

# Annual Wellbeing Report 2023/24

# EXTRACT

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**Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg hefyd.  
This document is also available in Welsh.**

# About This Report

## What is the Annual Wellbeing Report?

The purpose of the Annual Wellbeing Report is to provide an end-of-year self-assessment of Council performance in delivering its Wellbeing Objectives for 2023/24.

These Wellbeing Objectives, including the steps the Council will take to achieve them, and how performance will be measured, are set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-26:

1. Cardiff is a great place to grow up
2. Cardiff is a great place to grow older
3. Supporting people out of poverty
4. Safe, confident and empowered communities
5. A capital city that works for Wales
6. One Planet Cardiff
7. Modernising and integrating our public services

This Annual Wellbeing Report is the product of a comprehensive self-assessment process, as set out below, and draws on service performance, governance and risk, resources, and other sources of performance information provided for each Wellbeing Objective. Each chapter of this report provides a strategic assessment by Wellbeing Objective, along with a summary of successes, challenges, and priorities for the future.

In undertaking the mid-year and end-of-year assessments, the Council fulfils its statutory duties in relation to both the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and the publication of the reports ensures that Cabinet receive an update on the delivery of their policy agenda and the performance of statutory services.

## Statutory Requirements

The Annual Wellbeing Report fulfils the Council's following statutory requirements:

- **The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** requires the Council to set and publish Wellbeing Objectives, take all reasonable steps to meet those objectives and publish a statement about Wellbeing Objectives. These duties are fulfilled through the Council's Corporate Planning process. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act also requires the Council to publish an annual report of progress, which is done through the Annual Wellbeing Report. A core element of the Act is the **Sustainable Development Principle** and the **Five Ways of Working**. These are: long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration, and involvement. This report assesses the extent to which the Sustainable Development Principle and the Five Ways of Working have been applied in the delivery of the Council's Wellbeing Objectives.

- **The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021** established a new legislative framework for local government elections, democracy, governance, and performance. The Act requires each council in Wales to keep under review, through self-assessment, the extent to which it is meeting its “performance requirements” and publish a report setting out the conclusions of their self-assessments once each financial year. Specifically, the Council must ***review its ability to use its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively.***

This Annual Wellbeing Report, produced through the self-assessment process outlined below, sets out the Council’s conclusions as to the extent to which it has met the performance requirements (that is, exercising its functions effectively, using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively, and that its governance is effective for securing the above) during the financial year.

### Meeting Our Statutory Requirements

A summary of the legislative requirements relating to planning and delivery is set out below.

<b>Act</b>	<b>Planning and Performance Requirement</b>	<b>Compliance Arrangement</b>
Wellbeing of Future Generations Act	Set and publish Wellbeing Objectives	Completed through the publication of the <a href="#">Corporate Plan</a>
	Take all reasonable steps to meet those objectives	Completed through the publication of the <a href="#">Corporate Plan</a>
	Publish a statement about Wellbeing Objectives	Completed through the publication of the <a href="#">Corporate Plan</a>
	Publish an annual report of progress and review Wellbeing Objectives	Completed through the publication of the Annual Wellbeing Report 2023/24
	Publish its response to any recommendation made by the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales	None received, as yet.
Local Government & Elections Act	Keep performance under review: the extent to which it is exercising its functions effectively; using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively, and; its governance is effective for securing the above.	Completed through the publication of the Annual Wellbeing Report 2023/24
	Consult on performance: with local people, staff, trade unions and partners	Completed, with reference to key findings included in the Annual Wellbeing Report 2023/24
	Report on performance: produce a self-assessment report every year, containing assessment of performance	Completed through the publication of the Annual Wellbeing Report 2023/24

	(service, finance, governance) and improvement actions identified	
	Arrange a panel performance assessment and respond to a panel performance assessment report	To be completed during the 2022-27 local government cycle

The Council considers that, through the publication of its Corporate Plan and Annual Wellbeing Report, **it has met the relevant statutory duties listed above.**

In response to the change made to the description of the national wellbeing goal of ‘A Prosperous Wales’ and as part of its end-of-year performance assessment, the Council has reviewed its wellbeing objectives. The Council remains content with the seven wellbeing objectives as they are laid out in this report.

