

# Children's Services Strategy 2023-26



**STRONGER  
FAIRER  
GREENER**



## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

We all have a part to play in doing our best to make sure our children and young people are safe and can achieve their very best here in Cardiff – a Child Friendly City.

Recent years have added pressures to an already busy and stretched service with the impact of the pandemic still being seen and more and more children and young people having complex needs and living in challenging circumstances.

This refreshed strategy reflects on all aspects of the services we offer, in an honest way, highlighting our progress but also where we have further to go. We know that we have three key areas of work we have to undertake to improve our services as much as possible – Place, People and Practice – and our Strategy for 2023-26 outlines just how we will work across the Council and with partners to achieve our aims.

We would like to thank all staff across our services for their dedication, passion and commitment to doing all they can so that children and young people can lead happy, healthy, safe lives.



## INTRODUCTION

At Cardiff Children's Services our vision is clear – we want 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, enabling them to remain with family where it is safe for them to do so. We call this shifting the balance of care for the children and young people in our city. We will take a trauma informed approach to our practice. This is a strengths-based approach which seeks to understand and respond to the impact of trauma on people's lives. It emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone and aims to empower individuals to re-establish control of their lives.

This strategy sets out our plan to deliver this progressive change for children in Cardiff with a focus on shifting the balance in 3 key areas:

- Ensuring a range of support in the community and a variety of homes for children are available in Cardiff - **place**.
- Supporting a permanent workforce – **people**.
- Developing our **practice** and procedures.

We will ensure that children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled, and that children and families are at the centre of the work that we undertake with them throughout their journey through our service. We will ensure that children are aware that they have rights, and what their rights are. We will also 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. To this end we have undertaken a Child's Rights Impact Assessment to inform 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.

The strategy takes account of the feedback we received from children and young people in relation to our annual report for 2021/22. We built upon this with further consultation and engagement with children and young people throughout the development of the strategy, informing our vision and direction of travel for 2022/25. We have also consulted with our workforce and partners to ensure that our vision is shared and understood.



