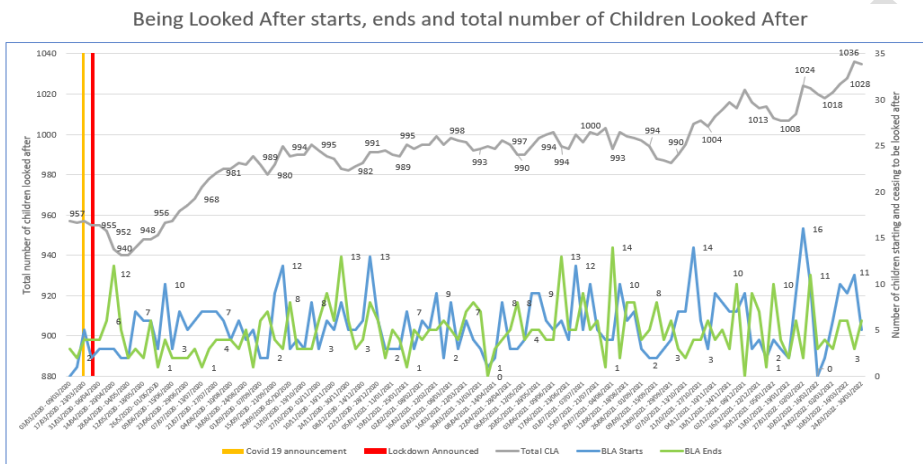
However, it should be noted that there is variation within the age-bands which make up the population of children and young people. Charts below show that whilst population size-based demand from primary school aged children is likely to decrease in the coming decade, a peak in population of secondary school aged children and young people aged 11 to 18 is likely to extend until 2028. These are children born before the fertility rate decreased.



The projections do not take into account the as yet unknown impact of Brexit and the Pandemic. The figures may therefore be subject to further revision as those events are incorporated into population trends over time.

## Rates of children looked after

In interpreting population figures, it is important to be aware, that the rate of children who become looked after is dependent on the level of societal need, the ability of referring and safeguarding agencies to detect that need, as well as the age structure of the cohort.

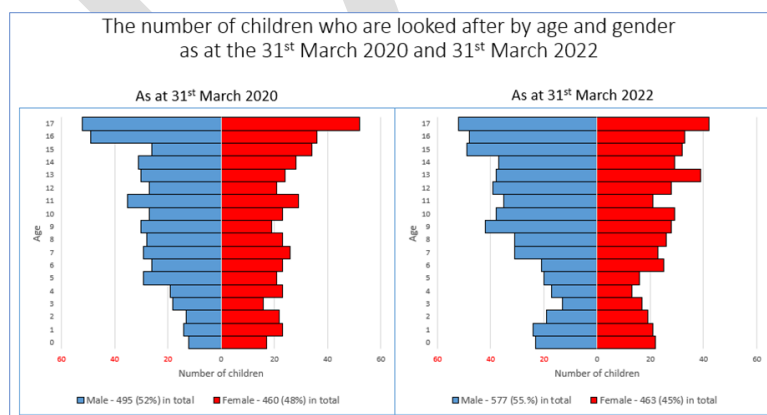


The chart above shows the difference between the number of children and young people becoming looked after and those ending being looked after between March 2020 and April 2022.

The net result was a period of increase in the total number of children looked after during the first wave of the pandemic (a societal crisis), followed by a period of relative stability between October 2020 and October 2021 (whilst society remained under restrictive measures). Numbers have increased again over the latest period since the end of 2021.

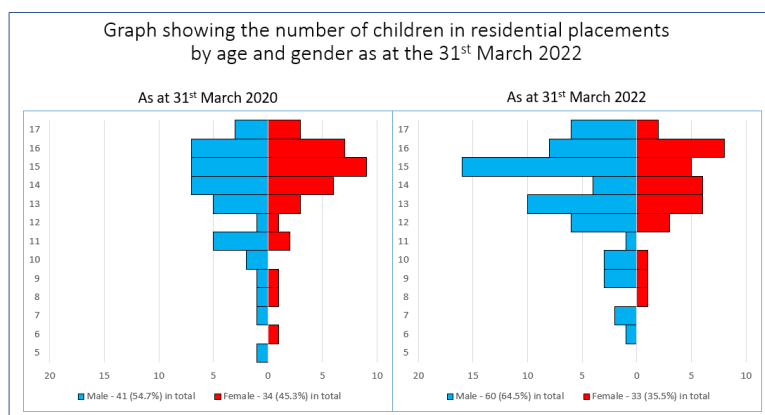
It is reasonable to infer this recent increase is in part a consequence of the accumulated impact of the pandemic being felt within families, and children returning to settings where referring and safeguarding professionals have been better able to identify children in need of care and support. But also potentially reflects demand from the increasing population size noted above.

In inferring placement demand from population projections, the profile of looked after children shown in the charts below, suggests it is the pattern of population growth for children and young people aged 11+ that is most significant. This is even more evident when looking at the age profile of children in residential placements.



The number of looked after children has increased by 85 or 8.9% over the last 2 years.

This is consistent with what we know about Cardiff's overall population trend for children and young people, along with what we would anticipate in relation to the impact of the pandemic.



Boys make up the majority of the increase in numbers of children looked after, with an increase of 82 or 16.6%.

The number of boys in residential placements has increased from 41 (54.7%) to 60 (64.5%) over the 2 year period

Looking at the age structure of looked after children, together with the population projections for 11-18 year olds, the data suggests that the peak in demand for looked after placements, based on population size alone, might not be reached until 2023 and extend until 2028.

Further impact of the pandemic, as well as increasing societal influences on mental health, and the cost-of-living crisis have the potential to result in even higher rates of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Should public services not be able to mitigate these factors, they are likely to result in further increases in the rate of children being looked after, beyond those indicated by the population projections.

Whilst some of that impact is likely to be felt in the near future, there is potential that some of the demand might not become evident until some years in the future, thereby extending the peak beyond 2028. This is because adverse experiences accumulate over time.

### The Long-term Impact of the Pandemic

The most robust evidence we have in relation to the impact of the Pandemic is from the Welsh Government’s Technical Advisory Group. Its paper ‘Five Harms Arising from Covid-19: Consideration of Potential Baseline Measures’; 9 July 2021 states:

“Studies suggest that some of the impacts of the Pandemic on children and young people in particular will not become evident for some time. While the evidence is of varying quality, consistent themes include impacts on socialisation, communication, emotional and mental health, low levels of physical activity, increased sedentary behaviour, healthy eating and obesity. A review of 63 studies from previous pandemics, such as SARS in 2003, has demonstrated the potential for long-lasting effects. The length of time that children felt lonely predicted mental health problems up to nine years later, particularly depression. Children who had experienced more extreme isolation, such as quarantine, were five times more likely to require support from mental health services and experienced higher levels of post-traumatic stress. Poor emotional health in childhood is linked to long-term mental and physical health difficulties, and poor academic and occupational functioning. It is the number one predictor of adult life satisfaction”.

The paper further indicated that the harm related to COVID-19 can be broadly grouped into 5 key areas:

1. Harm directly arising from SARS-CoV2 infections;
2. Indirect COVID-19 harms due to surge pressures on the health and social care system and changes to healthcare activity, such as cancellation or postponement of elective surgeries and other non-urgent treatments (e.g. harm from cessation of screening services) and delayed management of long-term conditions.
3. Harms arising from population based health protection measures (e.g. lockdown) such as, educational harm, psychological harm and isolation from shielding and other measures.
4. Economic harms such as unemployment and reduced business income arising both from COVID-19 directly and population control measures, like lockdown.
5. Harms arising from the way COVID-19 has exacerbated existing, or introduced new, inequalities in our society.

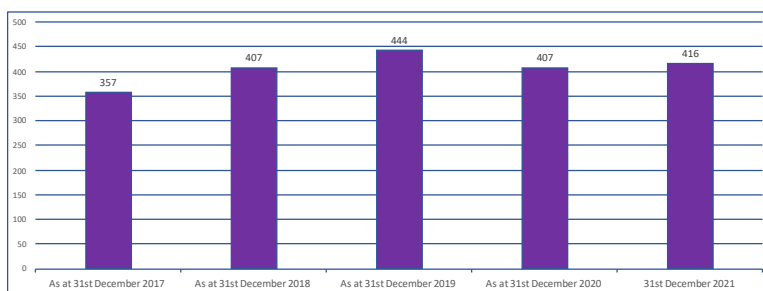
All of these areas have potential to impact on children, young people or their families, to build a toxic mixture of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

In the context of children who have suffered additional non-pandemic related ACEs, pandemic associated events which lead to separation from a carer or relative might be particularly significant as a tipping point. Mitchell, Rosch-Marsh and Robb (2014), identified studies have shown the characteristics and backgrounds of young people in secure accommodation (our most vulnerable young people) have a number of common features including experiencing multiple losses and separation from a parent or significant care giver.

## Disabled Children

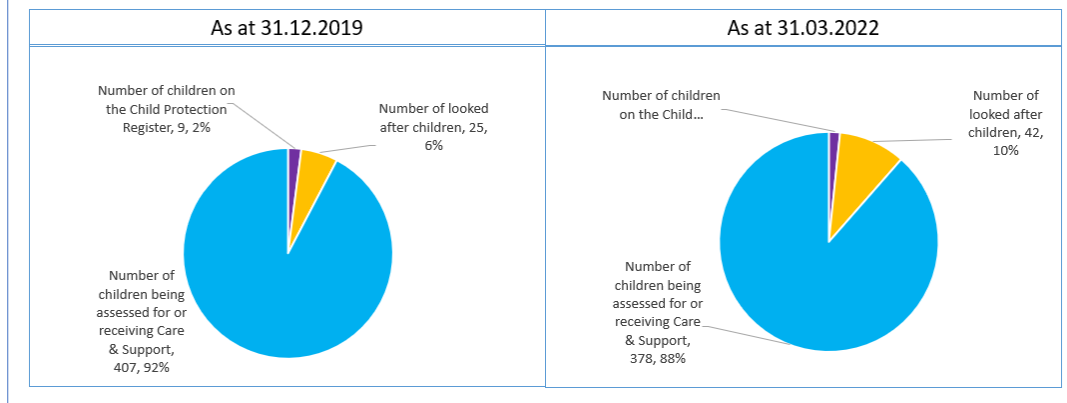
The effect of the pandemic is particularly notable on the population of disabled children and their families. The charts below, show that the cohort of disabled children known to Children's Services has remained relatively stable over the period, but the numbers of children who have become looked after has increased by 68% from 25 to 42. It is well noted that the effect of the pandemic has been particularly severe on disabled people.

Number of children on the Child Health & Disability caseload over the last five years



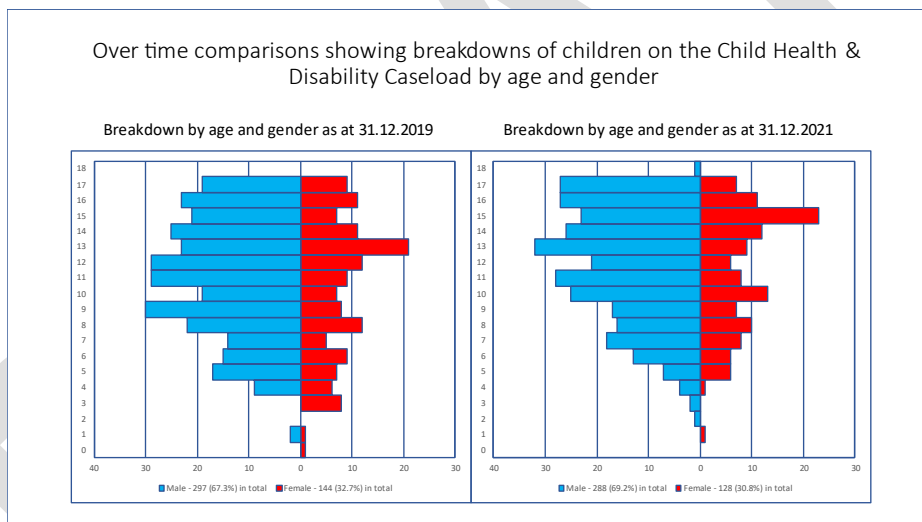
The number of children on the Child Health & Disability Team's caseload has increased to 427 as at the 31st March 2022

Breakdown of Child Health & Disability caseload by whether on the Child Protection Register, looked after or being assessed/receiving Care & Support



The number of looked after children on the Child Health and Disability Team caseload has increased from 25 to 42, 6% to 10% of the caseload, over the last two years. This equates to a 68% increase in looked after children.