### **How is the Annual Wellbeing Report developed?**

The assessment of performance contained within the Annual Wellbeing Report is developed through a thorough process of self-assessment involving the political and managerial leadership of the Council, drawing from a wide range of sources of performance information.

#### Sources of Performance Information

Sources of performance information which contribute towards the performance assessment contained within the Annual Wellbeing Report include:

- **Performance against the Council’s Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** – The Council’s [Corporate Plan](#) contains a suite of performance indicators which measure progress made in delivering the Wellbeing Objectives. Where applicable, targets are set against these performance indicators to demonstrate the desired level of achievement. Performance indicators are assigned a RAG status: **Green** where the indicator is on or above target, **Amber** where the result is within 10% of the target, and **Red** where the result is more than 10% from the target.
- **Progress against the steps in each Wellbeing Objective** – Each Wellbeing Objective within the Corporate Plan also contains a set of ‘steps’ or actions. Monitoring the progress of these steps provides an understanding of what has been achieved and where further work is required. The Year-End Performance against both the Corporate Plan indicators and steps can be found on the Council’s [Corporate Performance Dashboard](#).
- **Consultation and Engagement** – The Council has a number of established consultation and engagement mechanisms such as the Annual Ask Cardiff Citizen Survey, the Budget Consultation, the Child Friendly City Survey as well as other surveys and consultation exercises which take place over the course of the year that provide residents, businesses and other city stakeholders an opportunity to share their views on a wide range of Council services and initiatives. In addition, the Council’s [Annual Compliments and Complaints Report 2022/23](#) provides valuable insight into where Cardiff’s citizens feel the

Council needs to improve. The Corporate Plan contains a number of 'qualitative' Key Performance Indicators that relate to citizen satisfaction with services, and the findings of the consultation and engagement work forms an important part of the Council's self-assessment process, policy development and budget setting process.

- **Finance Monitoring** – The Council's [Outturn Report 2023/24](#) serves to inform of the Council's financial position in respect of the year ending 31 March 2024 and its findings contribute to the assessment contained within the Annual Wellbeing Report.
- **Governance** – The Council's Governance Framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values by which the Council is directed, controlled, and the means through which it accounts to, engages with, and leads the community. The Council's [Annual Governance Statement](#) sets out an assessment of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control.
- **Risk** – Delivering objectives requires frequent management of risks at both operational and strategic levels, particularly in the dynamic external environment in which the Council is operating. The Council's Year-End [Risk Report](#), and its Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers, provides an overview of the current risks and the actions in place to mitigate them.
- **Scrutiny Committees and Governance & Audit Committee** – The Council responds to the issues raised and recommendations made by the Committees, which help inform policy development and performance improvement.
- **Inspection Reports** – The Council is subject to a number of inspections from regulatory bodies including Audit Wales, Estyn (Education) and the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). Their findings help the Council to assess areas of strong performance, as well as identifying areas that require improvement.

#### Self-Assessment Process

The Annual Wellbeing Report is developed through engagement with directors and a self-evaluation, assurance, and challenge process. The process features enhanced roles for both Scrutiny Committees and the Governance & Audit Committee. This process includes:

- A directorate self-evaluation of service performance, resourcing, and governance challenges and priorities, answering the following questions:
  - What is going well?
  - What are the key risks and challenges facing your services?
  - What are the next steps?
- Performance and budget challenge and assurance sessions convened by the Chief Executive and the Section 151 Officer with each director considering the findings of their directorate self-assessment.

- A progress and performance session with Cabinet and the Council's Senior Management Team where the Chief Executive provides a strategic assessment of organisational performance.
- Consideration of the draft Annual Wellbeing Report by:
  - The Performance Panel, convened by the Chair of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee, and involving the Chairs of each of the Council's Scrutiny Committees
  - Governance & Audit Committee
  - Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee
  - Cabinet, having received and responded to the recommendations of each Committee.
  - Council.

All correspondence from the Performance Panel and Committees relating to this report can be viewed on the Council's [Decision Register](#).