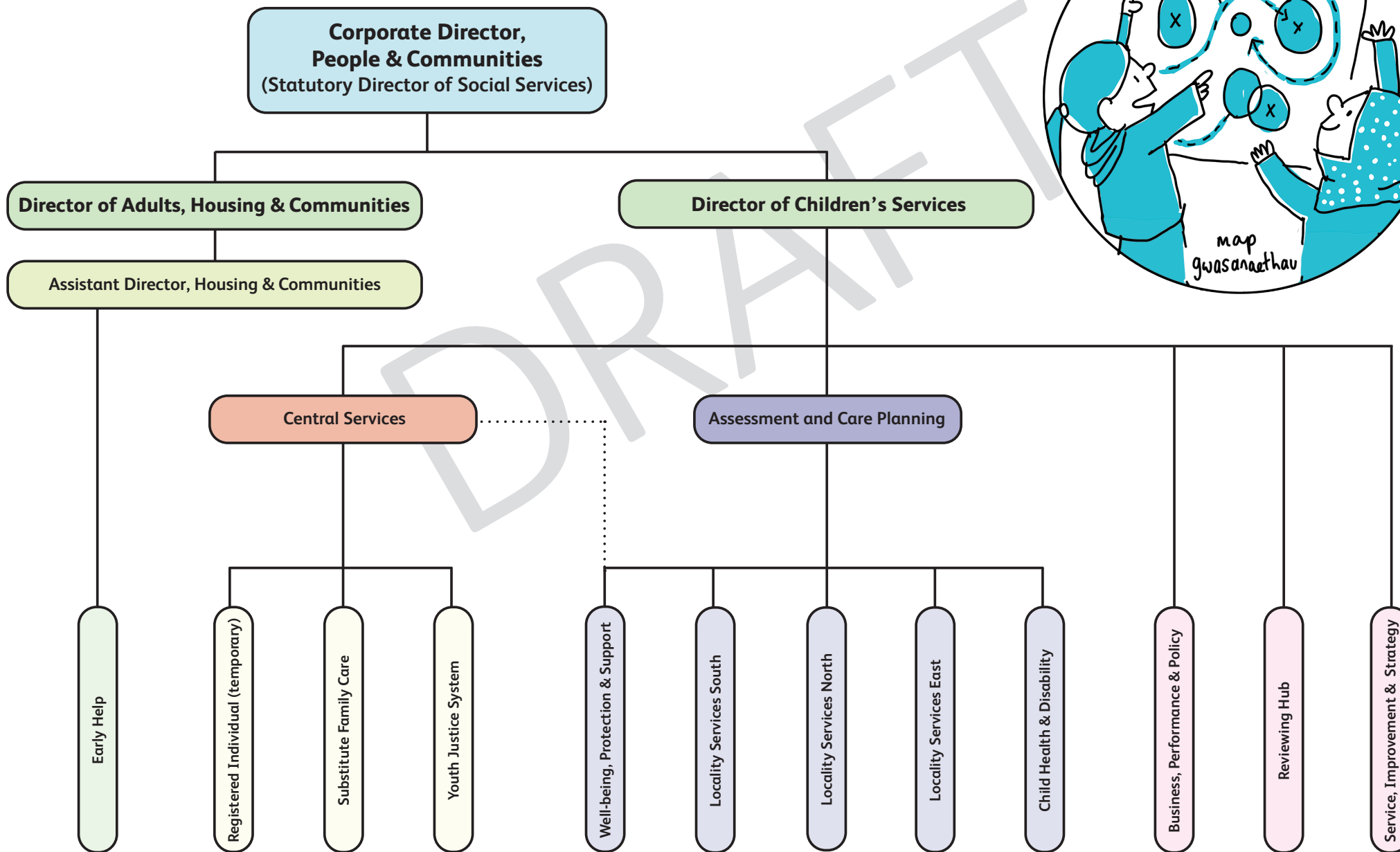
## OUR VISION

CHILDREN IN CARDIFF ARE PROVIDED WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT, FROM THE RIGHT PERSON AT THE RIGHT TIME, IN THE RIGHT PLACE AND AT THE LOWEST SAFE LEVEL OF INTERVENTION, ENABLING THEM TO REMAIN WITH THEIR FAMILY WHERE IT IS SAFE FOR THEM TO DO SO AND ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL.

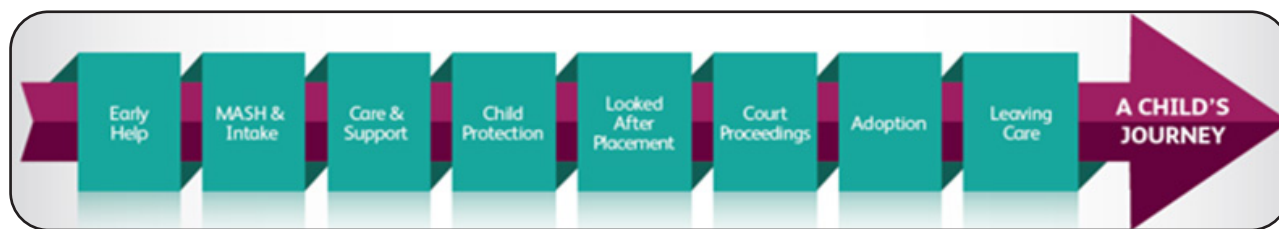
*#KeepingFamiliesTogether*



An overview of our structure and a brief summary of the child's journey is set out below, followed by an overview of the work that we are doing to achieve our vision.



## THE CHILD'S JOURNEY



### Early Help

- Cardiff Family Advice and Support offer a range of information, advice and assistance for children and their families. The team provide information and advice – for example on family life, child behaviour, childcare, parental support, employment, money and housing.

### Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Intake & Assessment (I&A)

- MASH are the first point of contact for safeguarding referrals from professionals. Where it is considered that further action is required, the referral is passed on to I&A for a wellbeing assessment and / or child protection investigation.

### Care and Support

- Where an assessment concludes that a child or young person needs care and support, a care plan is co-produced with the family and reviewed to monitor achievement of outcomes.

### Child Protection

- Where a child protection investigation concludes that a child is suffering, or at risk from suffering, abuse or neglect, a multi agency child protection conference is convened to decide whether the child should be placed on the Child Protection Register.
- Where a child's name is placed on the Child Protection Register, a multi agency plan is co-produced with the family and reviewed to monitor achievement of outcomes.

### Children Looked After

- Where a child is not able to remain safely at home with their parents or extended family, they will need to be "looked after" by the local authority. This may be because the parents are too unwell to look after the child, the child is disabled and has needs that the parents / family are not able to meet, or Children's Services may have intervened because an assessment concluded that the child was at significant risk of harm.

### Court Proceedings

- When a child become looked after because of concerns for their safety, the child is usually the subject of a court-made legal order. This gives the local authority shared Parental Responsibility for the child.