Age profiles show similar patterns as for the general population, of increasing rates of being looked after as children get older.



## Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Unlike the general trend in rates of looked after children known to Children’s Services, rates of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children are not affected by numbers of local births or rates of local Adverse Child Experiences, but are affected by global factors which lead people from other countries to seek a safe home in the UK.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children can arrive in Cardiff via a number of routes. One of the most common routes is spontaneous arrival. These young people usually present at the Home Office or in the police station looking for support because they are unaccompanied children.

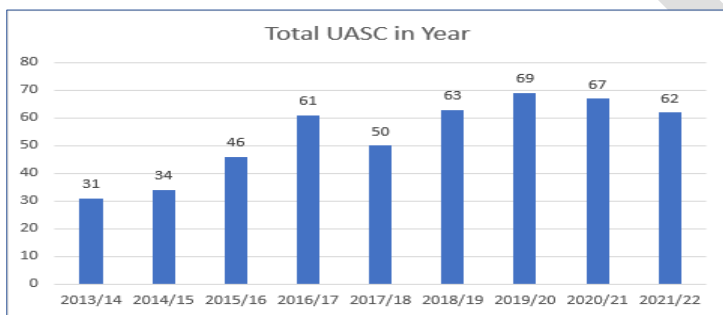
Some others, but not many, are dispersed to Cardiff by the Home Office as adults but claim that they are under the age of 18. Occasionally, the local authority will agree in these instances to undertake an age assessment.



Another route of arrival is through the National Transfer Scheme. This has operated on the basis of a rota system since July 2021 under the then voluntary scheme and from December 2021 under a mandatory scheme. Regions and nations take it in turns to assume responsibility for unaccompanied children. A weighting system determines the number of children each local authority can expect to receive. Allocations may be made up to a threshold of 0.07% of the local authority's general child population. But this is not a 'cut off' point. While transfers generally operate within the framework of the rota, local authorities retain the flexibility to agree transfers outside their turn, where a particular placement is in the best interest of the child, for example where a child may have a family connection. Where such a transfer takes place, this is considered as part of the receiving authority's allocation of placements under the next cycle.

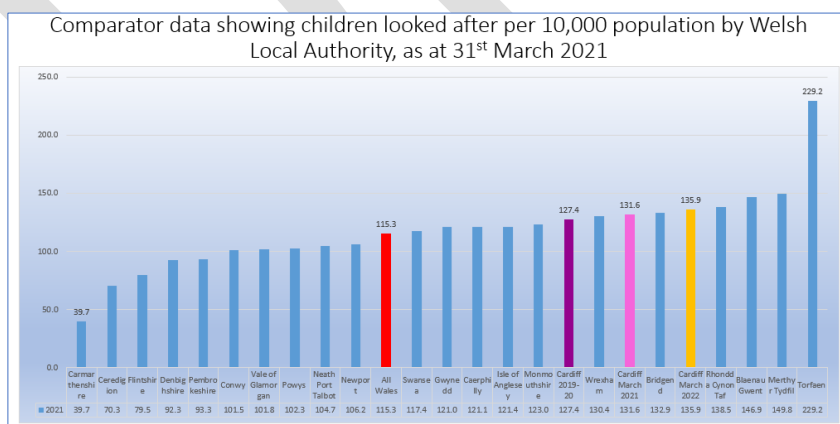
12 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children were placed by Cardiff under the mandated National Transfer Scheme during 2021/22 with many being placed prior to this. There were a total of 38 being looked after at the 31st March 2022. The youngest four were aged 15 years of age. The other thirty-four were aged 16 and 17 years old.

The following chart shows the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who were placed in Cardiff over the last nine years. The number doubled between 2013/14 and 2016/17 and have remained approximately steady since. For the reasons explained above, it would not be appropriate to project demand for placements forward based on previous trends.



## Comparison to other Welsh Local Authorities

This graph shows the number of looked after children per 10,000 population compared to other Welsh Local Authorities as at 31st March 2021.



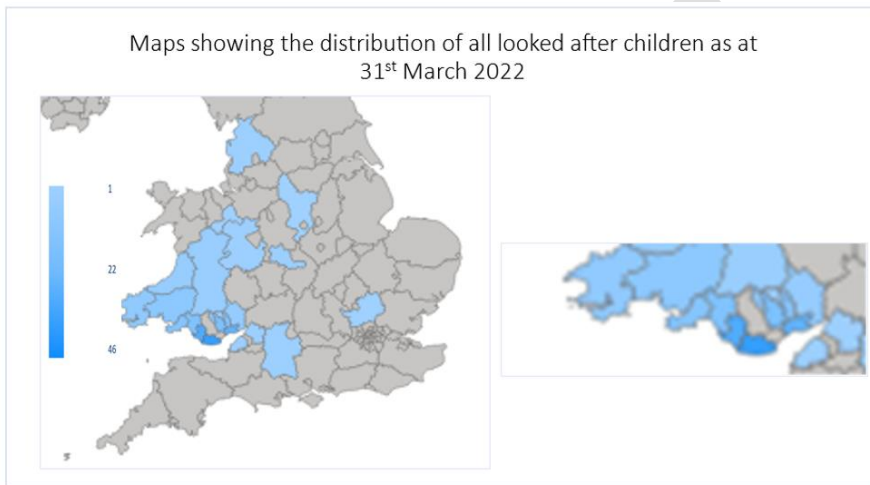
Cardiff figures for March 2020 and March 2022 are included as a comparison, our numbers per 10,000 are increasing, however Cardiff is not an outlier with 135.9 per 10,000 currently. Rates are in excess of the Wales average, but this is not unexpected given the area's city demographic.



# Current Provision

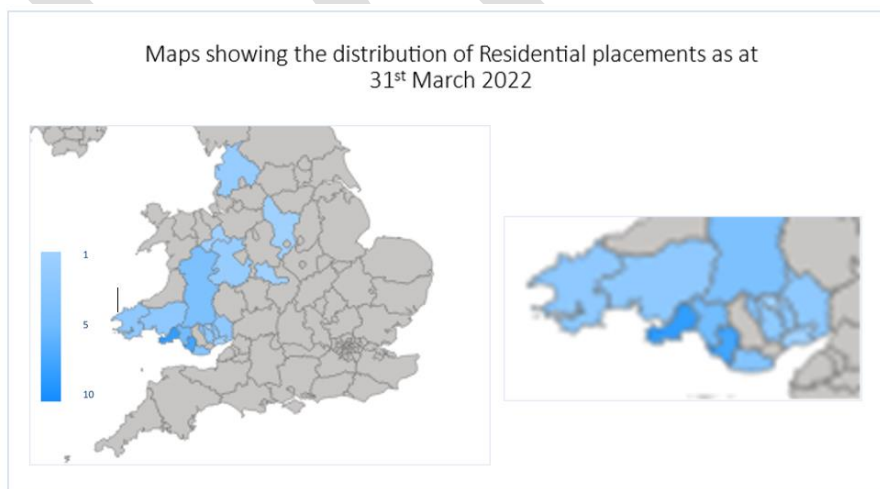
## Where do Cardiff Children and Young People live?

At the end of March 2022, 64.6% of children looked after lived in Cardiff whilst 35.4% were living out of County. The map below shows the vast majority were placed within South Wales local authorities, but some were placed further away in England.



Living closer to home has many benefits including maintenance of family and friendship relationships, remaining close to their communities, being able to attend local schools and access health services. There are circumstances where it is appropriate for a child or young person to live away from Cardiff, where they are placed in kinship placements with members of their family, or where it is not safe for a child to be placed close to home. Some of our placements have however been a result of a lack of placement availability or due to the location of a specialist placement setting.

At the end of March 2022, 25% of children living in residential placements were living in Cardiff, whilst 75% were living out of County.



Our aim is to year on year see more of our children and young people living closer to home.

## What kinds of Homes?

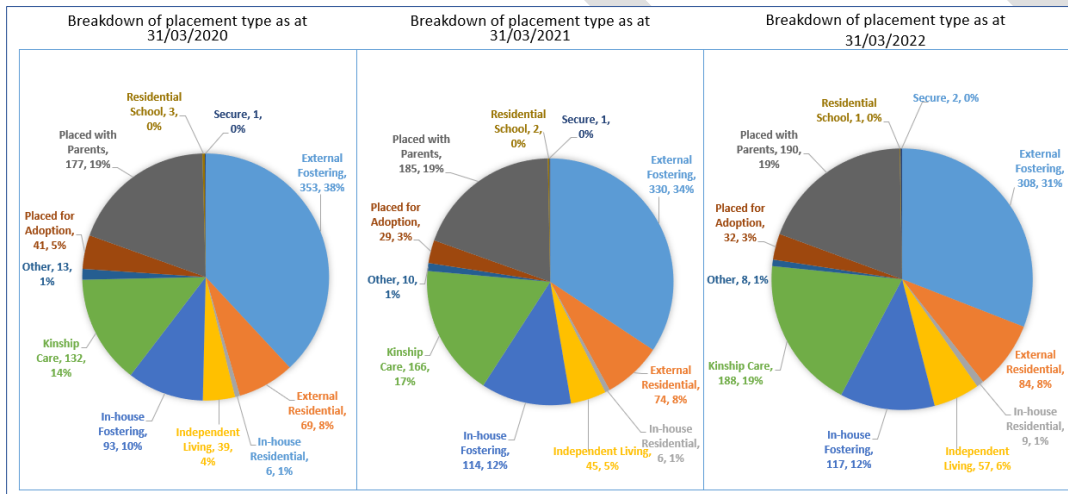
The pie-charts below shows the type of homes our Children Looked After are living in.

They show there is an increasing number of children and young people living with their own families or with people connected to their own families, 'placed with parents' or in 'kinship' arrangements.

They show rates of in-house fostering are increasing (from 93 in 2020 to 117 in 2021) and use of external fostering is decreasing in both relative and absolute numbers (decreasing from 353 (38%) in 2020 to 308 (31%) in 2022). It is important to note that this is in the context of an increasing number of children looked after.

The rate of external residential has remained a constant proportion but increased in numbers from 69 to 84 over the three year period. Numbers of children in in-house residential have increased by a third from 6 to 9. This reflects the addition of two new properties to the Council's children's home portfolio.

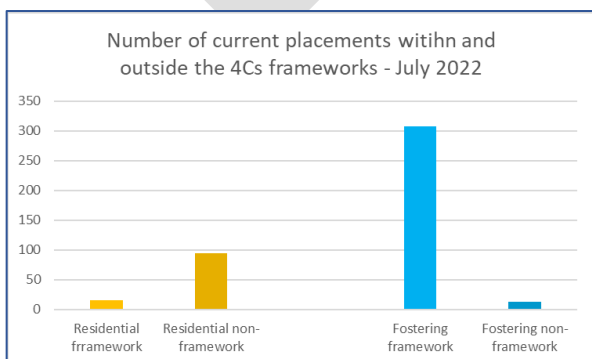
Rates of Independent living have increased from 39 to 57 young people.



## How these placements are commissioned

The Children's Commissioning Consortium Wales (otherwise known as 4C's) manages the All Wales Fostering Framework (2016); the All Wales Residential Framework (2016) and the All Wales Residential Flexible Framework (2019) on behalf of Welsh Local Authorities which are part of the syndicate. Cardiff has been a member since its inception in 2012.

