

Cardiff Children's Services

Homes for Children Commissioning Strategy



Llety
Gwasanaethau
Plant
**Children's
Services
Accommodation**

The Right Home and the Right Support for our Children Looked After September 2024 - 25 DRAFT



This document is available in Welsh /
Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg



CREV GWR IN THE STONES
FEL GWYB YDR HORIZONS
O FWRNALS A WENJING



**STRONGER
FAIRER
GREENER**



CARDIFF
CAERDYDD

Introduction

Cardiff Council are pleased to present our Homes for Children Commissioning Strategy for children and young people who are in the care of the Council and need to be looked after.

Our Vision

This strategy sits within the overarching context of the Cardiff Children's Services Strategy (2023-2026).

That outlines a dynamic and progressive vision for children's social services.

Children in Cardiff are provided with the right support, from the right person at the right time, in the right place and at the lowest safe level of intervention, enabling them to remain with their family where it is safe for them to do so and achieve their full potential.

Scope

The last version of this strategy set out the following objectives:

1. Shifting the Balance of Care: To ensure we are working with families at the lowest safe level of intervention and minimizing the need for children to become looked after.

In our 2022 Strategy a significant focus was placed on this objective, so that by intervening earlier we prevent the escalation of need and reduce the number of children requiring residential and foster homes. We aimed to apply this principle at every stage in a child or young person's journey with us.



During the last 2 years we have significantly shifted the balance of care in favour of earlier intervention through developments in social work practice, procedures and resources in Children's Services. Figures later in this report demonstrate that the number of children looked after is now reducing in Cardiff as a result.

2. The Right Place: the right location and providing the right model of care.

During the 2 years since the last report, we have worked with partners in Health and Education to enhance our ability to provide formulation based assessment and care. This is provided in partnership with the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board's Psychology department, to deliver the Goleudy service.

3. Sufficiency: increasing the availability of local homes for children and young people.

Since the last version of this strategy, we have significantly improved our in-house offer, increasing the number of homes from four to eight. We have learnt from our experience and are now in a better position to meaningfully take forward the next phase of our accommodation strategy with five additional homes in development.

What do we want our strategy to do now?

Building on what we have already delivered, we now have two objectives:

- To build, reshape, and expand our children's homes and fostering services to improve the outcomes of our most vulnerable children, young people and families.
- To meet the requirements of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill 2024, to ensure sufficient accommodation for children who are looked after in not-for-profit children's homes and foster care.

We will:

Deliver our Homes for Children Commissioning Priorities through the core elements of
The Children's Services Strategy: Striving for Excellence.

Cardiff Children's Services Strategy 2023-26

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE



What we'll do

Children in Cardiff are provided with the right support, from the right person at the right time, in the right place and at the lowest safe level of intervention, enabling them to remain with their family where it is safe for them to do so and achieve their full potential #KeepingFamiliesTogether

How we'll do it



Ensuring a range of support in the community and a variety of homes for children are available in Cardiff - **PLACE**



Supporting a permanent workforce - **PEOPLE**



Developing our **PRACTICE** and procedures



How we know we are making a difference

- Reduction in number of children looked after.
- Children looked after are in or closer to Cardiff and in house placements.
- Court timescales are met.
- Reduced social worker vacancy rate.
- Reduced social worker turnover.
- Reduction in number of children on the Child Protection Register.
- Reduction in number of children experiencing exploitation.
- Improved access to services for children with mental health / emotional wellbeing issues.
- Reduced offending / reoffending rate.

Social Care Policy Content

Further information can be found in relation to each Policy through the hyperlink provided.

Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill 2024

[Removing profit from the care of children looked after: general briefing July 2024 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

[Overview of the Social services and well-being... | Social Care Wales](#)

The National Framework for the Commissioning of Care and Support in Wales: Code of practice 2024

[National framework for commissioning care and support: code of practice | GOV.WALES](#)

Procurement Act 2023

[Transforming Public Procurement - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: the essentials \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016

[Regulation and inspection of social care in Wales | Social Care Wales](#)



Together We are Stronger

Working in Partnership

The legal, policy and local strategic context all stress the importance of partnerships and working differently across public sector partners, the third and independent sector.

Our work with partners is a central tenet in our delivery of more care, support and accommodation options in order to see an improvement in outcomes for children and young people.

The Social Services and Well-Being Act describes the outcomes, which all partners need to work together to achieve for Children and Young people.