### Adoption

- Adoption is a way of providing a child or children who cannot be raised by their own parents with a new family. Adoption is a legal procedure which transfers the parental responsibility for the child to the adoptive parents.

### Leaving Care

- Young people who are care leavers are entitled to receive services and support up to age 25.

## SHIFTING THE BALANCE OF CARE - PLACE

### The issue that we are facing:

The lack of sufficiency of placements and accommodation for children looked after and care leavers has resulted in an increase in the number of children being placed in high cost placements and homes operating without registration. The duration of these placements has also increased. This is not in the best interest of the child and impacts on our ability to manage the market. It also has a subsequent impact on our ability to manage our budget.

### Our response to the issue:

We are looking for innovative solutions and developing 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, including:

- Implementing a Reviewing Hub
- Developing our short break provision
- Embedding a Reunification Framework
- Discharging Care Orders for children placed with their parents
- Converting kinship care arrangements to Special Guardianship Orders
- Developing the North Yorkshire Model for Cardiff – The Right Place

### The actions we will take:

The key actions that we will take to shift the balance to support children to remain at home, return home from being looked after or achieve permanence for children who need to be looked after are set out below. The detail of how we will implement these actions will be set out in our Directorate Delivery Plans - taking account of feedback from consultation with staff and young people.



## SHIFTING THE BALANCE OF CARE – PEOPLE / WORKFORCE

### The issue that we are facing:

We are experiencing an issue with the recruitment and retention of social workers, and particularly experienced social workers. This leads to over reliance on agency social workers which impacts on consistency of workers for children and families and our ability to manage the market - with a subsequent impact on budgets.

### Our response to the issue:

We have developed and are implementing a Workforce Strategy with a focus on recruiting and retaining social workers. The purpose of the Strategy is to attract both newly qualified and experienced social workers to Cardiff, and retain them when they are in post. 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.

Recruitment pressures mean that we simply cannot appoint more social workers to meet the rising demands. Instead, we are implementing innovative solutions quickly to meet the demands and address the wider COVID-19 harms. This includes a focus on prudent social work – ensuring that social workers only do what only social workers can do. One option that we are exploring is how to implement the NEST (Nurturing, Empowering, Safe and Trusted) trusted adult concept using key workers who don’t necessarily need to be social workers. This approach recognises the importance of having a trusted adult so children and young people have an adult in their life who understands them and who they can turn to when they are feeling sad, worried or angry.

### The actions we will take:

The key actions that we will take to shift the balance to a primarily permanent workforce with agency workers being used in exceptional and short term circumstances only are set out below. The detail of how we will implement these actions will be set out in our Directorate Delivery Plans - taking account of feedback from consultation with staff and young people.





## SHIFTING THE BALANCE OF CARE - PRACTICE

### The issue that we are facing:

There has been a continued and significant rise in demand for services and complexity of issues presented by children and their families throughout the child's journey. This is impacting on our ability to allocate and manage cases, leading to inconsistency of social workers for children and a risk of cases drifting and care plans not being progressed. It also has a subsequent impact on our ability to manage budgets.

### Our response to the issue:

We have undertaken a systems review to help us to ensure that our processes are streamlined, and our services are future proofed so we can respond to the increase in demand and complexity. We will be focusing on our front door to address failure demand and shift our approach to supporting families, so we take a more integrated wellbeing approach, working to families' strengths to provide them with the support that they need. This focus on integrated prevention services will ensure that risk is managed appropriately throughout the service to safeguard children effectively and reduce the potential for a risk averse and oppressive practice.

We are developing our practice to ensure it is strength based, trauma informed, restorative, research led and family focused. This will involve a change in culture across the whole of the directorate that will be supported by our new Training and Development Framework. This change will start with staff induction, continue with support for social workers in their first year in practice and provide ongoing support for career progression. We will ensure ongoing learning and development using our Quality Assurance Framework. Implementing restorative practices will provide staff with a range of language, behaviours and tools that will strengthen their relationships with children, young people and families, empowering them to share responsibility by using a solution-focused approach, which supports positive change. We have also introduced Practice Leads who are working well with the teams - delivering support to upskill newly qualified workers and help us to improve practice and consistency of practice across the Directorate.

Our Participation Framework will set out how we ensure that our strategies and plans are shaped by the lived experience of children and young people, reflect the principles of a child's rights approach and ensure that the child is at the centre of all we do.