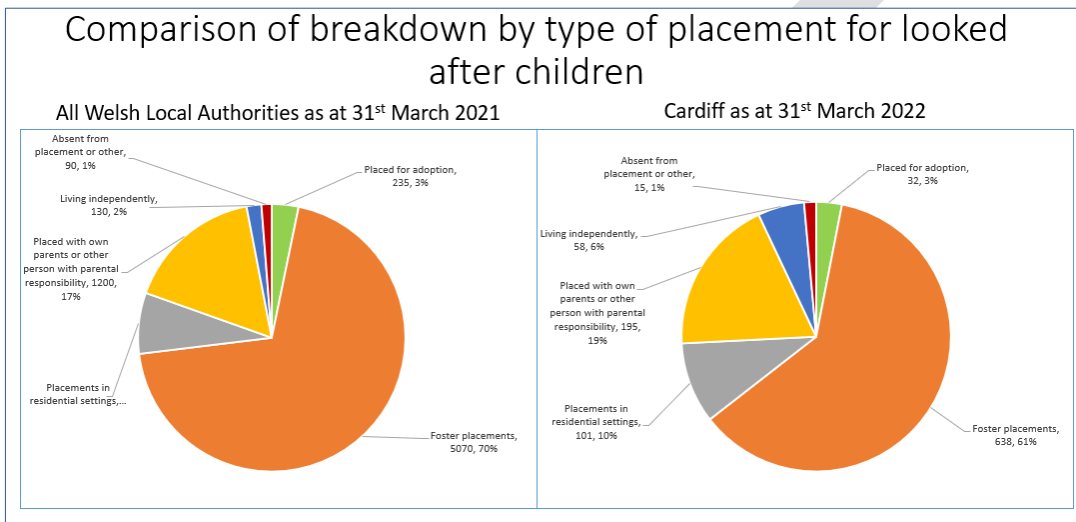
The Frameworks have been negotiated by 4Cs with providers on behalf of the consortium, to maximise the benefit of standardised contracts, terms and conditions, and purchaser economies of scale. There is however a cost to providers to become registered on the frameworks.



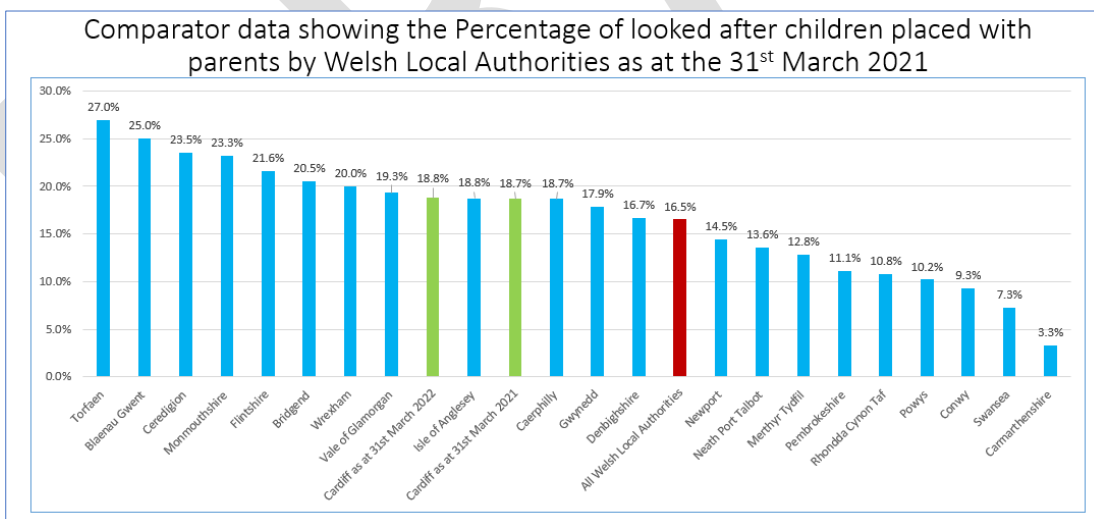
The chart above shows that whilst 96% of children are placed with fostering providers signed up to the framework, only 16% of children are placed with residential providers signed up to the framework. This reflects the relative strength of supply and demand forces across the two sectors, along with residential providers preference to develop local arrangements.

### How does this compare to other Welsh Local Authorities?

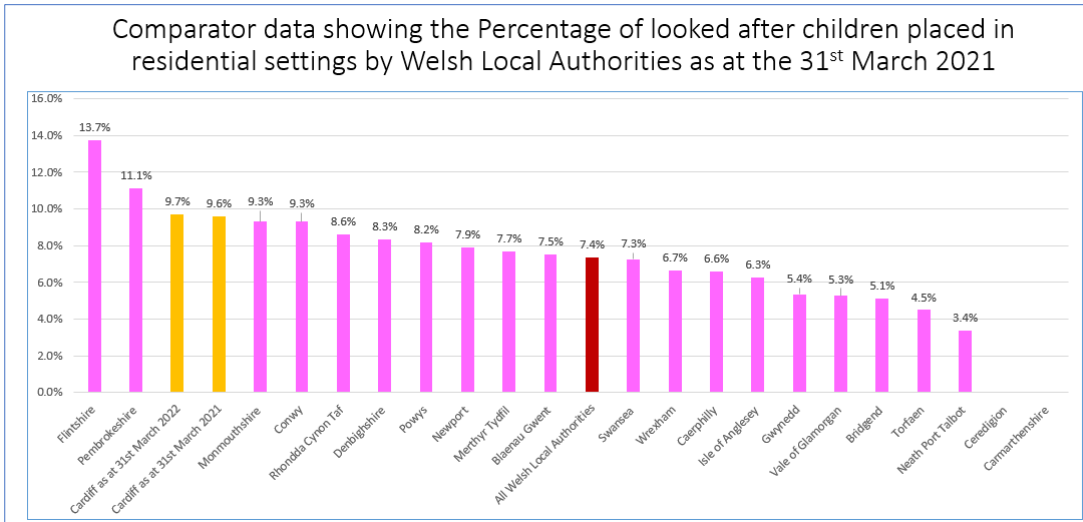
Cardiff has 2% more children placed with parents, 4% more Independent Living placements and 3% more residential placements than the percentage for Wales. All Wales figures indicate 9% more children are placed in foster placements across Wales compared to Cardiff's rate.



The chart below shows that Cardiff sits slightly above halfway in the rate ranking of Welsh Local Authorities Looked After Children Placed with Parents.

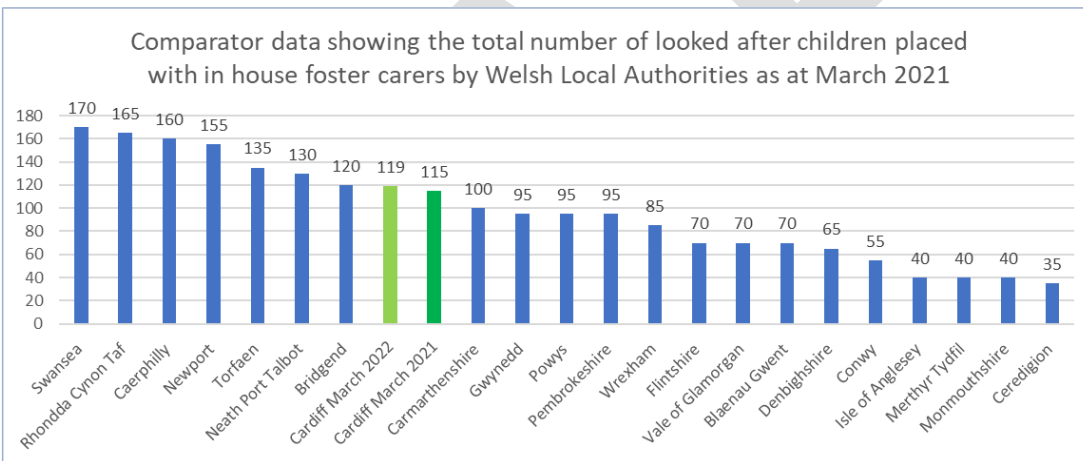


Cardiff has towards the highest rates in Wales of Looked After Children Placed in Residential Settings. Although this is only 2% higher than the Welsh Average.



\*Please note, these figures do include Child Health & Disability Team's placements.

Cardiff is at the lower end of the upper third of the Welsh ranking of number of Children Placed with In-house Foster Carers.



## Focus on Residential Placements

In alignment with the preference of the First Minister, set out in the Welsh Government's 'Removing Profit from the Care of Looked After Children' Programme Board Terms of Reference, for the initial scope of the work to focus on private profit in relation to children's care homes, this section focuses on Residential placements.

Future six monthly updates of this Cardiff Placement's Strategy will add further detail in relation to independent sector foster care, supported accommodation for care leavers and care at home for disabled children, in alignment with the phasing of that Welsh Government's programme.

The chart above (at the beginning of the What Kind of Homes Section) shows that residential placements have remained a constant proportion of total placements over the 3 year period at 9% (8% external, 1% in-house).

Absolute number of children have increased in external residential settings from 69 to 84, but given the consistency in the percentage, this is most likely to reflect the increasing size of the population of looked after children rather than a shift in dependency.

In house residential provision has increased from 6 to 9 children between 2019 and 2021. This is because we have increased our children’s home capacity with the launch of our Assessment Centre and Pop Up Pop Down emergency accommodation.



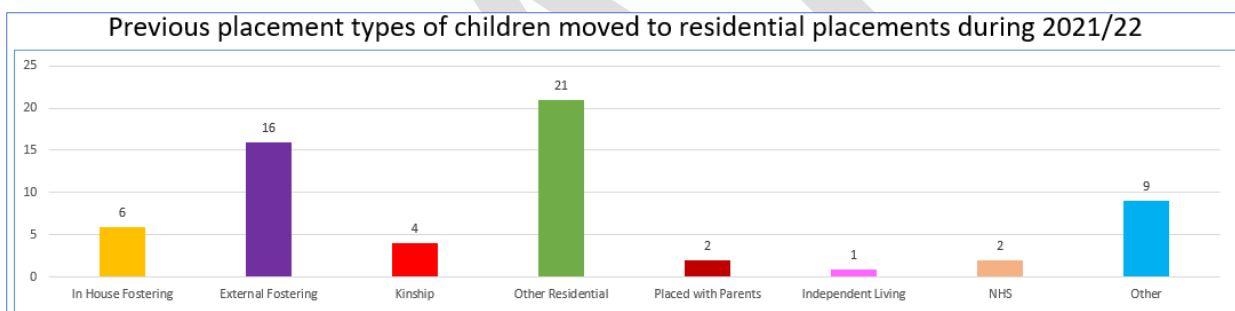
Assessment Centre

Emergency Accommodation

Existing residential provision

We have continued working with local residential providers to secure an additional 4 residential beds in Cardiff during 2021-22. This builds upon work in previous years to attract independent providers to the area, so that we can place more children close to home.

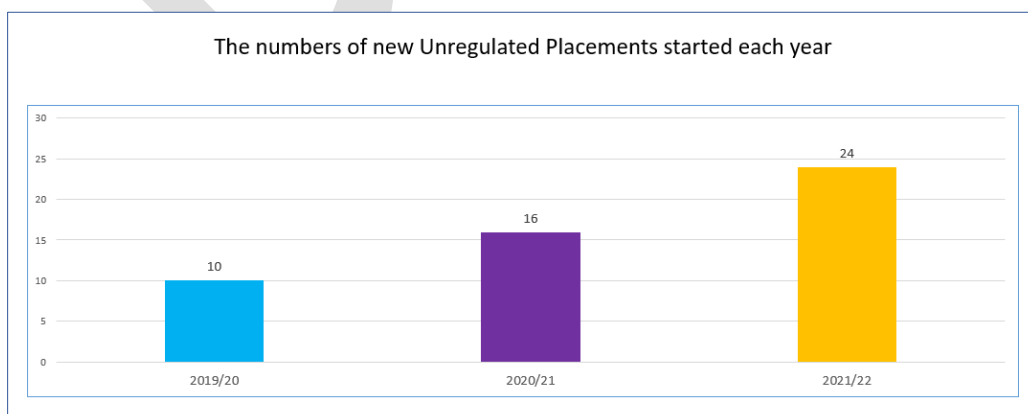
The majority of moves to residential placements (21) have been from another Residential placement (34%), whilst 16 (26%) have been from external fostering placements in the last year.



It should be noted that 2 placements were directly from the NHS.

The issue of increasing complexity can also be seen in that one 5-10 year old was placed in residential care at the start of being looked after (aged 9).

The increasing number of unregulated placements shown in the chart below, also indicates that it is becoming progressively more difficult to find providers for children with the most complex emotional mental health need within or outside Cardiff.



Some of these children were looked after at the time of the crisis, some had previously been known to Children’s Services, a small proportion had never been known to Social Services.