Performance improvement and evaluation isn't something that only takes place at the end of the financial year. A mid-year self-evaluation report is considered by Cabinet, drawing on performance information at month 6 and performance is monitored quarterly through updates to the steps and performance indicators in the Corporate Plan, and the areas of risk, budget, audits, consultation, and performance are all considered holistically throughout the year to drive improvement.

## Overall Assessment

This Annual Wellbeing Report contains the Council's assessment of performance against the seven Wellbeing Objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-26.

Overall, the Council considers that it has made good progress across all seven Wellbeing Objectives despite the ongoing challenges the Council is facing, including the cost-of-living and housing crises, workforce challenges, the rising costs of placements for children and young people, and increasing demand across a range of Council services, all within the context of major financial challenges.

Progress throughout 2023/24 is evidenced by an overall pattern of good performance across the Council services and Corporate Plan commitments, the effective, efficient and economic use of resources, with effective governance infrastructure to deliver improvement. However, this report also identifies performance challenges and risks in each Wellbeing Objective which will require improvement action over the year ahead.

The analysis contained within the Annual Wellbeing Report (and the Mid-Year Performance Assessment) form a central component of the setting of the Council's priorities and actions for improvement for the year ahead, which are set out in the Council's [Corporate Plan 2024-27](#).

Each Wellbeing Objective includes a summary of the areas of progress and the strategic challenges facing the organisation while the subsequent sections provide more detail on the Council's performance against the individual priority headings as included in the Corporate Plan.

### **Areas of Progress and Improvement:**

The Council continues to evidence a broad pattern of year-on-year improvement across a range of council services, with clear progress being made in the delivery of Corporate Plan commitments in 2023/24:

- Pupil attainment in Cardiff remains above the Welsh average for GCSEs of grades A\* to C for WJEC qualifications made available by Welsh Government.
- Within the context of a national shortage of experienced social workers, the Council has managed to reduce the number of vacant permanent social work posts to just 15.8% - the lowest rate achieved in years, from a high of 38.7% in June 2020.
- The Trusted Assessor Model has been successfully rolled out, meaning occupational therapists can prescribe care for those being discharged from hospital, freeing up social worker time and reducing case backlogs.
- There has since been a sustained reduction in the number of people sleeping on the city's streets – from around 50 individuals in November 2023 to 19 in March 2024.

- Cardiff University estimate the value of the Real Living Wage to be £68m for the Cardiff economy since 2012.
- Progress has been maintained with the Council's house building programme despite difficult market conditions with 1,110 new homes delivered.
- £5.4m has been secured in external funding for investment in local communities over the last twelve months.
- In 2023/24, the Council played an active role in the creation and safeguarding of over 2,400 jobs.
- Overall, the Council's 'direct' operational emissions reduced by 11.7% between 2019/20 and 2022/23 (the latest available data). Furthermore, the Council's 'indirect' procurement-related emissions reduced by 25.5% between 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- The 2023 Air Quality Progress Report, which presents monitoring data captured in 2022, shows that there were no exceedances in either the annual or short-term air quality objectives for NO<sub>2</sub> at any automatic and non-automatic monitoring site during the period covered by the report.
- Significant progress has also been made in delivering a transformative programme of investment in public transport and active travel – Phase 1 of Cardiff CrossRail has been successfully tendered, funding obtained for bus priority measures, and funding made available to progress Stage 2 of the Outline Business Case for road user charging options.
- The Council has maintained its place as a Top 100 employer in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index survey, the highest placed Welsh Local Authority overall.
- Good progress has been made in delivering the recommendations of the Race Equality Taskforce with a progress report shared with the Taskforce in July 2024.

### **Corporate Improvement Priorities**

The Annual Well-being Report 2023/24 highlights a range of strategic performance challenges, which need to remain the subject of corporate focus over the year ahead.