### The actions we will take:

The key actions that we will take to shift the balance of our practice are set out below. The detail of how we will implement these actions will be set out in our Directorate Delivery Plans - taking account of feedback from consultation with staff and young people.



## WELSH GOVERNMENT CONTEXT

The Welsh Government’s Programme for Government sets out the ten well-being objectives which they believe will make the greatest contribution towards achieving the long term well-being goals for Wales. These are:

### THE TEN WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES ARE:

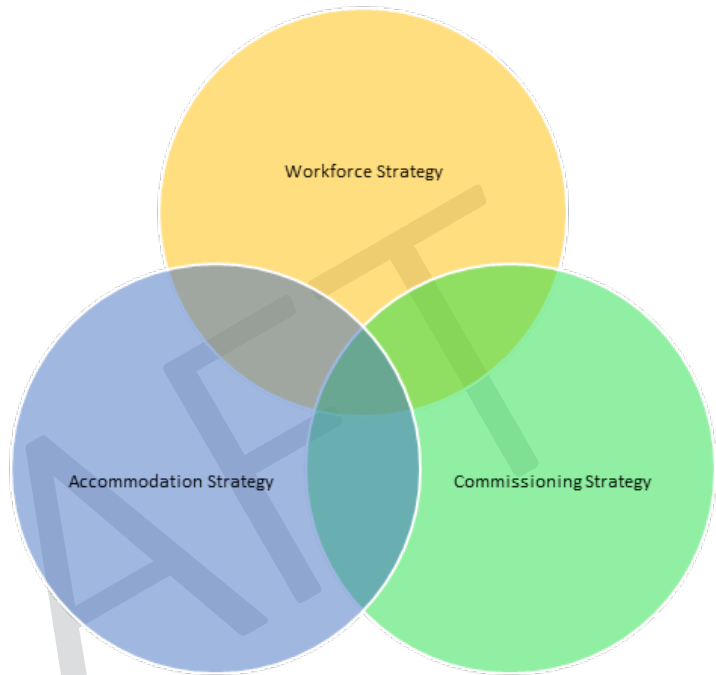
Provide effective, high quality and sustainable healthcare	Continue our long-term programme of education reform, and ensure educational inequalities narrow and standards rise
Protect, re-build and develop our services for vulnerable people	Celebrate diversity and move to eliminate inequality in all of its forms
Build an economy based on the principles of fair work, sustainability and the industries and services of the future	Push towards a million Welsh speakers, and enable our tourism, sports and arts industries to thrive
Build a stronger, greener economy as we make maximum progress towards decarbonisation	Make our cities, towns and villages even better places in which to live and work
Embed our response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do	Lead Wales in a national civic conversation about our constitutional future, and give our country the strongest possible presence on the world stage

The commitment to eliminate private profit from social care sits underneath the well-being objective to protect, re-build and develop services for vulnerable people. This is part of the wider strategy to keep families together wherever possible and to reduce the number of children and young people looked after away from home. We are driving this forward via our aim to shift the balance of care (place) set out on page 7 above – including our work to implement The Right Place model and our new Accommodation Strategy.



## STRATEGIES AND PLANS

The Children's Services Strategy sets out our overall vision and direction and 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.



## MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The detail of how we will deliver our Children's Services Strategy is set out in our Directorate Delivery Plan and our effectiveness and progress are monitored via our Local Authority Social Services Annual Report.



A visual representation of our Directorate Delivery Plan is below:

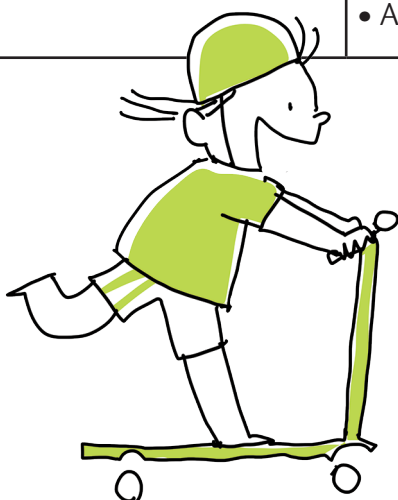


## KEY THEMES FROM ENGAGEMENT EXERCISES

As part of the production of the revised Children’s Services Strategy, engagement sessions have been undertaken with children and young people and staff. Key themes emerging from these sessions are set out below. We have also taken into account feedback received as part of the challenge process during the production of the Local Authority Social Services Annual Report. This feedback will be used to shape the steps that we take to implement the Children’s Services Strategy – these will be clearly set out in the Children’s Services Directorate Delivery Plan. A detailed overview of the consultation sessions is available at Appendix 4.

