



Summary of an Inquiry Report of the:
Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

**OUT OF COUNTY
PLACEMENTS
INQUIRY SUMMARY**
18 May 2018



Cardiff Council

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FOREWORD

I would like to thank the members of the committee who took part in the task and finish inquiry into out of county placements. I would also like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence in front of the committee during the process. Last, but not least, Martyn Hutching's support and professionalism during this sometimes difficult and challenging inquiry has been immense and I am truly grateful for this.

This was always going to be a challenging, interesting, thought provoking Task and Finish inquiry. The fact is that this is an issue that is not just affecting our city, it is affecting local authorities across the whole nation. During the process, the committee had the privilege of interviewing young people who had been affected by being placed out of county, so it was not just from an adults or agencies perspective that the outcomes and recommendations are based on. This report's outcomes and recommendations are based on what is best for the young people and what as a committee we feel is the way forward for the local authority; we believe that, in time, the recommendations will have a hugely positive effect on young people and their families. The report will also help Children's Services to continue their improvement in the coming years.

Thanks again to everyone who took part.



**Councillor Lee Bridgeman
(Chairperson)**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- To review the provision of out of county placements, the types of provision, cost and impact on resources
- To identify gaps in local provision, social services, and education that result in the need to place children out of county.
- To identify the barriers to providing additional support in Cardiff and the impact on looked after children in being placed outside Cardiff.
- To consider plans and proposals to provide improved provision and determine the effectiveness of these improvement in addressing Cardiff high levels of out of county provision.
- To report the findings of the Committee to the Cabinet.

APPROACH TAKEN

The Inquiry held a number of evidence gathering meetings with the Officer and key stakeholders.

The following Scrutiny Members took part in the evidence gathering during the Inquiry:

Councillor Bridgeman (Chair)	Councillor De'Ath
Councillor Joyce	Councillor Williams
Carol Cobert	

The Inquiry team was grateful to the staff and managers in Children's Services for the open and honest advice, comments and suggestions they made.

External contributions

The Inquiry also appreciated the advice, comments and openness of the Chairman of the Welsh Government Advisory Group, representatives from the Fostering Network, Voices from Care, the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru and Pembrokeshire Council who attended. The Group also considered papers from the ADSS Cymru and Blaenau Gwent Council.

KEY FINDINGS

Impact on Children being looked after

- KF1** The lack of placement provision in Cardiff needs to be addressed;
- KF2** Former Looked After Children often have told us that they value consistency in their relationships with professionals and relatives;

Strategic operations

- KF3** As Corporate Parent, the Cardiff Council has a responsibility to ensure that all looked after children are safeguarded and that their outcomes are improved.;
- KF4** The overwhelming increase in cases coming forward are concerned with neglect with significant increases in domestic violence, issues which are increasingly highlighted as a result of the support that is provided as part of early intervention services;
- KF5** The Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) is focusing on improving outcomes for children by working to three key work-streams 1. Improving Practice, 2. Edge of Care and Risk Assessments, 3. Promoting Permanence. Cardiff Council should continue to work closely with the MAG whilst accelerating its own development agenda.
- KF6** Particularly as Cardiff is the fast growing City and is promoting itself as the a great place to grow up;
- KF7** to review the Corporate Parenting Strategy to reduce the number of Looked After Children is key to help safely reduce the number of looked after children, it should be supported by a clear strategic approach to commissioning and an updated placement strategy, and include more residential specialist provision in Cardiff, , in particular settings for over 14 year olds.

- KF8** There needs to be more collaborative working across Children's Services, and the wider Council;
- KF9** That effective prevention and intervention strategies and improved outcomes are key to reducing numbers of children being looked after. Prevention and intervention work is considered more effective under the full control of children's services;
- KF10** Parents of children who have complex needs children, require specific support services to build their resilience and enable them to look after their children at home.
- KF11** Placement commissioning arrangements should to be reviewed to ensure that the Councils has a fit for purpose system.;
- KF12** In September 2017 the Council had approximately 796 looked after children this has increased from 557 cases in 2012-13; and Members projected that this could reach 920 by March 2019.
- KF13** There is an overspend year on year and is likely to continue for some time, we need to build this into the budget;
- KF14** Savings accrued from invest to save schemes such as moving residential children back to Cardiff can be reinvested into preventative and early help initiatives;

Social Worker Workforce

- KF15** A stable and fully established social worker workforce is key for the well-being of children being looked after as well as the well-being of social workers themselves;
- KF16** The Council must do everything possible, to help recruit and retain children's services social workers;
- KF17** The "signs of safety" model provides the Council with the ideal opportunity to both improve the outcomes for children, well-being of social workers and reduce the number of looked after children and placements.