**Managing sustained increase in the complexity and scale of demand across council services:** Council services continue to face increasing and increasingly complex demand pressures which require a sustained cross-Council and multi-agency response, including:

- Services for children and young people are experiencing pressures and challenges as a result of the continued impact of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and of the long-term impacts of austerity and of poverty. In Education, a number of inter-connected issues, including concerning patterns of attendance and exclusions, of delayed pupil development and early years, rising concerns relating to emotional health and well-



being, and rising demand for pupils with Additional Learning Needs, will require concerted action from the Council, partners and school leaders over the year ahead. In Children's Services, despite effective preventative action, the number of children entering care and the cost of support services and accommodation is continuing to rise. In response, the Council will continue to prioritise the delivery of the strategy to shift the balance of care, including the delivery of its accommodation strategy for children.

- The adult social care sector continues to face ongoing pressures through rising demand and increasingly complex service requirements, including for older people and for cohorts of vulnerable adults such as those with learning disabilities. Over the year ahead, the Council will continue to work in partnership with health and community partners focussed to help as many people as possible to live independently at home.
- The number of people who are becoming homeless and the demand for emergency and temporary accommodation has continued to increase, with high waiting lists across all homeless gateways. Around 8,000 people are now on the Council's housing waiting list and the rental rate in the private rented sector is at unprecedented levels. The shortage of housing of all tenures is creating pressure and contributing to financial pressure across many council services (including Adult and Children's Services, above). The need to rapidly extend access to housing, through building and securing additional affordable housing and housing tailored to support independent living, remains a corporate priority.

**Ensuring continued service and financial resilience:** The Council faces significant immediate and medium-term budgetary challenges. The Budget 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan Update Report, which was considered by Cabinet and Council on 18 July 2024, set out a revised indicative revenue budget gap of £49.726 million for 2025/26 and a £147.784 million budget gap across the period of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) from 2025/26 to 2028/29. These pressures are due to a combination of increased complexity and scale of demand on services (see above), inflationary pressures driven by employee-related costs, the costs of goods and commodities purchased by the Council (such as energy, food and fuel) and the cost of construction, materials and commissioned services.

**Workforce pressures:** The Council continues to face a range of workforce challenges, including recruitment challenges and high levels of sickness in specific service areas. Recruitment and retention issues remain apparent across several services, which is impacting the delivery of certain projects and commitments. This is particularly the case in Adults and Children's Services, where interventions to develop tailored approaches to recruitment and retention is having a positive impact. In response to sickness absence rates being above target for the Council targeted support continues to be provided for areas with absence rates, particularly in respect to managing long term sickness absence, alongside enhanced interventions to the health and wellbeing support for staff. Over the year ahead the Council will continue to focus on the delivery of the Workforce Strategy 2023-27, prioritising proactive workforce planning, the further development of a supportive work environment, a continued emphasis on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and an enhanced programme of staff engagement.

**Responding to new risks and issues:** In addition to the sustained rise in demand on services, the Council has, alongside its partners, responded to several un-anticipated yet substantial risks and issues during the year. In 2023/24, these have included managing the immediate impacts of the housing emergency, responding to and developing a community response to the civil unrest in Ely, and managing the impact of accelerated asylum dispersal. In each case, the Council convened an effective response, often involving cross service-area working and collaboration with public service partners, the private sector and the third sectors. Looking ahead, the Council must continue to anticipate and respond, at speed and in partnership, to new risks and issues as they emerge.

In response to the demand and budgetary pressures facing the Council for the year ahead and over the medium term a comprehensive programme of service and budget reviews has been initiated by the Council's Cabinet with a focus on identifying opportunities to drive efficiencies over the short term and to identify how services need to change and adapt to be sustainable over the medium term.

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# Wellbeing Objective 1:

Cardiff is a great place to grow up

## Our priorities in 2023/24 were:

- Becoming a Child Friendly City
- Supporting education recovery post-pandemic
- Continuing to deliver the Cardiff 2030 vision for education and learning
- Shifting the balance of care: place
- Shifting the balance of care: people
- Shifting the balance of care: practice
- Protecting the wellbeing of vulnerable children, young people and families

### Summary of Performance Position at Year-End

Key Performance Indicators

Steps



Steps and KPIs rated Red as Quarter 4 are addressed in the narrative below, and the full comment and results against each step and KPI can be found in the [Corporate Performance Dashboard](#).

