

CABINET MEETING: 19 JANUARY 2022

CHILDREN'S SERVICES STRATEGY

**SOCIAL SERVICES (COUNCILLOR ASH LISTER/COUNCILLOR
NORMA MACKIE)**

AGENDA ITEM: 7

Reason for this Report

1. To enable Cabinet to consider the Children's Services Strategy for 2023-26.

Background

2. The previous Children's Services Strategy has come to an end and a new strategy has been developed to set out the vision and direction for service provision over the next 3 years. The detail of how the strategy will be implemented will be included in the annual Directorate Delivery Plan.
3. We have achieved a great deal over the duration of the previous Children's Services Strategy, much of which fell during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example we have:
 - a. Maintained service provision to our most vulnerable children and young people throughout the course of the pandemic.
 - b. Implemented the Safeguarding Adolescents From Exploitation (SAFE) model to improve our partnership response to criminal and sexual exploitation.
 - c. Increased the number of children who are looked after with their families in kinship arrangements.
 - d. Developed a holistic Quality Assurance Framework and started a practice development journey.
 - e. Implemented the Mind of My Own app to support children to have a voice.
 - f. Started the pilot of Family Drug and Alcohol Courts in Wales.
 - g. Implemented a Reviewing Hub to improve arrangements for reviews of children with a Care and Support Plan.
 - h. Implemented an Interventions Hub to bring together all of our in house support services.
 - i. Made considerable improvements to our Youth Justice Service, as recognised by the most recent inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation.

4. We are still facing a number of key challenges, many of which reflect national issues. The revised Children's Services Strategy sets out our approach to tackling these challenges, that include increasing demand and complexity, sufficiency of placements for children and recruitment and retention of experienced social workers. Further information is provided in the paragraphs below.

Issues

5. Children's Services are experiencing consistent high levels of demand and complexity, in part resulting from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. From 2019/20 to 2021/22 the number of referrals increased by 115% from 2,373 to 5,108. Whilst we have seen an increase in the number of children on the Child Protection Register and looked after during this time, the good work of the service has ensured that the increase has not filtered through the child's journey at this level. The number of children on the Child Protection Register increased by 74% from 253 to 439, but the increase in the number of children looked after was just 9% - from 955 to 1,040. A strategy is required to ensure that the Directorate is able to manage and respond to the demand for services, meet the needs of children who require care and support, and ensure that the children and young people in Cardiff are safeguarded. An overview of the increase in demand experienced is available at Appendix 6.
6. Key areas of concern are in relation to children and young people are as follows:
 - Increase in the number of children and young people experiencing serious emotional wellbeing and mental health issues and an increase in use of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.
 - Although fewer children are committing offences there is a significant increase in violent behaviour and the severity of offences being committed by young people, particularly in relation to serious youth violence.
7. This is all being experienced in the context of significant budget pressures, market sufficiency issues, and difficulty recruiting and retaining experienced social workers – which is further impacted by the recent negative representation of the social work profession in the media following recent child deaths.
8. The Children's Services Strategy sets out how we will seek to work with our partners to address these issues, using the least interventionist approach. We call this "shifting the balance" and we are focusing on three key areas:
 - Place – ensuring that children remain at home with their family where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
 - People – recruiting a permanent workforce and reducing our reliance on agency social workers.

- Practice - developing our practice to ensure it is strength based, trauma informed, restorative, research led and family focused.

Consultation

9. Children and young people were consulted with via the Advocacy Service, NYAS Cymru, and asked a series of questions about their experience of Children's Services so we can better understand what has, and has not, worked well for them. In addition to this a series of workshops were held with staff to obtain their views on what is / isn't working well and what we need to do next. This feedback was taken into account during the development of the strategy. We have also considered themes from complaints from children and young people, parents and carers to ensure that lessons are learned and feedback is considered when planning future developments. A record of the consultation undertaken with staff is available at Appendix 5.

Achieving Our Vision

10. The Children's Services Strategy is supported by our Workforce Strategy, Accommodation Strategy and Commissioning Strategy. Together, these set out how we will deliver our vision. Other strategies supporting our service delivery include the Corporate Parenting Strategy, Trauma Informed Strategy, Strategy for Children with Disabilities and Additional Learning Needs and Youth Justice Strategy.

