

COUNCIL: 18 MARCH 2021

CHILDREN & FAMILIES STATEMENT

AGENDA ITEM:

Covid-19 Operating Model

Children's Services continue to review the Covid-19 operating model on a regular basis. On 27 February 2021, Welsh Government announced a change to Covid-19 rules allowing households with a child aged under 1 to bubble with another household. In light of this, kinship carers are able to support contact with families where they are in a bubble and where this is in accordance with the child's plan. 16 and 17 year olds living alone or with young people of the same age, but no adult, are also able to form a bubble with another household so are able to use this as an opportunity to have contact with their families or a significant other to support their emotional health and wellbeing. All other contact is virtual unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as final contacts or where the risk of not going ahead with contact is deemed to be higher than doing so. Face-to-face contact requires Operational Manager approval and agreement via the Children's Management Team and decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

Children's Services are also working closely with colleagues in Education & Lifelong Learning to support the challenge of children returning to school. Aside from the logistical issues, it is anticipated that an increase in wellbeing support will be required for children who are experiencing anxiety about returning to school. In addition to this, it is anticipated that referrals to Children's Services will increase as teachers become aware of issues that children have experienced during lockdown.

Review of 2020-21

2020-21 has been a year like no other. Children's Services, along with all other council directorates, has been faced with responding to the ongoing and changing needs of the Covid-19 pandemic, whilst continuing to providing essential services. Our ability to do so, and to continue doing so, is testament to the commitment and dedication of the workforce, and I cannot thank them enough for the resilience they have shown. During the year, we have appointed a Director of Children's Services and all permanent Operational Managers are in post. In spite of the difficulties posed by the pandemic, the service has made some significant achievements, which can be summarised as follows:

- Recruitment and retention of social workers has continued to be a priority and we have seen a net gain of 26 social workers during the year to date.
- We have had a positive inspection report from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

- We have maximised use of technology to maintain virtual contact with children, families, colleagues and partners.
- We have strengthened multi-agency working relationships, including improving our approach to risk management and work with Community Safety.
- Engagement with staff – we have implemented a practice development group which oversees a number of workstreams to drive improvement.
- A Quality Assurance Framework has been developed and a lead officer is in post to drive improvement.
- A fourth case management team has been introduced in localities to strengthen the capacity for decision making.
- Work on developing the skills mix of teams commenced.
- Specialist exploitation social workers have been integrated into locality teams.
- Adoption processes have been strengthened with the embedding of Life Journey Workers in case management teams.
- The Corporate Parenting Strategy has been reviewed and updated with dedicated officer in post to implement the action plan.
- The updated Exploitation Strategy has been published and arrangements are in place to improve corporate oversight of exploitation and safeguarding.
- We have ensured focussed support on services for young carers with appointment to a specialist post.
- We are on target to launch the Reunification Framework in Quarter 1 2021/22.
- The number of children remaining with their families in kinship arrangements has increased – an important element of our work to shift the balance of care.
- In house fostering provision has significantly increased.
- Improved partnership arrangements are in place for management and recording of young people who go missing.
- Additional accommodation for vulnerable young people has been secured through joint working with colleagues in Housing.
- The Personal Adviser Service worked closely with the Into Work Service to support young people into education, training and employment.
- Work towards upgrading the CareFirst client record system to Eclipse has commenced.
- CareFinance has been implemented for fostering payments.
- We have developed scorecards and data to support decision making and are implementing PowerBi as long term solution.
- The development of updated policies and procedures is also progressing well.

Finally, I also want to thank the majority of Members who attended our recent briefings on developments within our Early Help service and the positive outcome of the recent Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspection.

Assessment Centre

Work towards opening the Assessment Centre is continuing at pace. The purpose of the Assessment Centre is to ensure that children have a full assessment of their needs within a 10-week period before decisions are made about the most appropriate placement for them to move to, or be rehabilitated at home. We are nearing the end of the recruitment process and are developing the model with a view to opening in May 2021.

Mind of My Own

Another exciting development in Children's Services is the planned launch of an app called 'Mind of My Own' that will support children to communicate with us and enable us to capture the views of children and young people in our care planning. We are in the process of implementing the app and will be providing training for all staff shortly. This is a really welcome development that will help children to give voice to their lived experience and be heard.

Family Drug and Alcohol Court

I am really pleased to let you know that the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan region has been selected as the pilot location for Family Drug and Alcohol Courts in Wales. The Family Drug and Alcohol Court is an alternative family court for care proceedings that is designed to work with parents who struggle with drug and alcohol misuse. The focus is on trying to solve the problems that have led the Local Authority to bring the parent to court acknowledging that mental health problems and domestic abuse may be contributory factors. This is a really exciting project for Cardiff to be at the heart of and a fantastic opportunity as the evidence suggests that model delivers significant benefits for parents and children, as well as cost benefits for public services.

Cardiff Family Advice and Support (CFAS)

The level of calls received by the Family Gateway has remained at a consistent level throughout January and February 2021. 27% of calls, which led to the team completing well-being referrals, were as a result of self-referrals from families who were seeking support. This continues to show that families feel confident in contacting the service.

Caseloads within the Family Help Team have also remained consistently high. Family Help Advisors across the East, West and Disability Teams are currently supporting 488 children and young people. 94 family assessments were completed in January 2021 and 97 cases were closed following the completion of a successful family plan and with evidence of positive distance travelled.

Development work in relation to alternative referral methods has been ongoing and it is expected that web chat and the online Early Help referral form will be launched early in the new financial year.

The Childcare Offer

By the end of February 2021, 380 childcare settings were signed up to provide Childcare Offer places. 151 applications were processed in the month, with 139 approved. This brought the total number of children being funded to 1,577. The £465,201 spent in the month on childcare places and additional support brings spending for the year to date to £4,250,706.

Childcare and Play Grant

Of the additional £606,183 made available by Welsh Government since late Autumn 2020, to date, a total of £194,546 has been provided to childcare settings following the submission of successful grant applications. This represents 32% of the additional funding available. Of this, £57,455 has supported 12 settings who were required to

close due to a positive Covid case; £10,750 has been shared across 28 settings who have claimed funding for additional Covid related costs, and 18 settings have accessed the sustainability grant, with £102,581 paid out to date.

Further applications are currently being assessed and the Childcare Business Support, Childcare Offer and Early Help Teams continue to promote the availability of the funding to childcare providers in order to maximise the take up of the grant and, therefore, the benefit to the sector.

Childcare providers can access the grant application forms via the Cardiff Family Advice and Support (CFAS) website: [Cardiff Childcare Business Support - Cardiff Family Advice and Support : Cardiff Family Advice and Support \(cardiffamilies.co.uk\)](https://www.cardiffamilies.co.uk/childcare-business-support)

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11 March 2021