- Being Safe,
- Having somewhere suitable to live,
- Being involved in decisions that impact your life,
- Having friends,
- Being part of good, strong communities,
- Having every chance to do well in education, training, worked-based earning and employment,
- Feeling good about your life,
- Being able to grow up happily and successfully,
- Being well looked after,
- Having access to appropriate health care.

Our approach to collaboration across services including public, third sector and independent providers in the market will facilitate a whole system approach and provide inclusive services for all those children, young people and families who may need them.

Working with Providers

This strategy also signals the ongoing desire of Cardiff Council to work collaboratively with providers to ensure an open and mature relationship. This proactive dialogue will engage providers in the development of key aspects of commissioning and enacting the Welsh Governments not-for profit vision, including the development of future provision and the analysis of current needs. They continue to have an important perspective to bring to the shaping of future provision.

Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs)

Cardiff is a member of this national consortium which is a strategic commissioning alliance between Welsh Local Authorities to support commissioning needs in respect of fostering and residential homes for children. Where it makes sense, Cardiff will be a key partner in developing regional and national solutions for children's provision.

Foster Wales

Foster Wales was launched in July 2021. It is the nationwide collective of the 22 Local Authority fostering teams. Its objectives include:

- Co-ordinating national and local foster care marketing and recruitment.
- Managing and using the fostering National Performance Management framework.
- Coordinating national retention initiatives such as the National Commitment.
- National workforce improvement initiatives such as foster care Learning and Development.
- Continuing work in respect of harmonisation of foster carer payments.
- Promoting best practice standards and quality improvement across the sector.
- Foster Wales has a close working relationship with the National Adoption Service (NAS).

The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative

This is a collaboration between Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) and Merthyr Tydfil Local Authorities. It is one of five regional collaboratives that form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales.

The collaborative's primary role is to facilitate the adoption process for children who can no longer live with their birth families. They provide comprehensive support throughout the adoption journey, including:

- Information and Guidance: about the adoption process, including videos, stories, and blogs to help prospective adopters make informed decisions.
- Training and Preparation: to individuals and families for adoptive parenthood.
- Matching with adopters: to identify the best match for both the child and the family, and supporting them through the introductory period and formal adoption process.
- Post-Adoption Support: after the adoption to help families settle and thrive together.

They also focus on finding homes for children who typically wait the longest for adoption, such as those with medical or developmental issues, sibling groups, and children over the age of four.

The wider professional Network

More widely it must be stressed that for every child and in every situation, children, young people and their families are supported by a broad and encompassing network of professionals. These professionals are vital in providing our children and young people with the assessment and support which enables them to settle in new homes, reduces breakdown, enables relationships to thrive and to achieve permanence.

This includes our statutory partners. These include a variety of teams across Children's Services, Schools Services, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, Cardiff Council's Communities Directorate and other Council directorates. It also includes large numbers of third sector and voluntary organisations, many of which are affiliated with Cardiff's 3rd Sector Council.

These Professionals work with our children and young people across settings, and include:

- Social workers, social work assistants, residential staff and support workers.
- Teachers and school staff.
- Nurses and allied health professionals including therapists.
- Housing providers and service & benefit advisors.
- Youth workers, support workers and volunteers.
- And many others who make a difference by meeting each individual's specific needs.

Trusted Adults within Communities and Social Networks

Finally, it must be stressed that among the most important partners in supporting a child, are their family and social network, and the trusted adults they develop in a whole range of community settings.

We are all ambitious for our children looked after and care leavers and we know the wider professional network, the city and its communities are too.



Our Model of Care

The Cardiff 'Corporate Parenting Strategy' sets out the vision for children looked after.

'A child who is cared for by the Council has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent. Every good parent knows that children require a safe and secure environment in which to grow and thrive. Parents protect and support their children against the dangers and risks of life. Parents are ambitious for them and want them to reach their potential. Parents celebrate and share in their achievements.'

We are working to apply the Cardiff Model of Care.

We want to ensure that children and young people are not passed from service to service but instead are supported by an integrated service. This is delivered by a dedicated team of edge of care and residential workers, a clinical psychologist, speech and language therapist and a Police worker who 'stick with' young people on their journey

It is applied to children and young people who are in care, edging to or on the edge of care, or have recently moved to supported or independent accommodation whilst being supported.

Some young people are placed in children's homes which function as hubs and assessment centres, and others are supported by outreach while either in foster care or living with their families.

The approach to practice thinks differently about:

- Risk management and safeguarding children and young people.
- Psychologically informed systemic practice across Children's Services.
- Reduces handoffs and episodic planning.
- Right services, right time, right place to meet need.
- Always striving for permanence in family/community setting (connectivity).
- Trauma informed that is strengths based.
- Is aspirational – building self-esteem, foundations for the future and improving the lived experience for young people.