## Overall Assessment

The Council considers good progress has been made in delivering its commitments to make Cardiff a Great Place to Grow Up in a context where children and young people, and the services upon which they rely, are experiencing new and significant challenges because of the continued impact of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and of the long-term impacts of austerity and of poverty.

The Council continues to demonstrate a sustained improvement in the quality and effectiveness of education in Cardiff, with pupil attainment remaining above or well above the Welsh average, school inspection outcomes are good, especially in the primary sector and a partnership approach is in place to support pupils and schools access the wider opportunities Cardiff can offer. The Council is also working in close partnership with schools, communities, public service partners and with children and young people to develop responses to a range of complex and interconnected challenges, including high levels of attendance and exclusions, delayed pupil development and early years, rising concerns relating emotional health and well-being and rising demand for pupils with Additional Learning Needs,

## Areas of Progress

- Cardiff become the first British city to receive Child Friendly City status from UNICEF.
- Pupil attainment in Cardiff remains above the Welsh average for GCSEs of grades A\* to C for WJEC qualifications made available by Welsh Government.

## Areas of challenge and risk

- Schools continue to feel the lingering impact of the pandemic, which has affected attendance and exclusion patterns, as well as the number of pupils who are Electively Home Educated.
- Though 121 new specialist school places for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) have been created during the year, and a further 120 places are planned to be delivered by September 2024, this additional capacity has not kept up with demand, resulting in more learners being placed in more costly provision in order to meets their needs. The shortfall in specialist provision is placing significant demand and budgetary pressure on the city's schools and other services.
- Schools face significant immediate and long-term budgetary challenges, driven by demographic changes in the city and record levels of inflation. There has been a significant increase in the number of schools in deficit which is now 46 schools. To respond to the significant savings the Directorate and schools will need to make, service reviews are being commissioned including Schools Catering Services and ALN Transport.
- Even though £39.5m was spent in 2023/24 on school maintenance, up from £25m in 2022/23, a significant risk of building failure remains in some schools due to the poor

condition of a number of schools, which are at risk of not meeting health and safety standards, and the limited financial resources available to address the issues.

- Securing ongoing school improvement in the context of budgetary challenges, increased demand from the impact of the pandemic, and delivery of National Reforms in Curriculum and Additional Learning Needs.

### **Child Friendly City**

Cardiff became the first British city to be awarded Child Friendly City status by UNICEF with the final stage of assessment beginning in April 2023, formal recognition being received in September, followed by formal agreement in October. A sustainability plan has been agreed with UNICEF outlining a programme of work for the coming three years. To support Cardiff's ambition to become a Child Friendly City, the Rights Respecting Schools approach has continued to be rolled out, with more schools becoming accredited throughout the year, and Council staff have been required to complete Child Rights training.

Over three quarters of Cardiff's schools (76.6%) are now designated as UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools. Of these 98 schools, 51 (54.1%) have been awarded Silver or Gold status, which is just short of the Council's target (55%) for Silver and Gold schools, which represents 54.1%. At the end of 2023/24, 72% of Council staff have completed the Child Rights training against a target of 85% and to improve compliance further in the coming year the completion of mandatory training has been linked to individual staff performance via their annual personal review.

The Council has been unable to measure two performance indicators in 2023/24 relating to the experiences of children and young people in schools, and whether or not they are aware of their rights, as the survey which collects these results did not take place. However, these measures will be drawn from the School Health Research Network (SHRN) questionnaire from 2024/25 onwards.

### **Education Recovery and the Cardiff 2030 Vision**

The Council continues to demonstrate a sustained improvement in the quality and effectiveness of education in Cardiff. Attainment outcomes for pupils were above or well above the Welsh average for GCSE and A-Level results in the Summer of 2023 for A\* to A and A\* to C results in WJEC qualifications. School inspection outcomes are good, especially in the primary sector. Of the 26 schools inspected in 2023/24, with 22 reports published, one school has gone into Estyn Review and one into Significant Improvement. Eight have been asked to publish Interesting or Innovative Practice Case Studies for dissemination on Estyn's website. Three primary schools are in Estyn follow-up from the previous year 2022/23 (two in Estyn Review, one of which is a Federated school) and one in Special Measures.