Workforce Strategy

11. Our Workforce Strategy sets out our plans to address recruitment and retention issues and to ensure the ongoing development of our workforce. This includes our emphasis on prudent social work, whereby social workers only do what only social workers can do – with appropriate support from non qualified staff.
12. The Workforce Strategy sets out our principles and gives an overview of the work that we are prioritising to implement them:
 - a. **Children's Rights:** We will ensure that staff are aware of their obligation to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights and understand that they are accountable to children for meeting this obligation.
 - b. **Home First:** We will identify preventative measures and/or develop solutions that enable people in need of care and support and their families to be as independent as possible and safe. This will include steps to support people to live within their local community, as close as possible to home, family, and friends wherever appropriate.
 - c. **What Matters:** - We will listen to and work with young people and their families in need of care and support, to find solutions that meet their needs, keep them safe and enable them to reach their full potential.
 - d. **Sustainable Resources:** - We will make the best use of our resources to ensure quality outcomes and value for money. We will work with people and partners to develop a sustainable approach to support within

the community so that people can access good quality and cost-effective solutions to meet their needs.

13. A Workforce Action Plan to support implementation of the Strategy is under development and will be updated as part of our Directorate Planning process for 2023/24. The Workforce Strategy is attached at Appendix 2.
14. Key workforce developments, such as the potential implementation of the Trusted Adult model to address the impact of the current social work recruitment and retention issues will be set out in the Action Plan. The premise of this redesign is built upon the key principle that families wherever possible should have one consistent worker throughout their involvement with Children's Services. Social care practitioner posts would be created to undertake the trusted adult role (much like a key worker). Each family would be allocated a worker at the conclusion of the initial assessment where it was determined that there was a need for social work intervention. The key worker / Trusted Adult would hold the case for the duration of the time the family required input from Children's Services, and this would be determined via the statutory reviews undertaken by the Reviewing Hub and formal supervision. The requirement for input from a social worker would also be determined via formal supervision, statutory reviews, and any other key escalation points including child protection, issuing to Court for a Care Order or pre court proceedings work. The social worker would be seen as the expert practitioner who would hold complex cases, including all child protection cases. They would joint work alongside the key worker as and when required to provide expertise and to meet statutory guidance / requirements and would undertake specific short-term tasks as and when required.

Accommodation Strategy

15. Our Accommodation Strategy sets out the accommodation provision that we need to achieve the aims of our strategy. This strategy is closely linked with our work to implement The Right Place model in Cardiff (based on the North Yorkshire Model) and includes our ambitious plans to increase residential care provision for children and young people in Cardiff.
16. The strategy sets out how we will meet our commitments against the national context and the pressure areas that we need to address to meet local need. These are:
 - a. National context:
 - i. Provide additional specialist support for children with complex needs who may be on the edge of care.
 - ii. Explore radical reform of current services for children looked after and care leavers.
 - iii. Eliminate private profit from the care of children looked after.
 - iv. Fund regional residential services for children with complex needs ensuring their needs are met as close to home as

possible and in Wales wherever practicable.

- b. Local pressures:
 - i. Mainstream children looked after.
 - ii. Specialist mental health services and step-down from hospital.
 - iii. Short break requirements for children with disabilities and complex need.

17. The Accommodation Strategy is attached at Appendix 3.

Commissioning Strategy

18. Our Commissioning Strategy sets out how we will work with our partners 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. It takes account of the Welsh Government's "Programme for Government" for 2022-2027 which aims to transform Children's Services and remove profit from the care of children looked after.

19. The Commissioning Strategy is attached at Appendix 4.

Scrutiny Consideration

20. The Children's Services Strategy will be shared with the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committees at their meeting on 16th January. Any comments received will be circulated at the Cabinet meeting.

21. The Committee were given the opportunity to comment on the future direction of the service as part of the consultation that was undertaken during the production of the Local Authority Social Services Annual Report 2021/22. The comments made by Committee were taken account of during the development of the Children's Services Strategy.

Reasons for Recommendations

22. To receive the Striving for Excellence in Children's Services Strategy and related Strategy documents.

Legal Implications

23. Equality Requirements: In considering this matter the decision maker must have regard to the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010. Pursuant to these legal duties Councils must, in making decisions, have due regard to the need to (1) eliminate unlawful discrimination, (2) advance equality of opportunity and (3) foster good relations on the basis of protected characteristics. Protected characteristics are: (a) Age, (b) Gender reassignment, (c) Sex, (d) Race – including ethnic or national origin, colour or nationality, (e) Disability, (f) Pregnancy and maternity, (g) Marriage and civil partnership, (h) Sexual orientation (i) Religion or belief – including lack of belief.

