

COUNCIL: 17 MARCH 2022

CHILDREN & FAMILIES STATEMENT

Cardiff Family Advice and Support (CFAS)

The Family Gateway Team is supporting the delivery of the Welsh Government package of support for unpaid carers to promote the value that they bring to the Welsh economy, communities and health & social care system. £275,000 of funding will be passed onto unpaid carers and it is anticipated that we will reach more than 500 unpaid carers with this amount. The guiding principle is to support unpaid carers in coping with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had an overwhelming physical and emotional impact and to help them to meet their well-being needs. Funding will be offered to those families open to the Council's Child Health and Disability and Family Help Disability Teams.

New Accommodation for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Last month, I had the pleasure of visiting the newly refurbished 6-bed residential provision for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) arriving in Cardiff, which is located in the Cathays ward and is due to open this month. This provision has been commissioned by the Council in order to provide a welcoming centre for UASC aged 16 and 17 years. The centre has been established to ensure the best outcomes for young people and will ensure that the needs of the young people are met in a timely manner. The Council is working in close partnership with the Salvation Army to ensure the best possible support and provision is provided to UASC who arrive in our city seeking asylum, safety, and sanctuary. The centre will accommodate young people of all genders arriving in Cardiff, either through National Transfer Scheme (NTS) or spontaneously, who are children looked after under s76 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It will offer initial wraparound support on arrival, whilst a longer-term placement is being arranged. It will also provide suitable accommodation and a venue for UASC going through the age assessment process, as they will be treated as children until the outcome of the assessments are known. Staffing of the centre will be provided by the Salvation Army, with 24-hour wraparound support for the young people living in the accommodation.

Recruitment Update

I am pleased to inform councillors that social worker vacancies in Children's Services continue to be reduced by the measures implemented by this Administration. The vacancy rate was 19.5% in January 2022, with a further 10 social workers in the recruitment process. This is a significant reduction from 38.7% in June 2021 and is the lowest level of vacancies since September 2017.

Family Drug and Alcohol Court

The pilot of the new Family Drug and Alcohol Court in Cardiff is progressing well. This is an alternative family court for care proceedings, which is designed to provide a more sensitive approach to working with parents who struggle with drug and alcohol misuse. Early indications are that families are engaging and there has been positive feedback from a family's barrister who noted the non-adversarial approach and improved opportunities for families to have a voice.

National Adoption Service and Foster Wales

Both Cabinet and Council are considering a report this month on the national arrangements for the National Adoption Service (NAS) and Foster Wales, including the continuation of Cardiff's role as the Host Authority.

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), alongside the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru, are the lead bodies for NAS; however, in line with the requirement contained within Welsh Government 'Directions', there has to be a 'Host' Local Authority for the NAS in Wales. A competitive process was undertaken back in 2014 and Cardiff Council was successful in securing the nomination to take on the role of the Host Authority. Cardiff's continued role as the Host Authority has recently been re-confirmed through a Partnership Agreement signed by all 22 Welsh local authorities.

As the Host Authority, we currently employ the NAS Director of Operations and NAS central team of staff, who are based at County Hall, to fulfil a range of national level functions related to the leadership, management and oversight of the NAS. Similar arrangements for pan Wales involvement of senior officers in the governance of Foster Wales have been put in place; however, there are no Regulations or Directions underpinning Foster Wales. The NAS central team and national functions are funded via the WLGA through a small 'top slice' from the local government Revenue Support Grant and any other funding made available for the service from time to time, mainly Welsh Government grant funding. A similar arrangement is in place for Foster Wales. The NAS also has its own governance arrangements, outside of the Council, and a Governance Board, which provides strategic direction and decision making to assure the improvement of adoption services across Wales. As the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children's Services, I also represent Cardiff Council, as the Host Authority, on the NAS Governance Board.

The WLGA is proposing the establishment of a Joint Committee on behalf of the 22 Welsh Local Authorities, which will enable local authorities to exercise their joint powers for the provision of the national and co-ordinating functions of the NAS and Foster Wales and oversee the agreement upon which Cardiff Council (or any other local authority) provides the hosting arrangement. The Joint Committee will provide the mechanism for all Welsh local authorities to discharge an executive and oversight role for the NAS and Foster Wales, including approval of the annual reports, work programmes and budgets of the NAS and Foster Wales.

A Joint Committee Agreement has been developed, which is currently with all Welsh Local Authorities for approval and signing. Specific clauses of the Joint Committee Agreement also provide the framework for a separate formal 'Hosting Agreement' to be developed and agreed. Work to finalise a detailed 5-year Hosting Agreement is well underway and this is expected to be agreed formally by all 22 councils at the first meeting of the Joint Committee. The Joint Committee Agreement and the formal Hosting Agreement will put the existing arrangements onto a more formal footing and provide greater clarity and certainty for the Council, WLGA and Welsh Local Authorities, as well as for the NAS and Foster Wales.

Councillor Graham Hinchey
Cabinet Member for Children & Families
11 March 2022