Shifting the Balance of Care – Place - Staff		
What’s working well	What we are worried about	What we need to do next
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interventions Hub</li> <li>• Family Group Conferencing (FGC)</li> <li>• Kinship / Special Guardianship Orders</li> <li>• Family Drug and Alcohol Court pilot</li> <li>• In house fostering and residential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrangements for Rapid Response</li> <li>• Consistency of use of FGC</li> <li>• Consistency of approach</li> <li>• Arrangements for when pilot ends</li> <li>• Placement sufficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Rapid Response</li> <li>• Embed use of FGC</li> <li>• Improve consistency</li> <li>• Plan for end of pilot</li> <li>• Develop in house services</li> </ul>

Shifting the Balance of Care – People / Workforce - Staff		
What’s working well	What we are worried about	What we need to do next
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced vacancy rate</li> <li>• Hybrid working</li> <li>• Return to face to face visits</li> <li>• Resource Assistants</li> <li>• Induction</li> <li>• Supervision</li> <li>• Practice leads</li> <li>• Locality approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment / retention</li> <li>• Caseloads / demand</li> <li>• Complexity and vicarious trauma</li> <li>• Media portrayal of profession</li> <li>• Consistency across service - e.g. practice leads, supervision, induction</li> <li>• Time to undertake training</li> <li>• Awareness of services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review offer to staff</li> <li>• Prudent social work</li> <li>• Develop resilience of workforce</li> <li>• Improve comms</li> <li>• Improve consistency</li> <li>• Upskill workforce</li> <li>• Service directory</li> </ul>



Shifting the Balance of Care – Practice - Staff		
What's working well	What we are worried about	What we need to do next
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Justice Service</li> <li>• Reviewing Hub</li> <li>• Care planning</li> <li>• Engagement / participation</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> <li>• Transition</li> <li>• Trauma Informed Practice</li> <li>• Child Health &amp; Disability Needs Panel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rise in knife crime</li> <li>• Placement breakdowns</li> <li>• Consistency across service - e.g. planning / engagement / advocacy / transition / trauma informed</li> <li>• Too many panels</li> <li>• Waiting lists - CAMHS / Enfys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop partnership work</li> <li>• Improve chronologies</li> <li>• Improve consistency across service</li> <li>• Streamline panels</li> <li>• Improve referral process</li> </ul>



## THE EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Children and young people were asked about their experience of receiving care and support and leaving care. Their responses tell us that we need to improve the consistency of services – there was variation with one young person reporting that their experience was “pretty positive” whilst for another it was “mostly negative”.

Young people enjoyed the opportunities that they were given – such as trips and activities. They particularly liked sharing these events with other young people who have had the same experiences as them and who have a better understanding of their situation. They found that taking part in these activities helped them to gain confidence as they discovered skills they did not know that they had. For young people leaving care who felt isolated, the activities helped them to feel less lonely.

Some young people noted that it was not always easy to get hold of people when they needed them, and that they did not feel listened to by the person that they lived with / who cared for them. They felt that decisions were made for them and not with them.

We also learned the importance of how we engage with young people - young people like it when the professionals that they work with are “on their level” - they feel more valued when professionals point out their strengths and help them to see what they are good at. This also needs to translate into how we write about young people when completing assessments and case recordings.

Some young people talked about how well supported they felt by their social worker, the Personal Advisor Service and the Into Work Service and shared how this helped them to develop their confidence. They also talked about the importance of support to maintain contact with their family and particularly their siblings.

### What young people would like to see for future services

- Foster carers should have more training for women and men (gender differences) and not just regarding ethnic minority issues.
- Professionals should get to know a young person for who they are and should invest time in them without assumption about their life or their abilities.
- Every effort should be made for children and young people to be an active part of their own plan and the decisions that impact their futures.
- Workers to take more care when recording so that it reflects factual information and is not subjective or does not place stigma upon young people.
- More consistent workers.
- Fun should not be underestimated and more opportunities for young people to get together should be facilitated as they have described lots of positives from doing this as care leavers.
- More support for mental health.
- Make sure family are in contact.

As with the feedback received from staff, these messages have been heard and will inform our future planning.

## LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 – Workforce Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Accommodation Strategy
- Appendix 3 – Commissioning Strategy
- Appendix 4 – Record of Staff Consultation
- Appendix 5 – Demand Analysis