These are children requiring safe accommodation, where no provider responded to placement tenders, or upon further liaison a potential provider withdrew their offer. These placements are exceptional interim arrangements whilst regulated placements are urgently sought, until a specialist placement becomes vacant, or with a view to bringing an unavoidable bespoke arrangement under regulation.

There is an unpredictable pattern of demand noted in terms of numbers of children presenting and complexity of need, with an upward trajectory.

Some of these children require secure welfare care or are on the edge of needing it. During March, April and May 2022, there was one child in each month in secure welfare placements. There is only one Secure setting in Wales. This is Hillside in Neath Port Talbot. It can be difficult to source accommodation in a secure setting in an emergency. Cardiff children have been accommodated in Scotland as well as England.

The table below (2017) highlights that the Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan region has significantly lower levels of therapeutic provision for children and young people than in other parts of Wales. This means that to meet the most complex needs of children and young people there is a reliance on services away from Cardiff.

Region	General therapeutic and specialist care		Short break / respite service		Disability only	
	Beds	% of region	Beds	% of region	Beds	% of region
North Wales	119	60%	28	14%	51	26%
West Wales and Powys	85	61%	29	21%	25	18%
Western Bay	77	73%	21	20%	7	7%
Cardiff & Vale	23	26%	28	32%	36	41%
Cwm Taf	37	70%	12	23%	4	8%
Gwent	60	76%	9	11%	10	13%

*Source: Data Cymru; Childrens residential profile of Care Wales -Care providers’ statement of purpose analysis (December 2017)*

This has been a key driver of our plans to add Safe Accommodation to our children’s home portfolio in 2022/23. This additional Therapeutic Children’s Home and outreach service will be part of a Joint Recovery Service which will provide an integrated response to young people requiring support to be safely discharged from hospital following an episode of emotional distress.

We are currently working on putting this service in place through, Short, Medium and Long-term plans, under three workstreams. The workstreams will aggregate to deliver the vision.

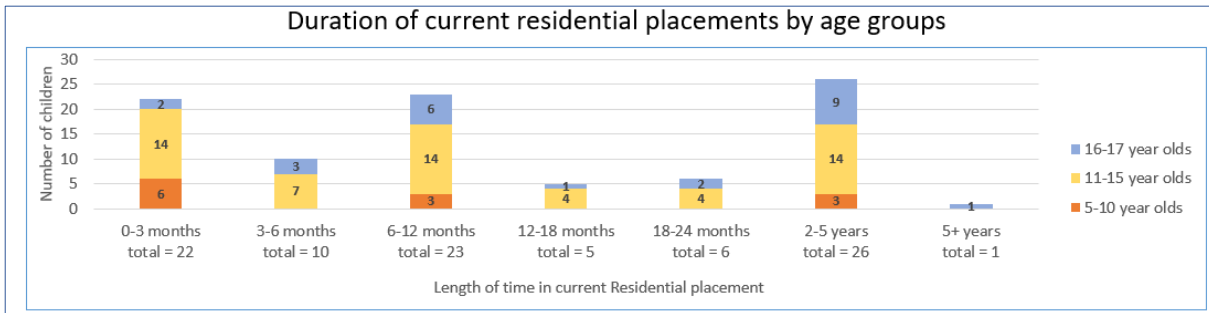
The first workstream will address the immediate presenting pressure, to put immediate arrangement in place to safely care for children who are subject to delayed discharge from hospital for reasons of emotional mental health. The second will tap into existing providers in the market and work with them to wrap a new Assertive Outreach Service around children. The third will commission robust long-term accommodation (a children’s home) and a permanent multi-agency workforce within the next financial year.

This aligns with work we are doing to adapt the North Yorkshire Model to develop a ‘Right Place’ model for Cardiff, using a No Wrong Door approach. This will link professionals across agencies to

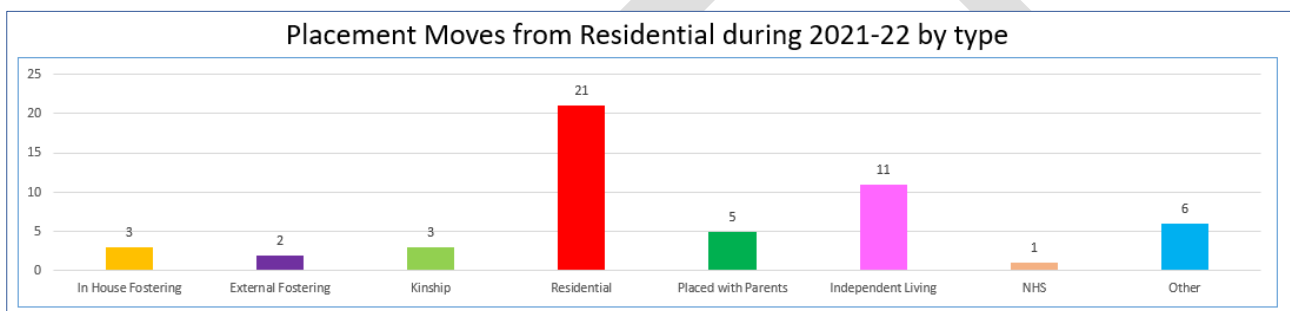


support children across residential, fostering, edge of care, and leaving care settings.

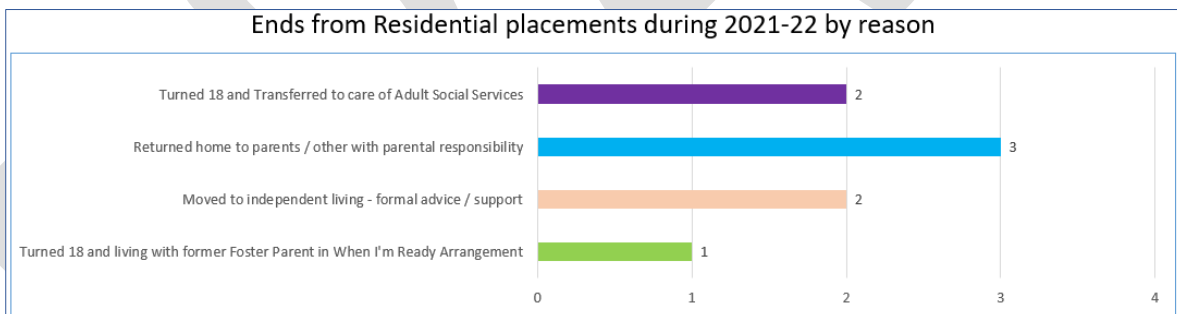
Of all children looked after in residential placement, 28% (26) of children have been in their current placement between 2 and 5 years, 25% (23) have been looked after for 6-12 months, and 24% (22) have been looked after for 0-3 months.



Just one, a 17 year old has been in their residential placement 5 years or more.



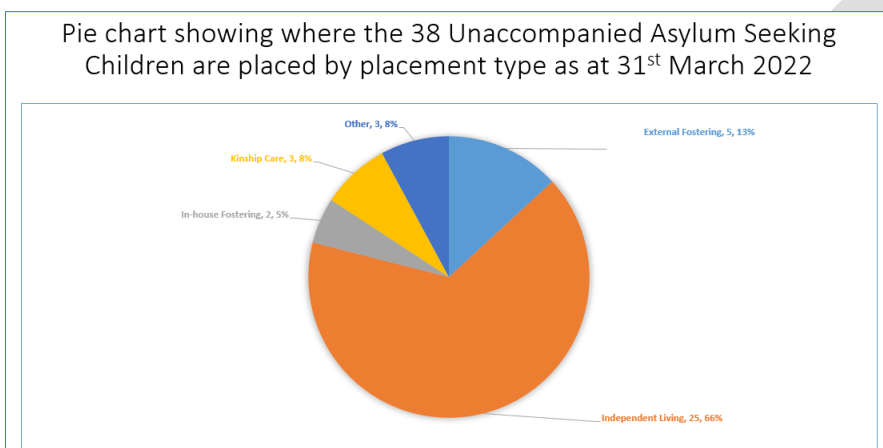
The majority of children (21) who moved from one residential placement moved to another (40.4%), mirroring the moves into residential, whilst 11 (21.2%) moved to an Independent Living placement.



Of those who left care from Residential, 5 (62.5%) turned 18. 3 (37.5%) returned to live with a parent / other person with parental responsibility.

## Overview of placements for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Of the 38 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children being looked after at 31st March 2022. The youngest four aged 15 years were placed in 1 kinship placement, 1 in house foster placement and 2 external fostering placements. The other thirty-four 16 and 17 years olds were living in the remainder of placements shown below. The majority were placed in semi-independent living.



It should be noted that not all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are placed in a local authority remain to take up long term placements. If the receiving local authority concludes from its own age assessment that the individual is an adult, they will cease to be eligible for support from the local authority. Young people who are awaiting an age assessment tend mostly to be placed in independent living accommodation until their age assessment is completed. Their numbers are small.

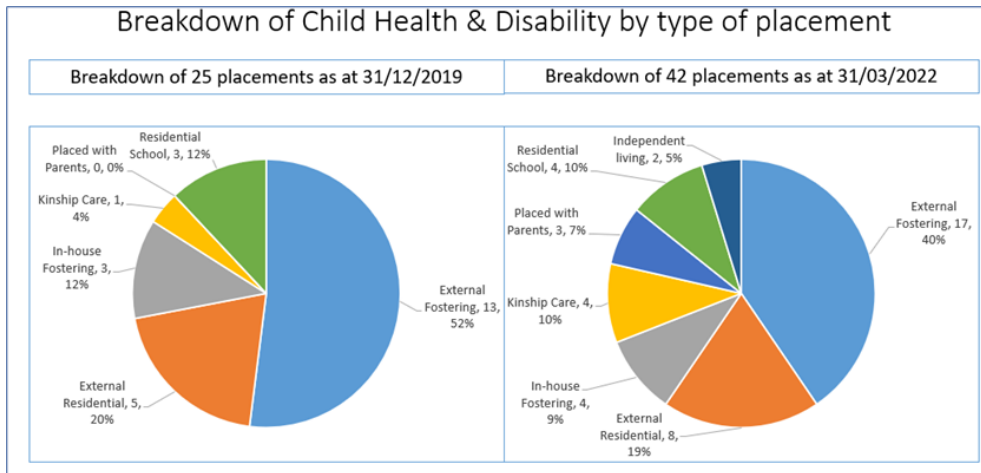
In planning future placement capacity for this group of children and young people, the fact that the majority of these young people are aged 16 and 17 years old along with the need to place those awaiting age assessment with a risk assessment, means that demand is likely to mainly be for semi-independent and independent living placements with floating support. We have worked with the Salvation Army to open a 6-bed unit specifically for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This is now full to capacity since its opening in April 2022.

## Overview of Child Health & Disability Placements

Trends in placements for disabled children should be interpreted with care, due to relatively small numbers. Relatively small changes in numbers can result in relatively large changes in rates.

The chart below shows the majority of disabled children were placed in foster care at the end of March 2022. Since 2019 there has been an increase in the proportion of disabled children being placed with kinship carers or placed with parents. This is reflected in a decrease in the proportional use of external foster care.

There is a proportionally higher proportion of disabled children in residential or residential school placements than non-disabled children (29% compared to 9%) at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. This reflects the increasing complexity of need among this group of children. The number of children has increased since 2019 from 8 to 12.



## Overview of Supported Housing

In October 2015 the Young Person’s Gateway was launched in Cardiff, to offer housing solutions for young people aged between 16 and 21. The Gateway enables young people aged over 16 years to access mediation services, supported housing and specialist floating support services.