Placements

- KF18** Cardiff needs to have considerably more placements than it currently has, and where possible should utilise its own housing stock;
- KF19** Monthly reviews of out of county residential placements is undertaken to assess whether the needs and well-being of each Child could be fully met in Cardiff;
- KF20** As Greenhill is the only special school and only takes Boys, Girls have to be placed out of county.
- KF21** To encourage more people to become Foster carers, it has been suggested that the Council should invest in its Foster Carers and identify ways of making working for Cardiff in-house Fostering Service more attractive such as seasonal allowances, pay additional fees and retainers;
- KF22** That where safe to do so, Cardiff should maximise the use of all in house foster carers whenever possible;
- KF23** The key issue that children have to be safeguarded in the setting which best meets their needs and well-being.
- KF24** The increasing complexity of cases and the growing numbers of children are impacting on both the availability of appropriate placements as a result the pre-matching and planning of placements is becoming crucial to the effective placement of Children particularly in emergency situations;
- KF25** There is a high volume of inappropriate referrals to the Council's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub from stakeholders, stakeholders need to be supported to understand when to make a referral to the MASH and when to provide effective early help services;

- KF26** Cardiff is the one of a few authorities in Wales to place 0 – 5 year olds out of county and in independent placements;
- KF27** If you want to reduce out of county placements then you have to change the approach as well as changing provision through an invest to save initiatives;

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1** All Placements must be made in the interests of the Child, minimising the impact on them, their education and well-being. **(KF1 & 2)**
- R2** As Cardiff is the fast growing city and is promoting itself as a great place to grow up, placements should be made, wherever possible in Cardiff. **(KF6)**
- R3** Social Service Directorate should undertake a well-being assessment of all it's Children's Services social workers over the next 12 months. **(KF 15)**
- R4** Social Services Directorate must develop and fully implement a social worker recruitment and retention strategy to encourage new applicants and support to retain staff by 31 March 2019. **(KF 16)**
- R5** As corporate parents, all staff and Councillors, must work in collaboration with all partners to ensure that the safeguarding of all children. **(KF4, 8 & 10)**
- R6** The new management team for People and Communities, to work with the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee to, review the structure and operation of the service to ensure that it is works with all parts of the Council in undertaking their corporate parenting duties, by 31 March 2019. **(KF 3, 10 & 23)**
- R7** it must task officers to review the early help service and reorganise the management and control of all early intervention and prevention initiatives to enable them to be under the control of children's services, within the next 12 months. **(KF 9)**
- R8** A strategic approach to commission placements, to improve outcomes and safely reduce the number of children being looked after, must be developed and implemented as soon as possible. **(KF 7 & 27)**
- R9** It tasks officers in the Social Service Directorate to review the Placement Commissioning arrangements by 31 March 2019. **(KF 11)**
- R10** it continues to implement the Signs of Safety framework, within the next 12 months and provide evidence of its impact.. **(KF 17)**

- R11** It tasks Officers to review, current demand, in to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub to ensure the consistent use of criteria by partners. **(KF 25)**
- R12** Officers must ensure that the placement of 0 – 5 year old, out of county, is only undertaken when it is in the best interests of the Child. **(KF 26)**
- R13** To develop and implement a Placement strategy which should include, to recruit and retain Foster Carers, including, continuous advertisement programme, additional support, allowances, and retainers, to be in place within the next 12 months. **(KF 21)**
- R14** It ensures that a review of all vacant fostering placements, Agency, Council and kingship options, is undertaken to verify that there is appropriate matching and stable placements for all Children being Looked After. **(KF 24)**
- R15** Officers are to develop and implement a building programme of homes for children in Cardiff, utilising every possible agency, as an Invest to save project, within the next 12 months. **(KF18)**
- R16** it ensures that future annual placement budgets must reflect anticipated number of Looked After Children at future year mid-point, to help ensure that Social Services do not overspend. **(KF 12 & 13)**
- R17** Savings accrued from returning children back to Cardiff are reinvested into preventative and early help initiatives. **(KF14, 19)**
- R18** Officer investigate whether Greenhill School could admit Girls to minimise out of county placements. **(KF 20)**
- R19 Action Plan** - The Cabinet Member ensures that an action plan is developed to ensure the implementation of these recommendations within an agreed timescale as part of the response to this report. **(KF 5)**

Scrutiny Committee Membership



Councillor Lee Bridgeman
(Chairperson)



Councillor Dan De'Ath



Councillor Philippa Hill-John



Councillor Heather Joyce



Councillor Linda Morgan



Councillor Jim Murphy



Councillor Mike Phillips



Councillor Kanaya Singh



Councillor Rhys Taylor

Co-opted Members:



Mrs P Arlotte
Roman Catholic
Representative



Carol Cobert
Church in Wales
Representative



Ms Rebecca Crump
Parent Governor
Representative



Karen Dell'Armi
Parent Governor
Representative

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