This leads to a systemic service wide integrity and delivering against the ambition of 'sticking with' young people. Central to the innovation is that all staff are trained in a trauma informed, restorative, and solution-focused approaches.

Trauma Informed Approaches

A trauma Informed Approach is a strengths-based approach which seeks to understand and respond to the impact of trauma on people's lives. It emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone and aims to empower individuals to re-establish control of their lives. We are committed to developing services that wrap around families, extended families and carers to respond to needs earlier and prevent their escalation.

Non-Violent Resistance (NVR)

NVR is an innovative form of systemic family therapy, which has been developed for aggressive, violent, controlling and self-destructive behaviour in young people. In other parts of the UK, it is increasingly being used with young people who have anxiety disorders and are hard-to-reach. This group is especially at risk of serious self-harm over their life span and may not engage sufficiently in therapy to be diverted from that risk.

A variety of other behaviours are now being responded to effectively with methods drawn from NVR, including internet addiction, eating disorders, Adult Entrenched Dependency (AED) (often in conjunction with severe and enduring mental health problems), gang involvement, and domestic violence.

High efficacy and very low drop-out rates make this an efficient approach, which can prevent family breakdown and facilitate the rehabilitation of looked after children back into their families.

Through whole systemic change this approach can lead to improved outcomes including a reduction in total time spent in residential settings and a total reduction in the number of children looked after, as well as a reduction in missing, arrests, and hospital admissions.

The approach is currently being rolled out through Children's Services Adolescent Resource Centre (ARC) service, with a plan to cascade training to staff throughout Children's Services, starting with the Council's own in-house Children's Homes.

Secure Base

The Secure Base Model was introduced into Cardiff's children's home several years ago. It focuses on the interactions that occur between caregivers and children, through the provision of a positive framework for therapeutic caregiving, which helps infants, children and young people to move towards greater security and builds resilience.

It helps children to feel secure in their relationships with the adults who look after them. Where children have not experienced the kind of sensitive parenting that promotes security and resilience, they will find it difficult to trust and will struggle with managing their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Therefore, caregivers need to be supported and equipped to offer a consistent, reliable base from which children can explore, and have the capacity to offer a safe haven for reassurance when there are difficulties in order to assist healthy childhood development.



The hallmarks of excellent provision

Ours is a vision of a collaborative of independent providers united by one common ambition to deliver consistently high aspirations for the children and young people in our care.

The experience of children and young people who live in these homes is paramount. We know the hallmarks of excellent provision indicate we will require:

- Meticulous planning and engagement in person centred care, with a commitment to never 'give up'.
- The investment of time in children and young people's relationships with staff, each other, and where appropriate their families, so that they become meaningful and secure.
- Staff must have an unwavering commitment to children and young people, and a belief in each child's ability to achieve.
- They must work with each child or young person to build their emotional resilience and self-confidence, to prepare them for independence and enable them to withstand difficulties and set backs in the future.
- Demonstrate absolute consistency in the management of behaviour so that young people understand and respect the boundaries that are set and respond positively to encouragement, rewards and meaningful sanctions.
- Effective leadership will be at the heart of our pathway to this success.

We are looking for providers who can demonstrate their ability to deliver:

- Excellent leaders who are hands-on, who unite their staff behind a shared purpose, and who are transparent and open in their expectations and pursuit of excellence.
- Clarity of vision, which is focused on the experience of children and young people and uncompromising in its ambition.
- A culture of continuous improvement and consistency in systems and practice, which enables every home to maintain its outstanding status over time. Leaders who ask, 'what could we do better?'
- Staff who possess passion and energy, are deeply committed to their work, and the recruitment, training and management systems to identify and support them.
- We need homes where there are robust systems to manage every induction, event and transition, to keep children and staff safe and compliant with regulations and requirements.

We want the very best providers to share best practice and learn from each other whilst delivering services to Cardiff.

What Key Stakeholders told us

This section sets out the messages received from key stakeholder regarding our Children Looked After.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

Wales made the UNCRC part of its domestic law in 2011 in the form of the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. The Measure clarifies that Welsh Government must have 'due regard' for the UNCRC in all its policies. The Convention states that all children have the right to have decisions made in their best interest and have the right to have a say in decisions that concern them.

What's important to Children and Young people?