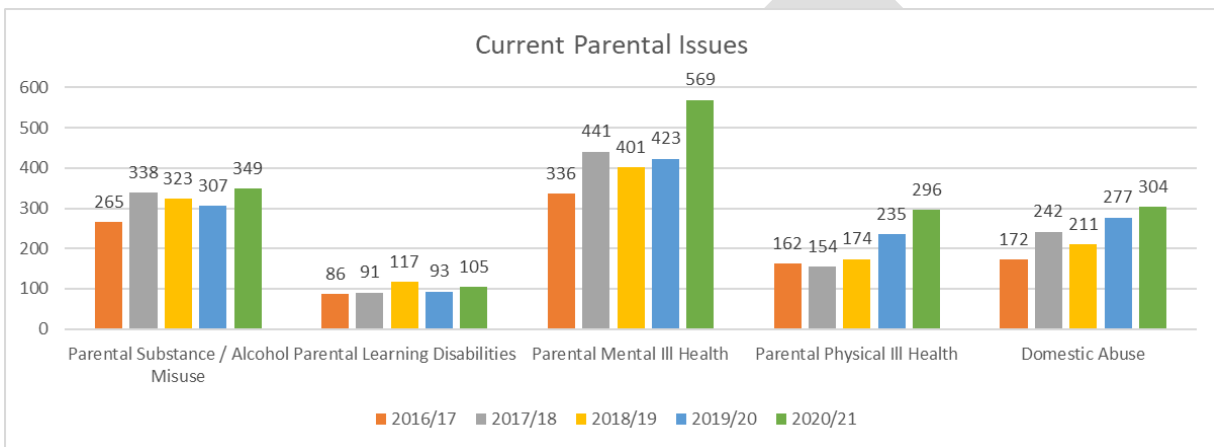
The service is available to young people to whom the Council has a duty through social services or homelessness legislation. During 2021/22 we worked with colleagues in Housing to secure an additional 15 Young Person’s Gateway units in Cardiff, with more due to come on stream in 2022/23.



# Needs Analysis

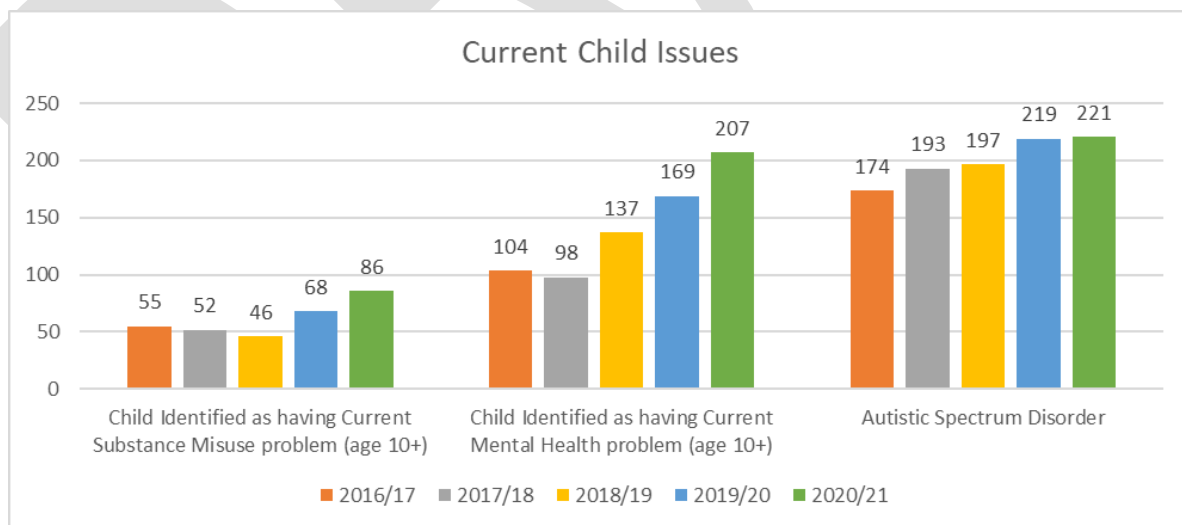
## Children Receiving Care and Support

The two charts below highlight the key challenges facing families evidenced in the 'Children Receiving Care and Support Census'. There are some important messages.



For parents there are consistent issues regarding their mental health, use of substances, and experience domestic abuse. Parental physical ill health is becoming an increasing issue.

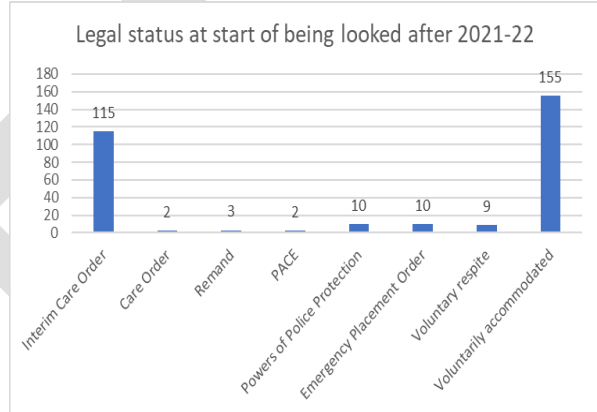
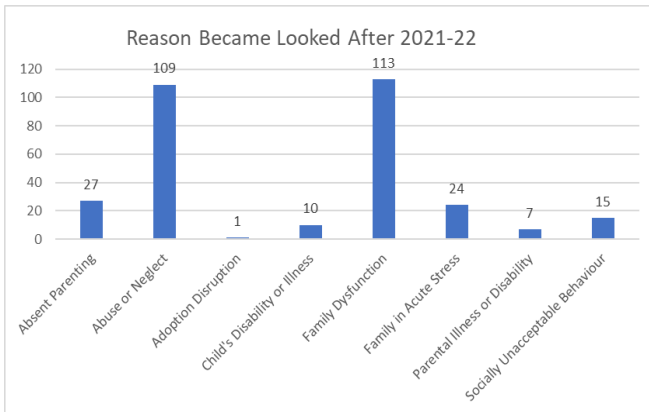
For our children there are also issues regarding their substance misuse and mental health needs. The number of children and young people with autism is much more significant an issue than at the time of writing the previous strategy.



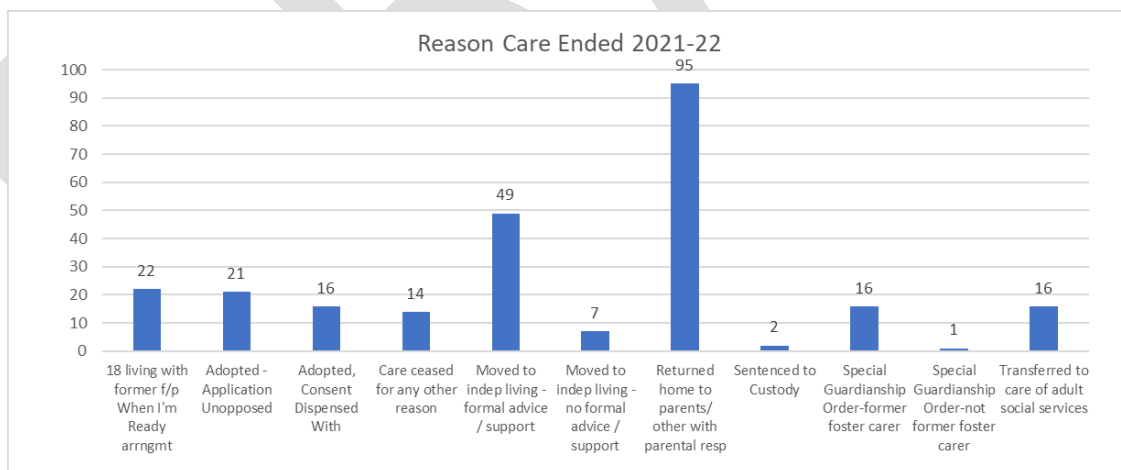
## Reasons Children Became Looked After and Reasons Care Ended

The following charts show the majority of children and young people became looked after in 2021/22 for reasons of family dysfunction, abuse or neglect (37% and 36% respectively). 9% were for reasons of absent parenting. 8% for reasons of family in acute stress. 5% for reasons of socially unacceptable behaviour. 3% were for reasons of the child's disability or illness. No other individual category exceeded 2% of children.

At the start of being looked after, 51% of children and young people had a legal status of voluntarily accommodated and 38% a status of Interim Care Order. No other category exceeded 3%.

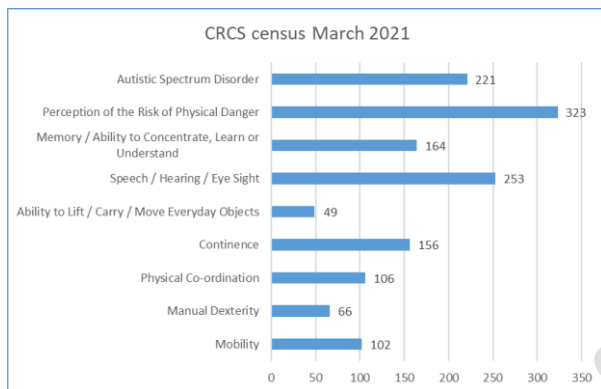


Upon care ending, 37% of children and young people returned home to live with their parent or other person with parental responsibility. 22% moved to independent living (with formal advice and support, or without). 14% were adopted (unopposed, or with consent dispensed with). 8% to live with former foster carers in When I'm Ready arrangements. 6% entered a Special Guardianship Orders with a former foster carer. 6% transferred to the care of adult social services. 1% were sentenced to custody. No other individual category exceeded 1% of children and young people.



## Focus on Disabled Children

The 2021 census shows the types of need experienced by disabled children known to Children’s Services. This is important knowledge in designing service models, designing homes and informing staff training plans.



Further analysis of the needs and services provided to disabled children will be provided in subsequent updates of this strategy.

## Focus on Children at Risk of Exploitation: Support for Our Children in the Youth Justice System

Some children in need of support from the Youth Justice Service remain appropriately at home with their families with support to manage contextual risk and make safer choices.

However, we know children who are looked after are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. That we need to pay extra attention to safeguard them from becoming criminalised and falling victim to those who exploit them. We also know the importance of working with young people who are in, leaving or have left custody to build their resilience and resettle them safely into homes and communities so that they do not go back into custody.

To change this, we need to work with in-house and commissioned placements, across local authority directorates and with partners to achieve a wholesale change in thinking, to better protect our young people and to avoid criminalisation.

In Cardiff, the Safeguarding Adolescents from Exploitation (SAFE) model is being embedded and a suite of SAFE tools are being used to support the process. The SAFE Operational Groups have received strong partnership support and buy in, and we are seeing improved relationships, communication and information sharing as a result. This is key to enable us to keep up to date with the ever-changing themes and trends in relation to criminal exploitation and sexual exploitation, so we can minimise the risks to young people, their families and communities.

Further analysis of the needs and services provided to children at risk of exploitation and children receiving support from our Youth Justice Service will be provided in subsequent updates of this strategy.



## Key Themes from the review of 100 referrals for Residential and

### Foster Care *\*It should be noted that this review was undertaken pre 2019.*

In order to understand the needs of our children and young people who are referred for fostering or residential services, a detailed desk-top audit took place of 104 referrals. This has identified some important key themes. Of the sample 18 were living in residential provision and 86 were living with foster

families. Of the residential homes 14 were standard residential homes, 3 non-standard and 1 was a mother and baby placement. Of the Fostering families, 64 were standard family placements, 9 were for solo carers placements, a further 9 were for sibling placements, and 4 were mother and baby placements.

In terms of their demographics:

- 50 were female and 54 male. 19% were aged under 5, 17% were aged between 6 and 10, and 45% were between 11-15 years old, and 17% were over 16.
- In terms of ethnicity 68% were categorised as white British, 12% were Asian, 9% Black and 9% from Mixed backgrounds.
- Seventy-three had English as their first language
- Five were unaccompanied asylum seekers.

There were a variety of needs evidenced in the review;

- domestic violence (8),
- unaccompanied asylum seekers (10)
- fostering placement breakdown (9)
- new born, 2 children were yet to be born and 5 were new-born. Two were cases of drug dependency.
- There were 21 cases of absconding behaviour.
- Mental health was a significant issue; Self-harm 11 cases. 7 were identified as having therapeutic care needs (3 of these were Residential placements and 4 Fostering). 6 had made threats or attempts at suicide.
- CSE was a factor in 19 cases: 7 children had experienced current or historical CSE; while a further 12 cases were identified as vulnerable to or at risk of CSE.
- 11 were identified as having substance misuse issues. In 7 of these cases cannabis was stated to be the drug abused, while others were unspecified.
- 14 had been or had shown potential to be violent, towards staff or other children.
- Special Needs: 4 were identified as having an ASD and 3 were indicated to have SEN issues.