The Council has progressed with its delivery of the Cardiff 2030 Vision, though the refresh and relaunch of this strategy has been delayed to address more immediate challenges including budgetary pressures, delivering school places, and increasing ALN capacity. The

longer-term vision will be completed in 2024/25. Work continues on the delivery of the School Organisation Programme in, including the approval of the Education Investment Strategy 2024-2033. The Council has also delivered of the first dual-language school at Groes-wen and agreed to double the number of Welsh-medium places from 192 to 420 to serve Cathays, Gabalfa, and the neighbouring wards.

In addition to investments delivered through Sustainable Communities for Learning, and other grants, in 2023/24, the Council spent £39.5m on carrying out maintenance, repair, and improvement work on Cardiff schools. Despite this, there are significant risks associated with the condition of the school estate.

While the Council has provided significant investment into ICT infrastructure in schools, the ICT School Investment Programme is currently under review due to an in-year overspend. Value-for-money and alignment with the delivery of the new curriculum are key considerations in this review, which is being considered with headteachers.

The Cardiff Commitment continues to be delivered effectively, with several workshops, events, training sessions, and work experience opportunities delivered for children and young people across Cardiff. The programme of work has also included a number of activities specifically supporting more vulnerable children, including those looked after or those with a disability. The Cardiff Curriculum Team has strengthened its offer to support schools bring the curriculum to life. The number of children and young people engaging with Passport to the City programme is 1500, 50 of whom were Children Looked After. Enhanced learning opportunities have been offered linked to expressive arts and creative industries, One Planet Cardiff, STEM, the Annual Schools Lego League, which saw participation from 30 schools, the Arts Award with UCAN Productions for visually impaired learners, and the Liquid Trees Project aimed at combating climate change.

The Youth Service has continued to support learners in their achievement and wellbeing. This includes post-16 engagement and youth mentoring provision to respond to the needs of young people not in education, employment, or training. The restructure of the Youth Service is expected to conclude in December 2024. The model aims to achieve a sustainable, impactful, a high-quality Youth Work Offer in the city, with strong locality teams at the core, to respond to the unique needs of the individual communities they serve. These locality teams would be sited in the areas of highest deprivation, building on the existing Cardiff Youth Service offer and would work closely with wider services for young people in their areas.

Schools continue to experience pressures and challenges driven by the continued impact of COVID-19 and changes to the city's demographic profile. These include:

- **School Attendance:** Although improving, attendance levels remain an area of concern, having yet to return to pre-pandemic levels. In primary schools, attendance in 2022/23 was 91.7%, compared with 88.87% in 2021/22 and around 95% prior to the pandemic. In secondary schools, attendance was 88.20% in 2022/23, compared with 86.03% in 2022/21 and around 94% prior to the pandemic. The percentage of persistent absence

(below a 50% threshold) in secondary schools is also not meeting its target. In response, the engagement programme with pupils, parents, and schools has been accelerated and is positively impacting the position, with the figures for academic year 2023/24 showing provisional improvement, comparing favourably to national averages. Moving forward, it is possible that pupils' attendance will be significantly impacted without the continuing support from Welsh Government on attendance grants and the additional support provided within schools.