From the information gathered from the consultations, surveys and engagement exercises with children and young people in care, key messages have been identified as follows:

- 1. Personal Connection:** Children and young people want professionals to know them personally, without assumptions about their lives or abilities.
- 2. Consistency and Action:** They desire consistent workers who act on previously shared information.
- 3. Accurate Recording:** They want factual, non-subjective records that avoid stigma.
- 4. Homely Environment:** They dislike terms like 'placement' or 'unit' and prefer a place they can call 'home' and personalise.
- 5. Inclusion and Understanding:** They want to feel included, understand why they are in care, and be involved in decision-making.
- 6. Appropriate Training:** Care planning should consider gender and cultural differences, with foster carers receiving relevant training.
- 7. Mental Health and Outdoors:** They seek better access to mental health services and more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors.
- 8. Relationships and Fun:** Building strong, dependable relationships and having fun are crucial, with more opportunities for socialising.
- 9. Future Security:** They want a secure future with decent income, independence, and the ability to care for themselves, while staying connected to their local area and support networks.
- 10. Normalcy and Safety:** They wish to feel like their peers, avoid stigma, and have their belongings respected during moves. School and college are seen positively as places to experience normal teenage life.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy was launched during the 2021 setting out five key priorities based on the views and experiences of children looked after. These are:

- Improving emotional wellbeing and physical health.
- Better connections, improved relationships.
- A comfortable, safe and stable home whilst in care and after.
- Educational Achievement, Employment and Training.
- Celebrating our children and young people

There are some important themes within these messages which need to inform our commissioning strategy going forward. These themes could be summarised as 'meaningful involvement', 'having positive experience', 'their emotional well-being' and their desire to 'stay close to home'.

What our providers tell us

The Council has been engaging individually and in workshops with Fostering and Residential Providers.

The overriding message was a willingness to work even more closely in partnership, with the Council. A number of important messages emerged through the discussions:

- **Diverse Experience and Skills:** Providers bring a wealth of experience, skills, and knowledge that are crucial for developing effective services.
- **Shared Learning and Development:** There is a strong willingness among providers to engage in shared learning and development, fostering a collaborative environment.
- **Engagement Opportunities:** There are numerous opportunities to link up engagement efforts with children and young people, ensuring their voices are heard.
- **Recruitment and Retention Challenges:** The sector faces significant challenges in recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce, which impacts service delivery.
- **Foster Carer Recruitment:** Recruiting Foster Carers is a common challenge, highlighting the need for targeted strategies to attract and retain them.
- **Planned Approach for Care Leavers:** Providers desire a more structured and planned approach for supporting young people transitioning out of care.
- **Ongoing Dialogue:** Continuous communication between providers and the Council is essential to address ongoing issues and improve services.
- **Understanding Changing Needs:** Providers are keen to understand how the needs and demands of children and young people are evolving to better tailor their services.
- **Complex Needs:** Some children and young people have complex needs that require deeper understanding and specialised support.

This feedback clearly shows the market of providers wanting to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the Council, looking at shared challenges and looking for solutions that best meet the changing needs of children and young people in Cardiff.

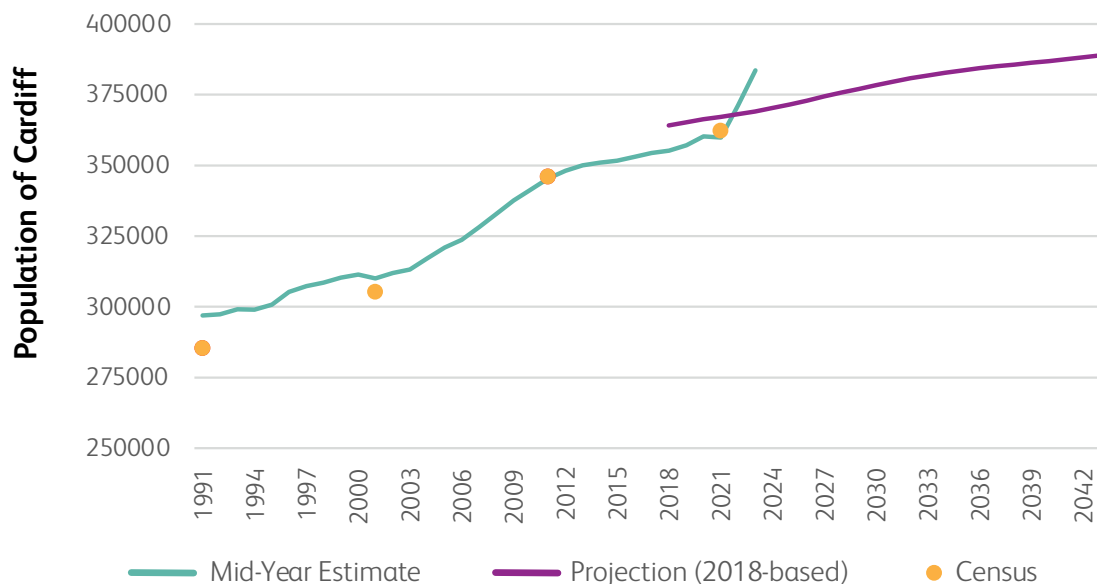
What our Staff tell us

Engagement with staff has further helped in terms of understanding the changing needs of our children and young people. Key messages included:

- **Rising Demand and Issues with finding homes:** We're seeing an increase in demand and it's becoming harder to find suitable homes, especially for children with complex needs.
- **Complex Needs in Younger Children:** Some children with significant needs are younger than we previously expected, making it tough to find regulated homes.
- **Breakdowns and Trauma Concerns:** There are too many breakdowns, and we're worried about the impact of vicarious trauma on our team.
- **Consistency and Service Development:** We value consistency across services and want to see further development, particularly in CAMHS and Psychology services.
- **Supporting Families and Sibling Groups:** We want to offer more support to families, help reunite them, and address the needs of sibling groups.
- **Process Improvement and Priority Areas:** We need to improve our processes, enhance Rapid Response arrangements, and focus on engaging with providers for teenagers, disabled children, and other priority groups.

Looked After Children and Data Trends

Population Change



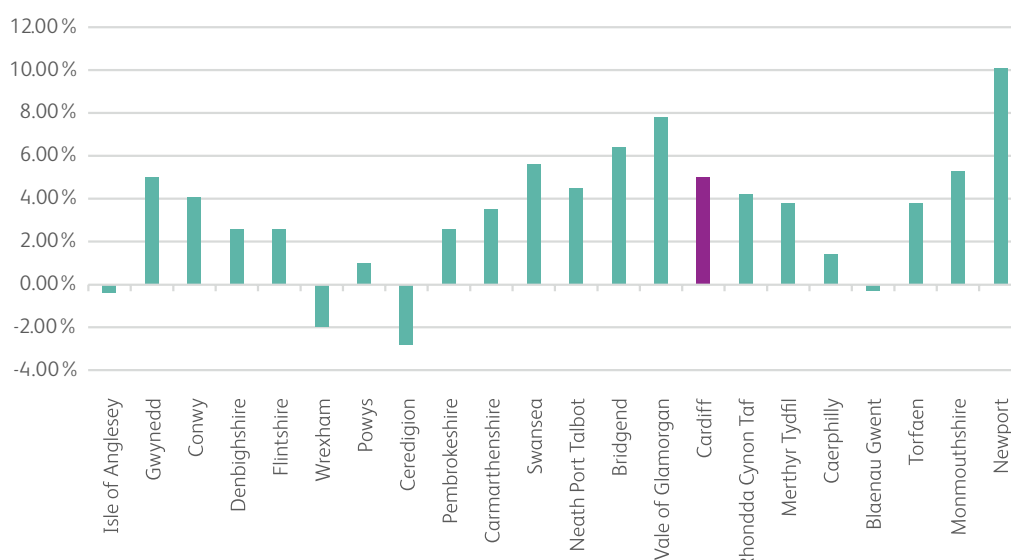
Cardiff's all age population is expected to grow by 18,607 people over 20 years. From 370,283 in 2024 to 388,890 in 2043. The annual increase is of approximately 900-1,200 people.

Forecasts indicate Cardiff will increase in size by 5% over the period.

This indicates Cardiff's population will increase at a moderate pace compared to some other Local Authorities such as Newport (which is predicted to grow by 10%). In contrast, regions such as Ceredigion and Wrexham are expected to see population declines over the same period.