### What do our staff say regarding this mini-needs analysis?

As part of the development of this strategy, a staff focus group assured the conclusions regarding the needs of our children and young people. Broadly, they were in agreement with the broad outline of needs contained within this section with five additions. The additional issues were raised by the workforce:

- They thought there should be a greater emphasis placed on behaviour and emotional issues being a key need especially in the 11-15 age group.
- There seem to be more sibling groups being looked after.
- They thought there were significant mental health needs being partly masked by different labels and professional perspectives.
- The needs of children and young people are complex and multi-faceted.
- Needs are becoming more complex which is reflected in the range of needs being described.

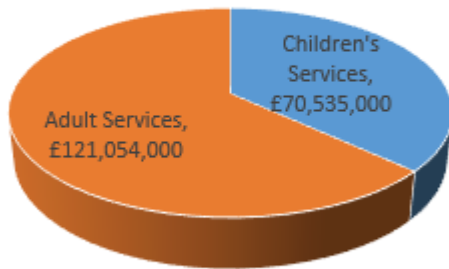
There is a great deal of synergy between the Children in Need of Care and Support Census, staff and provider views and the needs of our Children Looked After from the desktop analysis. There is a consistent picture on the range of needs.



# Financial Analysis

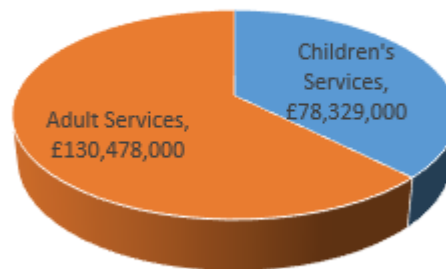
The financial support that is required to ensure that services are available and suitable to meet the needs of vulnerable families and individuals in Cardiff is significant.

Social Services Budget 2021/22  
£191,589,000



■ Children's Services ■ Adult Services

Social Services Budget 2022/23  
£208,807,000



■ Children's Services ■ Adult Services

Social Services budgets are a key element of Council costs and work has been focused in the past 12 months to increase the visibility of service performance and its financial impact. Work with corporate colleagues in the Resources Directorate has been exceptional and information based decision making is helping to ensure that the financial impact of implementing service priorities are planned from the outset.

It should be noted:

- Improved value for money has been achieved with increasing use of kinship arrangements and increased in house fostering provision reducing the dependency on external fostering providers. In particular real gains have been achieved in relation to in-house fostering provision for pre-school and primary age children.
- Cost avoidance savings of £4.5 million have been realised as a result of shifting the balance of care.
- The Joint Recovery Service has received £1.4 million from the Regional Integration Fund (RIF).

In previous years, financial planning has been based on the evidence of previous demand and likely population growth but the impact of the pandemic has made predicting demand challenging indeed. In recognition of these challenges Welsh Government have provided a temporary COVID-19 Recovery Fund to assist us to address immediate issues. We very much welcome this additional resource and our use of the Recovery Fund demonstrates our commitment in Cardiff to prioritizing the needs of children, young people and their families and those that care for them.

Additional financial information and analysis, including that relating to the cost of implementing our plans will be provided in the next six monthly update of this strategy.

# Analysis & Key Messages

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## What are the trends we can expect to see?

Analysis of the data above suggests the following:

- The total population of children and young people in Cardiff has been on an upward trend in recent years. The population increase is likely to peak in 2023.
- The peak is expected to last until 2028 for children aged eleven and older.
- Most of our children looked after fall into the 11 and over age band, although some are younger.
- There is potential that the peak in numbers of children looked after could be higher and last for longer than the general population. This is because there are currently fewer children and young people ending care than starting care. We expect the unprecedented impact of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, the increase in pressures on mental health, and the knock-on effect to other Adverse Childhood Experiences such as substance misuse and domestic abuse to continue to increase demand for placements.
- Cardiff's rates of children looked after are in excess of the Wales average, but this is not unexpected given the area's city characteristics. Despite its population size and demographics, Cardiff is not an outlier among the rates of looked after children in Welsh Local Authorities.
- There is increasing complexity in the needs of children and young people being looked after, with a notable increase in the impact of emotional mental health and wellbeing needs requiring larger numbers of specialist placements.
- The effect of the pandemic has been particularly severe on disabled people and there is potential that without mitigation, the disproportionate increase in the number of disabled children becoming looked after could continue.
- It is difficult to predict trends in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children since rates are affected by global factors which lead people from other countries to seek a safe home in the UK, together with the numbers presenting and dispersed to Cardiff. The number is not expected to decrease.

## What does the intelligence tell us about the shape of provision?

- There is a high degree of stability for most children who are looked after in Cardiff. But there currently remains an imbalance between in-house and externally commissioned services which adds complexity to achieving our not-for-profit objective. We are however beginning to see a shift arising from work in recent years, and have plans which we anticipate will further shift the balance towards achieving our aim.
- We are making good progress in shifting the balance of care by increasing number of children and young people living with their own families or with people connected to their own families - 'placed with parents' or in 'kinship' arrangements. We are also making progress in recruiting more in-house foster carers. As a result, use of external fostering is decreasing in both relative and absolute numbers. This is significant as it is within a context of an increasing number of children looked after. We expect the recent launch of Foster Wales to improve this further.
- There remain however too many out of area placements made for reasons of local sufficiency.

The majority of out of area placements are in South Wales, reflecting the particular challenges of finding either in-house or externally commissioned placements within a city.

- Residential placement sufficiency is a significant issue in particular. Although the rate of external residential has remained a constant proportion of total placements. The market is not currently able to meet the shifting demand for increased numbers of placements for young people with complex emotional and mental health needs.
- There is limited therapeutic residential provision in the Cardiff area, resulting in the need for out of area services or bespoke placements.
- Too often external residential placements breakdown and children have to move to another provider.
- In addition to the challenge of adding residential capacity to the portfolio, during the year there have been a number of external provider performance issues and providers entering escalating concerns. Some of those issues were as a result of COVID-19 and its impact on staffing.
- We have recently seen an increase in the number and consistency of children being placed in unregulated placements because we have not been able to source from the market regulated placements to meet needs.
- It has been challenging for us and for external providers to find properties to develop into children's homes in Cardiff. This is more difficult in Cardiff than surrounding areas because of the extent to which the housing market is competitive and property prices are higher. Despite this, we have increased our children's home portfolio from one to three in recent years, and have worked with external providers to add additional external children's home capacity within the City. Further additions are planned.
- We have identified that the North Yorkshire Model has potential to have a substantial positive impact across our placements. In Yorkshire the model has reduced for that local authority, the use of external agency, the use of out of county placements, and reduce the duration of residential care. As such this model should significantly aid us in achieving our not-for-profit objective. We are working closely with North Yorkshire to develop a 'Right Place' model for Cardiff, and develop Safe Accommodation as part of a Joint Recovery Service. Using a No Wrong Door approach, the model is particularly resilient and effective, because it links professionals across agencies to support children across residential, fostering, edge of care, and leaving care settings, leading wholesale change in a complex system.
- A key feature of the North Yorkshire Model is that it positions complex issues systemically within relationships rather than in children or people. This aligns importantly with four of the five priorities in Cardiff's Corporate Parenting Strategy. These priorities were identified through engagement with looked after children and young people who told us what they wanted for their futures. The four priorities are:
  - Improving emotional wellbeing and physical health
  - Better connections, improved relationships
  - A comfortable, safe and stable home whilst in care and after
  - Celebrating our children and young people
- Further collection and analysis of data and intelligence is required to improve capacity and model services for children at risk of exploitation, children in the Youth Justice System, teenagers, sibling groups, step down from residential, disabled children, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, children from different ethnic and cultural background. This will be included in future six monthly updates of this strategy.

**"I want to live in Cardiff. I've been all over Wales and it doesn't work"**





# Children's Services

## Commissioning Priorities

Our commissioning priorities set out below reflect our commitment to working in partnership to improve outcomes for our children looked after.

The Cardiff 'Corporate Parenting Strategy' sets out the shared vision of the Cardiff Council and the University Health Board for children looked after.

'A child who is cared for by the Council has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent. Every good parent knows that children require a safe and secure environment in which to grow and thrive. Parents protect and support their children against the dangers and risks of life. Parents are ambitious for them and want them to reach their potential. Parents celebrate and share in their achievements.'

This Commissioning strategy aims to contribute to this vision with a particular focus on 'safe and secure environments in which to grow and thrive, and parents protect and support their children against the dangers and risks of life'. It will contribute through focusing on 4 key objectives, under which there are 9 priorities which will collectively deliver our commissioning intention.

**Our Commissioning Intention is 'the right homes for our Children Looked After'**

To deliver this we will need to deliver all three Practice, Place and People Priorities of our 'Striving for Excellence Strategy'.

**Our Placement Strategy objectives are:**

1. **Shifting the Balance of Care:** To ensure we are working with families at the lowest safe level of intervention and minimizing the need for children to become looked after.
2. **The Right Place:** the right model of care.
3. **Sufficiency:** increasing the availability of local placements.
4. **To be responsive:** through better needs analysis.

Our analysis of need, and the experiences of our young people, has enabled us to develop the following commissioning priorities:

1. **Early Help and Support to Families:** To develop a range of support services to ensure children can remain at home with their families when it is in their best interests to do so.
2. **Supporting children to return safely to their own homes:** To embed and extend implementation of the Re-unification Framework to support children to return safely to their own homes when it is safe to do so.
3. **Therapeutic and Mental Health Support:** To respond to the therapeutic and mental health and well-being needs of Children Looked After, their parents and carers through the development of a range of services with partners.
4. **Reshaping Support for Disabled Children:** To redesign the pathway for disabled children, including the development of a greater range of support, activity, short break, looked after placements and emergency provision.
5. **Support for Children at Risk of Exploitation:** To implement the Safeguarding Adolescents From Exploitation (SAFE) model across placements and partners, to address and protect children who are looked after from the disproportionate risks of exploitation, criminalisation and the recent increase in serious youth violence.
6. **Our Fostering Service:** To increase the number of children looked after by local authority foster carers.

7. **Our Children's Homes:** To increase the range of local authority residential services to meet the demand from children with most complex needs and continue to invest in our existing portfolio.
8. **Our Commissioned Providers:** To increase the availability of local placements through our collaborative market engagement with Providers to shape provision to better meet the needs of our children and young people. Embedding not-for profit models in the commissioning arrangements wherever possible.
9. **Needs Analysis:** To further develop our understanding of the needs of this important group of children and young people by completing a detailed needs analysis.

As this commissioning program is implemented provision will be accessible to all young people based on their own unique set of circumstances, including; those affected by disability and ill health, those affected by adverse childhood experiences, those from BME communities and those affected by any form of exploitation including unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

The 9 commissioning intentions are explained in more detail on the following pages.



# Objective 1: Shifting the Balance of Care

To ensure we are working with families at the lowest safe level of intervention.

## 1. Early Help and Support to Families

**Priority 1:** To develop a range of support services to ensure children can remain at home with their families when it is in their best interests to do so.

**Outcome:** Fewer children will require commissioned placements.

**Progress:** We have implemented an Interventions Hub to bring together all our in-house interventions. This includes Family Intervention and Support Service (FISS) workers, on call out of hours FISS, Rapid Response workers, Think Safe! and our Adolescent Resource Centre. This has enabled one referral pathway to request support services whilst also improving clarity of roles, reducing duplication, and helping to ensure that children and their families receive the right support from the right person at the right time.

A Family Group Conferencing Service is now commissioned. The number of children remaining with their families in kinship arrangements is increasing, as has the number of children who are on a Care Order but placed with their parents.

During the year we have undertaken a review of children on Placement Orders with prospective adopters, who are not yet placed for adoption.

We have also introduced a Reviewing Hub that builds on the services we already had in place for children on the Child Protection Register and children looked after. This independent review of all children in need of care and support will improve our planning and help to ensure that cases are stepped up and down in a timely manner. It will help us to evidence that children and their families are receiving the right support from the right person at the right time, and reassurance that cases are being managed and closed appropriately.

### Actions:

1. Continue work to discharge Care Orders for children who are placed with their parents where it is appropriate to do so.
2. Work to convert kinship arrangements to Special Guardianship Orders.
3. An integrated edge of care service, based on the North Yorkshire Model is being developed.

