

COUNCIL: 27 JANUARY 2022

CHILDREN & FAMILIES STATEMENT

Oakway Update

I am really pleased to let you know that our emergency residential unit, Oakway, is now registered and plans for the provision to open are in development. These will take account of current staffing issues resulting from the significant increase in Covid-19 cases due to the Omicron variant. This is the latest step in Children's Services' 5-year plan to increase provision for children and young people who need to be looked after in Cardiff.

Oakway has been set up as a 'pop up, pop down' provision for children who need to be looked after at short notice. It will provide both respite and same day placements to ensure that children and young people who are experiencing difficult circumstances and in immediate need are provided with a safe, warm and welcoming place to stay. It is registered to provide accommodation for two children between the ages of 11 and 17 years whilst alternative arrangements are made. The provision will enable us to ensure adequate assessment and planning for reunification at home or a planned transition into an appropriately assessed alternative. Staff will work closely with families and foster carers to support a timely return home where this is assessed as being in the child/young person's best interests.

Christmas 2021

The Children's Services Christmas Presents Appeal resulted in around 1,200 children and young people being gifted Christmas presents last month. This is nearly twice as many as in 2020 and included a wide assortment of gifts for all ages.

The donations were largely gifted by the Mr X Appeal – a charity that appeals for presents for children and young people in need across South Wales. A number of local organisations donate to the appeal every year, which began over 60 years ago and continues to thrive. Alongside the Mr X Appeal, senior staff working in main theatres at the University Hospital of Wales supported the appeal again this year, generously donating a range of gifts. These donations are hugely appreciated as we are all too aware that some of these children don't have big Christmases, and it is lovely to know that they had something to open on Christmas Day.

A great deal of planning goes into the project and I would like to extend my thanks to all staff who were involved. The team has received some really special comments from families expressing their gratitude about how much impact it will have on their family life, with tears being shed by both families and staff alike.

I would also like to extend a big thank you to the Child Friendly Cardiff Team for providing over 500 free tickets for families to experience a range of Christmas activities as part of the Cardiff Winter of Wellbeing programme. The children and young people enjoyed activities including ice-skating at Winter Wonderland, the Christmas at Bute Park light trail and performances of the Aladdin pantomime and A Christmas Carol at the New Theatre and Sherman Theatre respectively. The feedback from families has been overwhelming positive and the comments received have shown that this made a real difference in creating happy Christmas memories for all those involved.

Cardiff Family Advice and Support (CFAS)

Throughout last month calls to the Family Gateway remained at a consistent level in comparison with the previous month and caseloads across the team remained high. There continues to be a strong focus on supporting children and young people's mental and emotional wellbeing. This is being achieved through partnership working with our Primary Mental Health Workers to identify emerging wellbeing concerns and to provide appropriate means of support and intervention.

The 'Supporting Young Cardiffians' campaign, developed in conjunction with ProMo Cymru and young people who have previously accessed the service, was also launched at the end of November 2021. This promoted the support available to other young people via a series of articles and blogs that were published on the Sprout website. As a result of the campaign, social media platforms saw an increase in engagement with more than 40 new followers across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

CFAS was also fortunate to be able to work in partnership with the St David's Toy Appeal once again in delivering Christmas presents to children and young people in Cardiff. With the help of the Early Help Police Community Support Officers, the team was able to deliver 250 presents to children and young people from low-income families.

Cardiff Parenting

More than 100 referrals were received for parenting via the Family Gateway in December 2021, and a total of 276 at the close of Quarter 3. This is in comparison to 126 for the same quarter in 2020/21 and 224 in 2019/20, showing an increase in demand for the service. In the lead up to, and over, the Christmas period where schools and professionals have less contact with families, our social media pages were used to promote free-to-access online courses for parents; to share psychologically informed information about children's development and behaviour and parents' well-being; and to re-advertise the parenting offer available to all families in Cardiff.

416 families in Cardiff benefited from 516 Christmas resource packs that were delivered to families to help with gifts at Christmas. 'Make a memory box' kits were delivered to Afghan Nationals in the 7-11 years age group and play resources provided for younger children. Our "Dads behaving Christmassy" group, in partnership with Ely & Caerau Children's Centre, was also a great success, with nine dads coming along with their little ones to share thoughts, experiences and fun. A weekly Saturday dads' group at the centre is due to commence the week beginning 24 January 2022.

Childcare and Play Grant

Through the additional funding provided via the Childcare and Play Grant element of the Children and Communities Grant, the Childcare Business Support Team has, to date, provided a total of £182,019 to 55 settings through the Utilities Grant, which is designed to offset children providers' costs relating to gas, electricity and water rates, thereby supporting their ongoing financial sustainability. To date, four settings have accessed a total of £11,694 to replace lost income due to Covid-19 closures. This grant ensures that parents are not charged where a setting is forced to close, but the setting retains the income from pre-booked childcare places.

Councillor Graham Hinchey
Cabinet Member for Children & Families
20 January 2022