24. When taking strategic decisions, the Council also has a statutory duty to have due regard to the need to reduce inequalities of outcome resulting from socio-economic disadvantage ('the Socio-Economic Duty' imposed under section 1 of the Equality Act 2010). In considering this, the Council must take into account the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers (WG42004 A More Equal Wales The Socio-economic Duty Equality Act 2010 (gov.wales) and must be able to demonstrate how it has discharged its duty.
25. Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ('the Act') places a 'well-being duty' on public bodies aimed at achieving seven national well-being goals for Wales – a Wales that is prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal, has cohesive communities, a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and is globally responsible.
26. In discharging its duties under the Act, the Council has set and published well-being objectives designed to maximise its contribution to achieving the national well-being goals. The well-being objectives relevant to this report are set out in Cardiff's Corporate Plan 2020-23. When exercising its functions, the Council is required to take all reasonable steps to meet its well-being objectives. This means that the decision makers should consider how the proposed decision will contribute towards meeting the well-being objectives and must be satisfied that all reasonable steps have been taken to meet those objectives.
27. The well-being duty also requires the Council to act in accordance with a 'sustainable development principle'. This principle requires the Council to act in a way which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Put simply, this means that Council decision makers must take account of the impact of their decisions on people living their lives in Wales in the future. In doing so, the Council must:
 - Look to the long term;
 - Focus on prevention by understanding the root causes of problems;
 - Deliver an integrated approach to achieving the seven national well-being goals;
 - Work in collaboration with others to find shared sustainable solutions;
 - Involve people from all sections of the community in the decisions which affect them.

Financial Implications

28. This report outlines the Children's Services Strategy which defines a set of targeted outcomes. The delivery of the strategy will be found from existing budgetary allocation to the service and any other grant funding streams identified for this purpose. Children's Services currently has a net budget of £79.816m with a further £2.175m held in contingency.
29. The report defines strategic goals and aspirations, but any additional schemes to implement the strategy are currently not costed and will be subject of separate approval. As schemes deriving from the implementation of the

strategy will have revenue and capital financing implications, business cases appraising different delivery options with detailed financial implications verified by finance will need to be authorised following sufficient oversight from appropriate levels of management across the authority.

30. The strategy timespan is for three years and the accommodation strategy details additional properties to increase residential placement provision within the authorities boundaries. The acquisition of these properties will have a longer lifespan than the strategy, and when capital expenditure is being incurred, there will need to be a longer planning horizon, with a risk assessment and consideration of mitigations that might be required, to ensure that assets being bought, created or reconfigured will continue to provide benefits to the council over the lifespan of the asset. The accommodation strategy notes previous Capital allocations that have not been utilised to date and the possibility of external grants to fund the acquisition and adaptation of properties. Further work will be required to ensure the accommodation strategy is affordable within the current funding envelope and utilisation of grants are in accordance with timescales and the terms and conditions of the individual grants.
31. Currently there are significant cost pressures within Children Services, as high-cost placements and bespoke care arrangements have arisen due to external changes since the pandemic and insufficient market capacity leading to increased prices. This has resulted in a projected overspend position in the Month 6 Outturn monitoring report. This strategy aims to manage and reduce the risk of significant overspends in future years through the implementation of several individual strands of work. Not included in the strategy is an implementation timetable or a risk assessment on the delivery of the strategy, which will need to be developed and delivered promptly to ensure corrective management actions can be taken to address the current financial challenges facing the service area and the authority. An appropriate financial monitoring mechanism will be required, aligned with performance indicators and delivery plans, to measure and communicate financial performance and cost effectiveness of schemes deriving from the strategy and ensure ongoing management control of schemes.

HR Implications

32. Appendix 4 Workforce Strategy sets out the HR aspects of the overall Strategy. Should any changes need to be made in order to implement said strategy full consultation will take place with Trade Unions and affected staff. Any changes will be made in line with corporately agreed policies and procedures.

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Property Implications

33. There are no further specific property implications in respect of the Children's Services Strategy Report. The Strategic Estates Department will assist where required in delivering Cardiff's Right Place Accommodation Strategy & Capital Plan. Where there are property transactions or valuations required to deliver any proposals, they should be done so in accordance with the Council's

relevant Asset Management process and in consultation with appropriate service areas.

RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is recommended to approve the Children's Services Strategy and associated appendices.

SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Deborah Driffield Director of Children's Services
	13 January 2023

The following Appendices are attached:

Appendix 1: Children's Services Strategy

Appendix 2: Workforce Strategy

Appendix 3: Accommodation Strategy

Appendix 4: Commissioning Strategy

Appendix 5: Record of Staff Consultation

Appendix 6: Demand Analysis

Appendix 7: EIA and Child rights impact assessment

The following Background Papers have been taken into account:

Local Authority Social Services Annual Report 2021-22