**Financial Assumption:** Prevention of placement cost.

## 2. Supporting children to Return Safely to their Own Homes

**Priority 2:** To embed and extend implementation of the Re-unification Framework to support children to return safely to their own homes when it is safe to do so.

**Outcome:** Where it is in their best interests to do so, children who return to live with their families will achieve better individual outcomes. They will not require placements.

**Progress:** The Reunification Framework, was launched during 2021/22. A Reunification Team comprising a principal social worker, social worker and 4 support workers has been set up. In the first instance the team are working with young people subject to section 76 (voluntary care) or who have been looked after for a period of 2 and a half years.

### Actions:

1. Use the Reviewing Hub to ensure cases are appropriately stepped up or down.
2. Broaden the range of cases under the Reunification Team over time.

**Financial Assumption:** Reduction in costs by moving from higher cost to lower cost placements / placement end.

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## Objective 2: The Right Place

### The right model of care

### 3. Therapeutic and Mental Health Support

**Priority 3:** To respond to the therapeutic and mental health and well-being needs of children looked after, their parents and carers through the development of a range of therapeutic service with partners.

This includes the development of a Joint Recovery Service including Safe Accommodation, for children and young people requiring wraparound support. This is a new service which will provide an integrated response to young people requiring support to be safely discharged from hospital following an episode of emotional distress.

**Outcome:** Children and young people will become more resilient, having received wrap around emotional mental health support. We will achieve this by improving the support, training and model of working provided to staff, carers and parents. Young people with the most serious mental health or emotional wellbeing difficulties will be discharged with less delay from hospital.

**Progress:** We are rolling out a trauma informed workforce across all our teams and services. The Enfys service provides specific consultation and advice to foster carers and social workers to help them to understand the child and respond to their individual needs in a therapeutic trauma informed way. We are developing a Joint Recovery Service composed of accommodation and outreach services for children and young people with the highest needs, in partnership with mental health and psychology services.

**Actions:**

1. Continue trauma informed training.
2. Put in place the developments arising from the Short, Medium and Long Term workstreams of the Children and Young People in Emotional Distress Project. Beginning with the recruitment of the Assertive Outreach Team to work across all three phases.
3. Complete market engagement process and event for the Joint Recovery Service.
4. Commence Joint Recovery Service commissioning process to deliver provider solution.
5. Joint Recovery Service implementation, including set up and development of appropriate pathways and connections to in-house and external delivery.
6. The University Health Board are recruiting to posts including a lead psychologist for the Joint Recovery service.
7. Implement the Safeguarding Adolescents From Exploitation (SAFE) model across the Directorate and work with partners to address the recent increase in serious youth violence.
8. Ensure the service is compliant with Liberty Protection Safeguarding legislation.

**Financial Assumption:** The Joint Recovery Service has received £1.4 million from the Regional Integration Fund (RIF).

### 4. Reshaping Support for Disabled Children

**Priority 4:** To redesign the pathway for disabled children, including the development of a greater range of support, activity, short break, looked after placements and emergency provision.



**Outcome:** The growing rate of disabled children becoming looked after because of family breakdown will be reduced. This is important because disabled people were among those who felt the impact of the pandemic most severely. The rate of family breakdown has been increasing.

**Progress:** A project has been established to oversee the development of services for children with disabilities, including the implementation of the action plan in response to the "Let Me Flourish" report. The initial focus of the project is to ensure that our in-house provision for overnight short breaks (Ty Storrie) is modernised and able to meet the demand and complexity of current caseloads. Options for the reshaping of Ty Storrie have been considered and the preferred design has been chosen - a 4 bed modular design. The detailed work is in the process of being commissioned.

**Actions:**

1. Develop an incremental pathway of support, activity and short break services which constitutes the Offer to disabled children and their families, to help prevent family breakdown and children becoming looked after.
2. Develop models and design / specification for further overnight short break accommodation to meet demand.
3. Develop models and design / specifications for local children's home(s), including shared care options.
4. Market sounding to determine if existing providers, procurement, in-house or hybrid arrangements offer the best route to reliable and cost-effective service delivery.

**Financial Assumption:** Invest to save through a pathway of incremental support to prevent family breakdown and subsequent placements. Capital funding is in place to modernise the current overnight short break accommodation (Ty Storrie). Funding has been identified to develop further children's homes for short breaks and / or residential placements.

## 5. Support for Children at Risk of Exploitation

**Priority 5:** To implement the Safeguarding Adolescents From Exploitation (SAFE) model across placements and partners, to address and protect children who are looked after from the disproportionate risks of exploitation, criminalisation and the recent increase in serious youth violence.

**Progress:** The SAFE framework has been reorganised consisting of layers of data and information gathering (including locality assessment work), the SAFE partnership group (action and task focused) and the SAFE policy group with oversight of priorities. This is all now supported by the SAFE project team who are liaising with staff from all partners across Cardiff.

**Actions:**

1. All partners are ensuring their staff are fully appraised of the SAFE approach.
2. Locality assessments are ongoing.
3. An action plan will arise from the finding of locality assessments and be reviewed and monitored via the Partnership and Policy groups

**Financial assumption:** Investment in this model of will increase placement stability, reduce breakdown and escalation of need to more costly provision or custodial sentences. Appropriate intervention will result in avoidance of costs to the public sector across individual lifetimes.



## Objective 3: Sufficiency

### Increasing the availability of local placements

#### 6. Our Fostering Service

**Priority 6:** To increase the number of children looked after by local authority foster carers.

**Outcome:** Cardiff Council's position as a commissioner will be improved in the market by being less reliant on external suppliers, and better able to target areas where there are gaps in provision.

**Progress:** Foster Wales was launched in July 2021. It is the nationwide collective of the 22 Local Authority fostering teams including Cardiff. Its objectives include working collaboratively to increase the number of in-house foster carers available for placements. We have also redesigned our Local Fostering service with the aim of increasing our numbers of Internal Foster Carers and ensure the placement process is fit for purpose. Work to grow the in-house fostering service is progressing well with the number of in-house carers increasing from 104 to 114 during 2021/22 and an additional 18 full assessments in the pipeline. Campaigns to grow our in-house fostering service continue. We have recently appointed a Market Engagement Officer to develop the relationship between Cardiff and the Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), so they are better able to meet our needs. We have piloted a Teen Scheme which aims to help young people step down from residential to foster care and an e-bed which is dedicated to emergency placements.

#### Actions:

1. Implement the All Wales Fostering Brand.
  2. Improve the placement finding process.
  3. We are currently focusing on attracting carers specifically for children with disabilities, teenagers and parent and baby placements. We will be broadening this further to attract carers who are able to take siblings specifically, for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, and to attract foster carers from ethnic and cultural backgrounds which better reflect the population of the city.
  4. Engagement with larger Independent Fostering Agencies and small independent providers to develop parent and baby placements, placements for teenagers, therapeutic placements and to revisit a step-down from residential & reunification model.
  5. We will work positively with Independent Fostering Agencies to transition to not-for-profit arrangements, through a programme of engagement events and forums. We hope to create a local culture of support and joint learning between commissioner, local authority foster care teams and local fostering providers.
- **Financial Assumption:** Significant financial gains have already been achieved in relation to the expansion of in-house fostering provision for pre-school and primary age children. Further gains are expected to be realised from the planned activity. This enables the Council to move towards achieving the not-for-profit objective.

#### 7. Our Children's Homes

**Priority 7:** To increase the range of local authority residential services to meet the demand from children with the most complex needs and continue to invest in our existing portfolio.

**Outcome:** We will have purposeful cost-effective residential provision in Cardiff, reducing the length of stays and the need for out of area placements. Local capacity will be increased. Our position as a commissioner will be improved in the market by being less reliant on third party providers. We will be better able to target areas where there are gaps in provision. This will result in fewer out of county placements.

**Progress:** During the year we have launched our Assessment Centre and Pop Up Pop Down Emergency Accommodation. A project group has been established to ensure that work to develop

our accommodation portfolio dovetails with our implementation of the Integrated Edge of Care Service (North Yorkshire Model).

**Actions:**

1. Design and develop 3 or 4 additional residential children's homes, including an additional short breaks home, and semi-independent accommodation for children looked after aged 16+ for care leavers and young people who cannot live with family and friends or independently, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who are subject to Age Assessments.
2. Refurbish our Crosslands Children's home.
3. Refurbish our Ty Storrie Short Breaks children's home.
4. Design and develop in-house elements of the Joint Recovery Service, including the therapeutic children's home.
5. Commission a range of furnished family homes across Cardiff, from existing Local Authority housing-stock, which can be utilised on a flexible basis by Children's Services.
6. Alongside the new homes we will create a skilled and experienced workforce that have the skills to achieve positive outcomes and sustain placements.

**Financial Assumption:** Funding is available. This investment will enable the Council to move towards realising the not-for-profit objective.

## 8. Our Commissioned Providers

**Priority 8:** To increase the availability of local placements through our collaborative market engagement with Providers, to shape provision to better meet the needs of our children and young people. Embedding not-for profit models in the commissioning arrangements wherever possible.

**Outcome:** Resilience will be built across the sector, by working in partnership to meet the needs of our children where they will best be met, with a view towards achieving plans for permanence. This will include a tiered approach to matching needs with resources so that the children with the highest needs are placed with carers who have the highest levels of expertise.

**Progress:** Engagement with Providers is already taking place and a more positive and collaborative relationship is being established. We have worked with local residential providers to secure an additional 4 residential beds in Cardiff in the last year, with more due to come on stream in 2022/23. We have worked with colleagues in Housing to secure an additional 15 Young Person's Gateway units in Cardiff, with more due to come on stream in 2022/23. We have also worked with the Salvation Army to open a 6-bed unit specifically for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children that opened in early 2022/23. We have recently appointed a Market Engagement Officer to further develop collaborative relationships with providers. Meetings have taken place with local small / medium enterprise (SME) providers in relation to the not-for profit objective and models are being considered, with mixed responses.

**Actions:**

1. Work with providers to shape the care market in line with the market position statement.
2. Increase the pace of existing market engagement to attract additional providers to share best practice and establish provision in the locality. These engagement mechanisms will include provider forums, the encouragement of specialism and direct individual engagement.
3. Market engagement regarding shortfall in therapeutic provision.
4. Continued engagement to encourage existing and new providers to enter not-for profit contractual agreements. This will include exploring legal and contractual options, exploring motivators and inhibitors, piloting and phasing of such arrangements.
5. Market engagement to identify a not-for-profit provider for elements of the Joint Recovery Service.
6. Engagement to develop a one-workforce ethos and culture, beginning with enabling external providers to access Council training.
7. Implement 'Quality Services: Delivering What Matters', the Cardiff & Vale of Glamorgan procedures for children, young people and adult's contracted care and support services, to ensure quality services and respond to escalating risks or concerns

**Financial Assumption:** That demand can be managed down sufficiently through our shifting the

Balance of Care and Sufficiency initiatives, along with our collaborative market engagement to make not-for-profit models attractive to market providers.



## Objective 4: To be responsive

### Through better needs analysis

#### 9. Needs Analysis

**Priority 9:** To further develop our understanding of the current and future needs of this important group of children and young people by completing a detailed needs analysis.

**Outcomes:** A dynamic and responsive Placement Commissioning Strategy which continues to deliver the right provision for the population as its needs change.

**Progress:** Provider sufficiency analysis is underway and provider monitoring systems are currently being re-designed to enable better strategic analysis.

**Actions:**

1. A set of needs assessments on key cohorts including placements resulting from; placement breakdown, children on the edge of care, children at risk or exploitation, and children with disabilities going into residential provision remain a priority.
2. Engagement with providers in relation to placements to teenagers, sibling groups, step down from residential, disabled children, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, children from different ethnic and cultural background.
3. Accommodation sufficiency analysis and cost of care analysis.
4. Review Commissioned services.
5. Engagement with workforce, to understand how best to attract and retain experienced staff, and how to best embed a mix of skills and multi-disciplinary working into teams.

**Financial Assumption:** A more detailed needs analysis will enable us to best design our provision to meet the evolving needs of the population. Thereby avoiding high cost out of area placements.