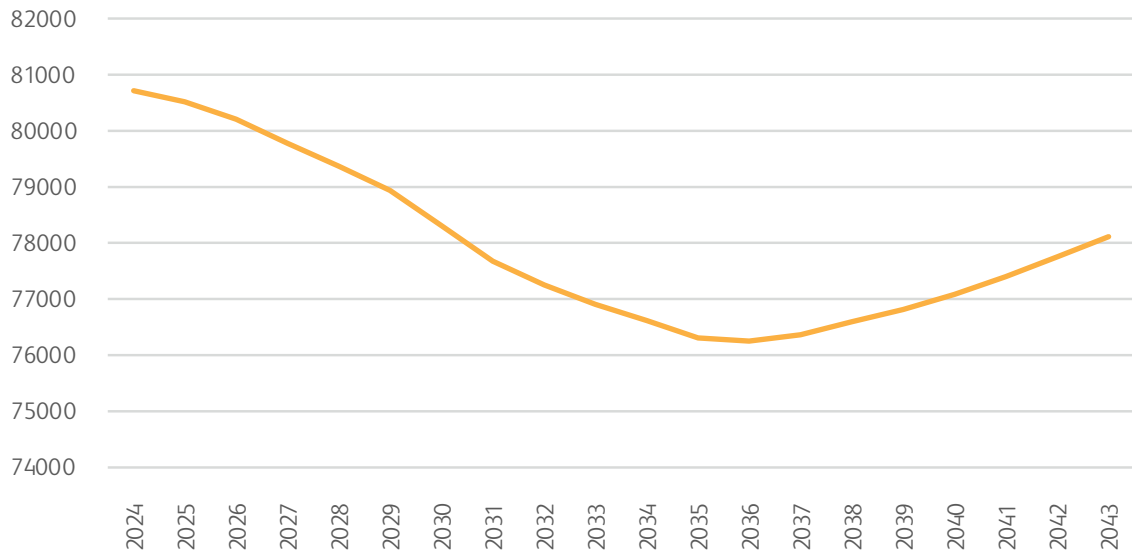
The average annual growth rate across Wales is approximately 0.25%. This makes Cardiff one of the larger, steadily growing Local Authorities.

Percentage Change in Wales Total Projected Population 2024-2043



Source: 2018-based projections for local authorities
Welsh Government

Population Age 18 and Under



Despite the overall population growth, projections show there is likely to be a gradual decline in the population of children (aged 0-18 years) in Cardiff from 80,714 in 2024 to 76,255 in 2036. This is a decline of around 5.5%.

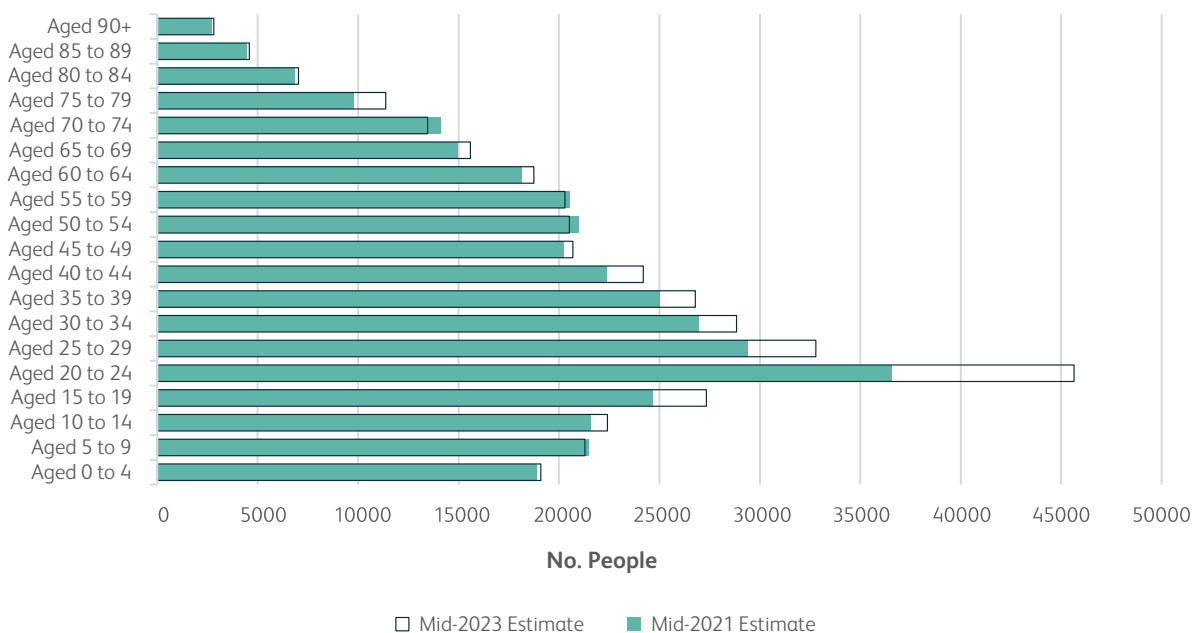
After 2036, the population starts to slightly increase, ending at 78,110 in 2043.

This will reflect population age structures and demographic trends, including birth rates and migration patterns.

Future projections should be interpreted within the context of considerable residential development continuing in Cardiff, with the ongoing addition of family homes. Projections may therefore change over time.