- Fixed-term exclusions: Exclusions in both primary and secondary schools have risen in the 2022/23 academic year. These rates remain higher in secondary schools than in primary schools, with secondary schools reporting an increase of around 35% in 2022/23. The Education directorate continues to work closely with schools to support those with high rates of exclusions and to support schools with pupil behaviour. There has also been a rise in the number of pupils on Pastoral Support Plans (437 pupils in 2023/24 compared to 400 pupils in 2022/23), some of which will include a reduced timetable. This process will be reviewed in 2023/24 to develop a new pilot to be rolled out at five schools, including consistent standards on recording, with training and guidance to be put in place.
- Additional Learning Needs: The Council has made good progress in meeting the requirements of the new ALN reforms, with all specified year groups transferred to the ALN system in accordance with Welsh Government timescales, and all statemented learners due to transition by the end of July 2024. There are almost 4,000 learners in Cardiff with identified additional learning needs, of which around 1,700 require a specialist education setting. Throughout the year, 121 new ALN places were created against a target of 141. An additional 20 places are planned for Eastern High, and 16 places at Herbert Thompson Primary, although these have been delayed due to the specifications still being agreed. In July 2023, Cabinet approved plans to progress with projects to increase the total number of ALN places, covering a range of ages and complex needs, to 1,755. Though the supply of places is close to the annual target, the creation of new places is not keeping up with rising demand; this, in turn, is impacting the number of learners being placed in more costly provision or being out of school and not accessing appropriate education provision. The number of learners in independent (non-Cardiff Local Authority) placements provision has increased from 131 at the end of 2022/23 to 216 at the end of 2023/24, leading to increased budgetary pressure. 131 216. As the number of pupils in specialist ALN provision increases, this increases the cost of home-to-school transport, particularly in cases where the provision is delivered outside of Cardiff.
- Pupil Development and Early Years: There has been an increase in the number of children displaying developmental delays on admission to school. Cardiff's schools have seen a significant increase in the number of reception-aged pupils assessed to have severe receptive language difficulties at a higher rate (15%) than the UK average (12%), and above the pre-pandemic rate (11%).

- Emotional Health and Wellbeing:** The increase in the number of children with emotional health and wellbeing needs remains an ongoing challenge. There are currently 1,139 learners with an Individual Development Plan for Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties who receive Additional Learning Provision in their school. A range of support services are available to support schools to enable them to develop their early intervention and Additional Learning Provision offer, including CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services), Mental Health In-Reach, Educational Psychology, and the Specialist Teaching Teams. The Emotional Health and Wellbeing team provided support and advice in relation to 1,418 mainstream learners in 2023-24. The Council continues to offer a range of early interventions along with additional learning provision in schools, including:

  - The implementation of the Welsh Government 'Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being (WSAEMW)'; 80% of all maintained schools are on track to have an action plan in place by March 2025.
  - The 'Thrive' approach, which offers a trauma-informed, whole-school/setting approach to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people; 64 (53%) primary schools and 13 (59%) secondary schools are now using this approach.
  - The use of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) in schools. ELSAs are teaching assistants in schools trained by Educational Psychologists to develop and deliver individualised support programmes to meet the emotional wellbeing needs of children and young people. There are currently 86 schools using ELSA as an intervention.
  - Many schools have small class arrangements based on nurturing principles, for learners to access for planned support and intervention on a regular basis.
- Electively Home Educated:** There has been a significant increase in the number of children who are Electively Home Educated (EHE) following the pandemic. The cohort in Cardiff has more than doubled in size between 2019 (219 children) and 2024 (543 children), though similar increases have been seen across Wales. Many cases are cited to be due to anxiety. The Council has a statutory responsibility to, at minimum, contact families who are home educating once a year. This is to ensure that suitable and efficient education is being provided relevant to the child's needs and abilities, and that the child is demonstrating progress. Information is shared with families regarding accessing support for wellbeing and where possible children are encouraged to return to education provided by the local authority.
- Post-School Outcomes:** Attainment and post-school outcomes are a concern for the EOTAS (educated-other-than-at-school) cohort, as the percentage of those successfully transitioning to further education, employment, or training is at only 82%, against a target of 92%; the lowest result for the last five years. While performing better, the proportion of looked after children making a successful transition is still below target at 89%. This is compared to the total cohort of school leavers, of which 97.7% achieve a successful transition, though this too falls short of the target of 98.5%.



Schools are facing significant budgetary challenges, driven by record levels of inflation which has devalued spending power despite the Council providing funding to schools above the Welsh Government settlement level. The budget challenge is also being driven by increasingly complex demand, and an increase in vacant places across the city's school system. At the end of 2023/24, the Education directorate had an overspend of £1.257m. The main pressures include ALN placements, School Transport, the Ed Tech service, and income shortfalls for the Outdoor Pursuits Centre.

Over the medium term, the fall in birth rates projected across the city is expected to result in an increase in the number of vacant places across schools in Cardiff. These demographic trends will bring additional financial pressures to several schools in the short term, and over the medium term it is projected to impact the financial sustainability of the wider school system.

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