**“I am very grateful and extremely lucky, to have loving and caring foster carers who have made me feel a part of their family”**

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# Our Commissioning Approach

Commissioning can take place at many levels or scales, from micro (individual) to macro (Cardiff wide). There will be an optimal level of commissioning for all services – our task is to identify at what level commissioning should take place in order to meet need in the most efficient and effective way. This commissioning strategy is focused on both the individual child looked after and the provision we need across Cardiff to respond to their needs.

Our commissioning approach will strive to ensure we commission confidently, working in partnership with providers of quality services and partner organisations, engaging in continuous improvement resulting in services, which respond to the needs and aspirations of service users and carers.

The following diagram shows some of the key actions that are involved in our commissioning approach. Depending on the specific commissioning task different aspects of the commissioning cycle will be used.



IPC commissioning model

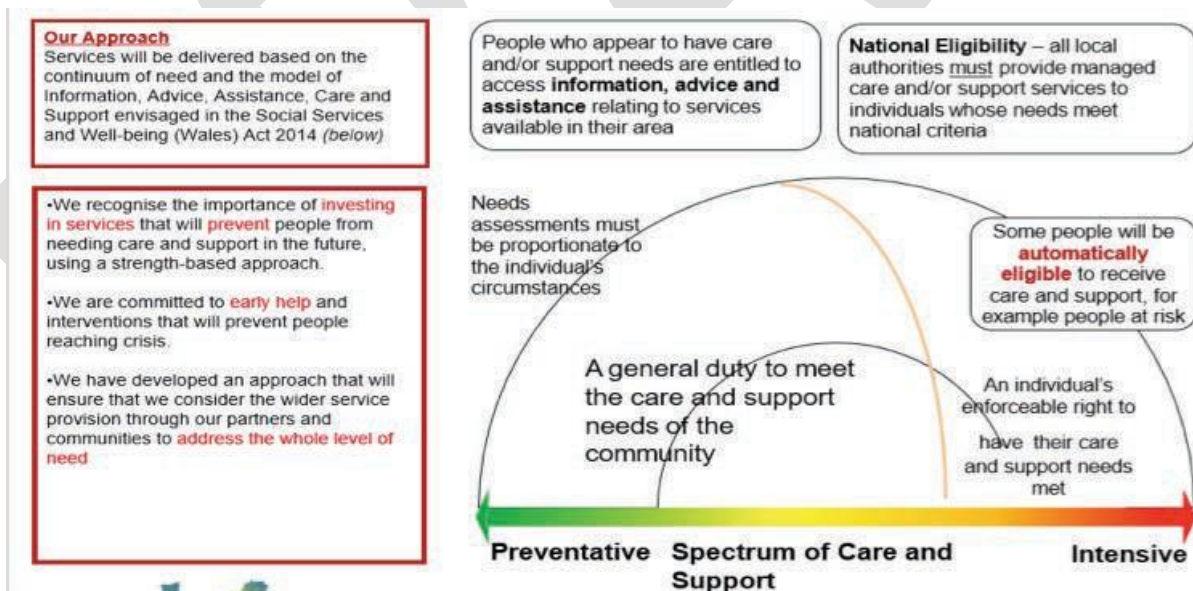
The key principles that drive our approach to commissioning are that all commissioned provision should be:

- Informed and listen to the voice of our children and young people,
- child centred, family focused, strength based and restorative,
- evidence based and trauma informed,
- appropriately skilled Carers,
- flexible and responsive,
- best value for money,
- outcome based.

Whether we are commissioning a service for an individual, or for a client group, it is essential that a common approach is used. This involves:

- Engaging with and taking ownership of a needs analysis,
- Using the business planning process to monitor our commitments,
- Basing our commissioning plans around meeting those commitments,
- Establishing what we can and can't provide and the risks of service failure,
- Gaining clarity over the finances available now and in the future,
- Joint planning with other authorities and partner organisations,
- Understanding and stimulating the Market,
- Maintaining robust monitoring and reporting to ensure quality assurance,
- Decommissioning services where there is no longer a need, or the need can best be met using an alternative approach.

Services will be delivered based on the continuum of need and the model of Information, Advice, Assistance, Care and Support envisaged in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (diagram 4)

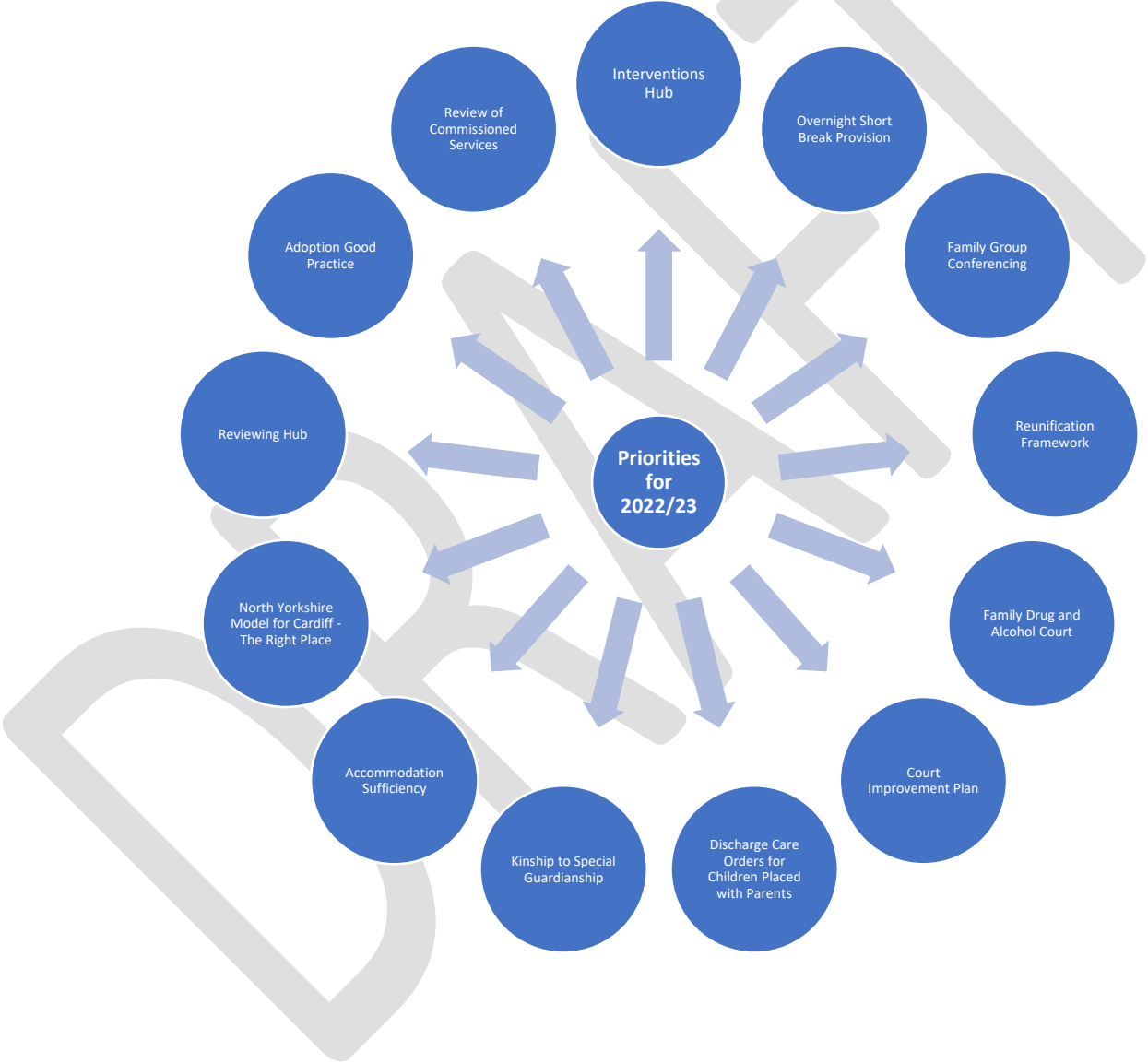


# Next Steps

The activities set out above will be delivered through the programmes established to achieve our Children's Services 'Delivering Excellence' Strategy.

The 3 diagrams below set out the Children's Services 'Striving for Excellence Strategy' priorities for 'Place', 'People' and 'Practice' in 2022/23.

**Place Priorities:** Ensuring a range of support in the community and a variety of homes for children are available in Cardiff.

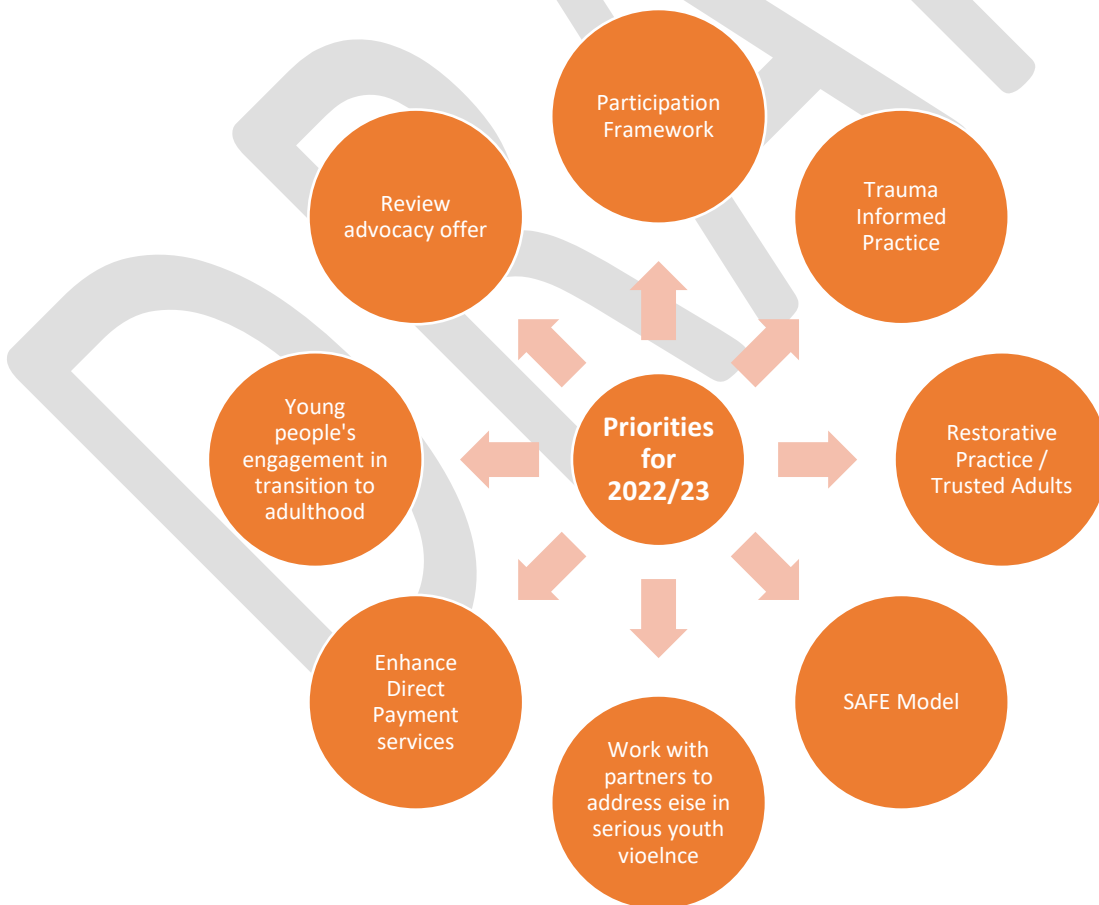


**People Priorities:** Supporting a permanent workforce. Further detail is available in our Workforce Strategy.





**Practice Priorities:** Developing our practice and procedures.



A considerable amount of this work has already been started and the programme will build on this

strength. A programme management approach will be put in place.

The governance of this programme will be through the existing Social Services Commissioning Board which meets monthly and is chaired by the Director of Social Services. A number of the priorities will involve partner agencies and they will be invited from the outset.

We will define success in six key ways:

- **Improved outcomes for our children and young people looked after.**
- **A stabilisation and then gradual reduction in demand for alternative family placements.**
- **More children and young people placed in Cardiff.**
- **A reduction in the use of residential placements.**
- **Better value for money.**
- **Reduction in use of for-profit placement provider.**