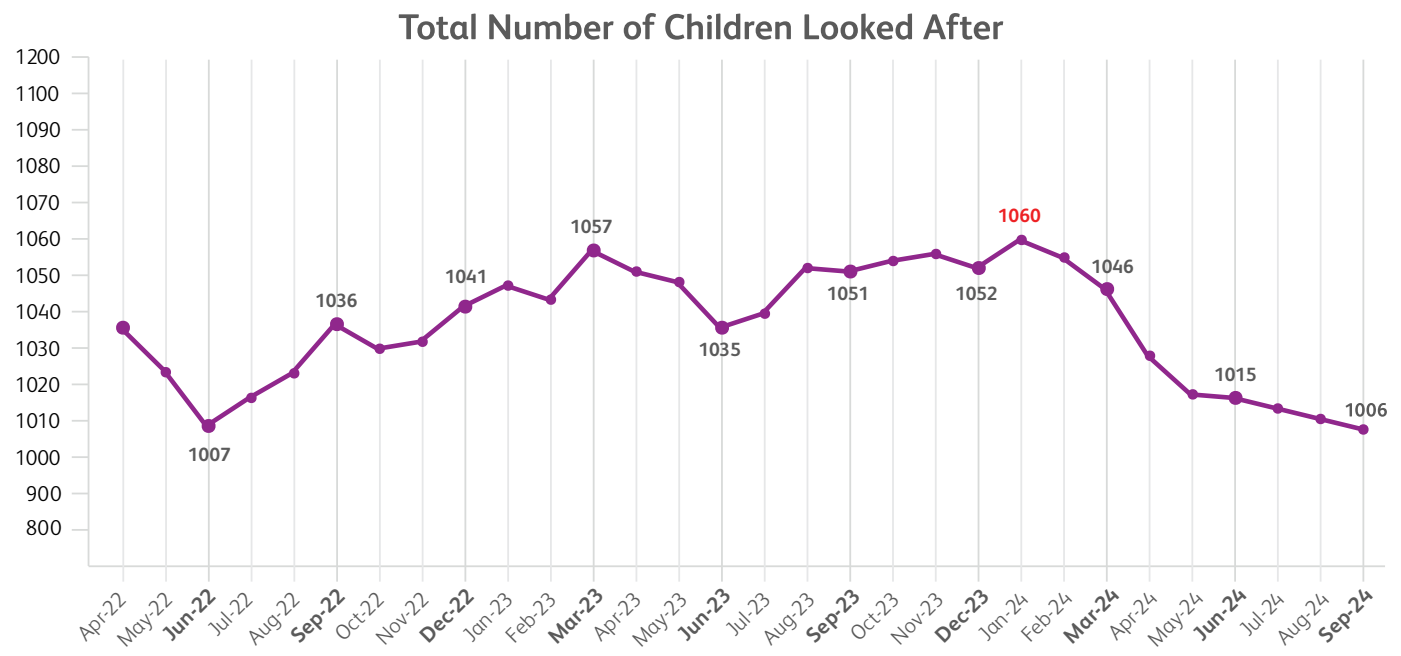
The data below indicates that the population of Cardiff has already grown faster than expected between 2021 and 2023 population projections, with higher numbers of children than previously projected. The most significant increase within the population of children has occurred in the number of young people aged 15-19.

Population Age Structure for Cardiff by 5-Year Age Group (No. People), Mid-2021 v Mid-2023



