

COUNCIL: 28 JANUARY 2021

CHILDREN & FAMILIES STATEMENT

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Inspection

A risk-based inspection of Social Services was undertaken by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) in late November/early December 2020. I can confirm that CIW has recently provided the Council with a copy of their draft report, which indicates that good progress has been made since the previous inspection, with no child protection or safeguarding alerts being raised. Any areas for improvement identified by CIW will be addressed through appropriate action plans and fed into the service's ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.

Children's Services Operating Model

Children's Services continue to receive contacts and referrals for children who are in need of care and support or who need to be safeguarded. The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) received over 1,600 contacts in December 2020. Due to the number of Covid-19 cases in Cardiff and in response to the Welsh Government announcement regarding the latest lockdown, the service has reverted to providing an emergency response. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to our frontline staff who are continuing to undertake face-to-face visits to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable children in our city.

Face-to-face visits to children who are on the Child Protection Register continue to be prioritised to ensure that these children are seen, as do visits to children who are subject to child protection investigations. Face-to-face visits to children who are on Care Orders, but placed with their parents are also continuing on the basis of risk assessment. Other home visits are currently being undertaken virtually unless there are safeguarding risks or other concerns. Contact for children who are looked after and their families has also reverted to virtual contact for the time being. This position is reviewed regularly and the service will continue to adjust this operating model as and when required.

Decision making in relation to placements continues to be undertaken by the Children's Services Management Team as a group, so all Operational Managers have oversight of placement arrangements and any issues arising. We are closely monitoring placements to ensure that we are aware of those placements that are at risk of breaking down and remain in regular contact with providers to ensure that they have business continuity plans in place. We have sourced Airbnb accommodation for use in emergencies where this type of accommodation is appropriate and are also looking into the possibility of using council buildings in emergencies for children who

have suspected or confirmed Covid-19, or come from a household where another member of the household has displayed symptoms or been diagnosed.

Cardiff Family Advice and Support (CFAS)

In December 2020, Family Help, including Family Help Disability, received new referrals for 91 families supporting 170 children. The team has continued to work virtually to support these families whilst face-to-face home visits remain suspended.

One of the many ways in which the CFAS team has continued to support the local community through partnership working was the St David's Toy Appeal, which delivers Christmas presents to children and young people within Cardiff. With the help of the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) employed to work with Early Help partners, presents were delivered to 72 children and young people from low-income families within the community at what is a really difficult time for them. This is the second consecutive year that the team has had the privilege of offering this service and it has, once again, proven to be very successful, as reflected in the feedback and messages of thanks received from both children and parents. In addition, the Early Help PCSOs have recently won a South Wales Police award for their work with the team and their contribution to community support.

The team and other members of Cardiff Early Help services also appeared on the Scott Mills show on BBC Radio 1, where one of our Family Help Advisors was able to share with the nation the positive work that has been undertaken by CFAS in the city during the Covid-19 pandemic. This also provided an opportunity to signpost the service to others who may benefit from such support and, after the show was aired, the team was extremely pleased to see service users contacting the Family Gateway directly after hearing about the service on BBC Radio 1.

Christmas Present Appeal

As part of an annual appeal, Children's Services collected over 1,000 presents for Christmas gifts for the children and families they support. The appeal was supported by the Mr X Appeal, Peri-Operative staff at UHW and other local businesses, with a huge range of generous donations being received from those involved. The success of the collection meant that everyone who requested presents for children received a gift in time for Christmas.

Cardiff Parenting

Cardiff Parenting continues to utilise virtual and digital media for delivering services while home visits and groups are suspended. This includes the introduction of a new group, GroBrain Toddler, to support parents in the tricky toddler years. The service aims to help improve parents understanding of their child's development during this time and how to connect with their child in order to guide behaviour more positively.

Cardiff Parenting is offering its formal parenting programmes of GroBrain, Parent Nurturing Programme and Talking Teens online, with some additional informal Flying Start digital groups, including Little Cooks @ Home, Rhyme Time & Story Time. An updated service brochure is now available in Arabic, Kurdish Sorani, Czech, Somali, Urdu, Romanian and Bengali. In addition, the Flying Start childcare setting,

TwinkleStars, is running its full offer for children, with some crèche assistants who usually work in the central Parenting team being utilised in the childcare setting, creating safe bubbles for children.

In December 2020, 334 activity packs were delivered to families, providing them with festive activities, books, messy/sensory play, cooking ideas and more, to enable them to enjoy time with their children. In addition, 1,323 contacts were made with parents and carers via telephone and video calls in order to deliver formal and informal parenting programmes.

Cardiff Parenting has also been successful in being awarded Welsh Government grant funding to upskill council officers in supporting inter-parental relationships in order to help address some of the stresses felt by parents in the home as a result of Covid-19. This funding will be spent in the coming year to train staff in customer-facing roles across the Council in identifying parental conflict early on with parents, raising awareness of its negative impact on children, and helping parents to resolve conflict and communicate more effectively.

The Childcare Offer

In December 2020, a further 82 applications for the Childcare Offer, relating to 92 children, were approved. This brings the total for the year to date to 786 approved applications for 909 children, which means that 1,402 children are currently benefitting from the Childcare Offer in Cardiff.

With £268,765 spent on childcare places and additional support in December 2020, the total amount of funding spent since April 2019 was £3,351,468. By offsetting the need for parents to fund these childcare costs, the Childcare Offer continues to encourage parents, especially mothers, to return to work and increase the disposable income of working families, particularly those on lower incomes, which supports the local economy and the school readiness of young children in Cardiff.

Bright Sparks Awards 2020

The achievements of children looked after and young care leavers in Cardiff have, once again, been recognised in an annual awards celebration. The annual Bright Sparks Awards ceremony is organised by Children's Services and is an opportunity to celebrate the outstanding accomplishments and successes of children looked after, carers, parents, care leavers and staff. Agencies, organisations and services who have shown particular support for children looked after or care leavers throughout the past year are also recognised.

In its 14th year, the Bright Sparks Awards 2020 recognised more than 200 individuals in 35 categories, including children and young people's achievements in areas such as education, sport, creative writing, bravery and volunteering. The event was broadcast online with a Christmas theme. Young people involved in the 'Bright Sparks Club', a club supported by the National Youth Advocacy Service, also contributed to planning and organising the event, including hosting the awards and announcing the winners.

I was very pleased to speak at the event, alongside the Assistant Director Children's Services, and to congratulate the children and young people on their successes over the year. Children and young people from Genus Care Children's Home in Cardiff mimed a performance to BBC Radio 1's Live Lounge All Stars cover of 'Times Like These' and staff from schools and children's homes across the city also provided positive messages to wish them luck for the New Year.

Councillor Graham Hinchey
Cabinet Member for Children & Families
21 January 2021