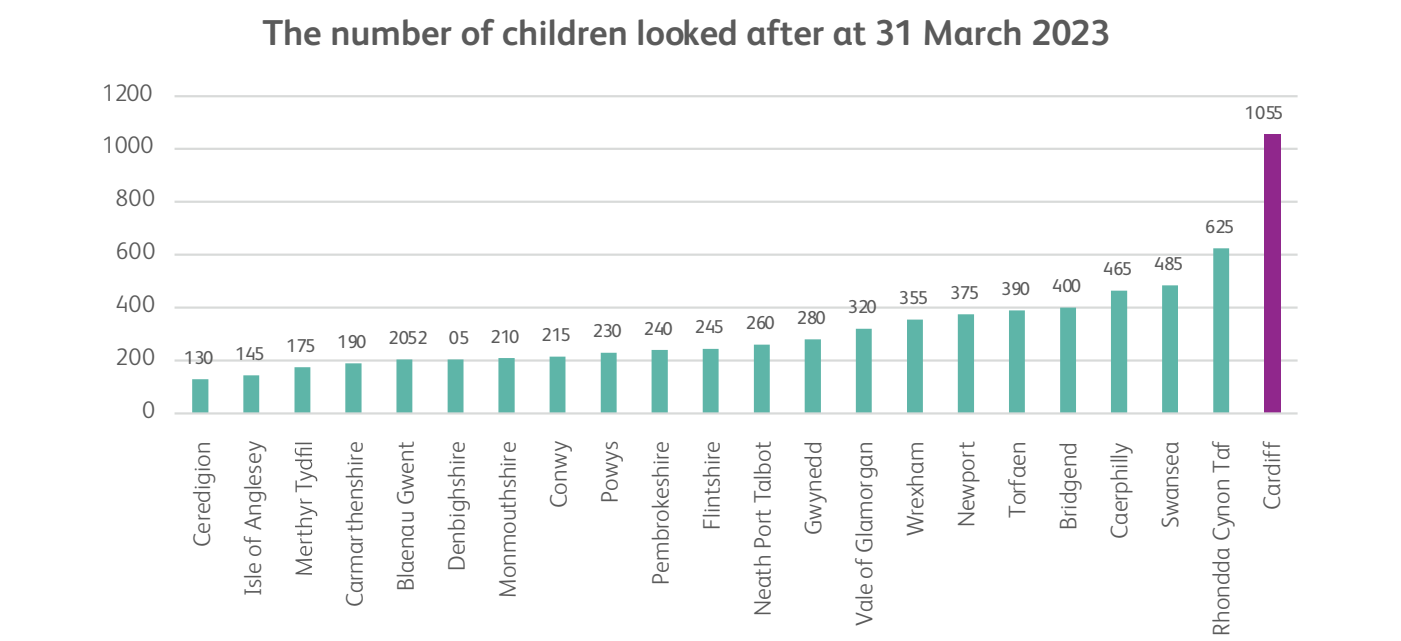
Children looked after

The trend in numbers of children looked after in Cardiff in recent years has shown a gradual increase from June 2022 (1007), reaching a peak of 1060 in January 2024, followed by a faster decline back to 1006 by September 2024.

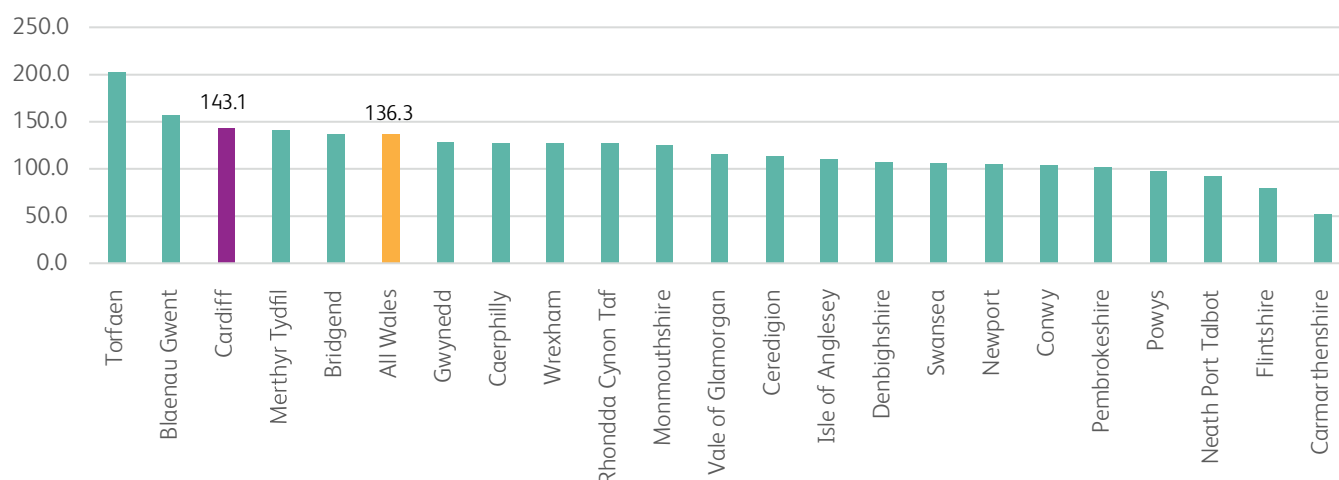


This may reflect the increased demand for services caused by the wider socioeconomic impact of Covid-19, and subsequently the impact of Children’s Services initiatives over the period to Shift the Balance of Care towards earlier intervention and prevention.

The number of children looked after varies widely by local authority, with urban areas such as Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taf having the largest numbers. Rural or smaller regions, such as Ceredigion and Isle of Anglesey have far fewer. Local Authority population size is also of course very significant.



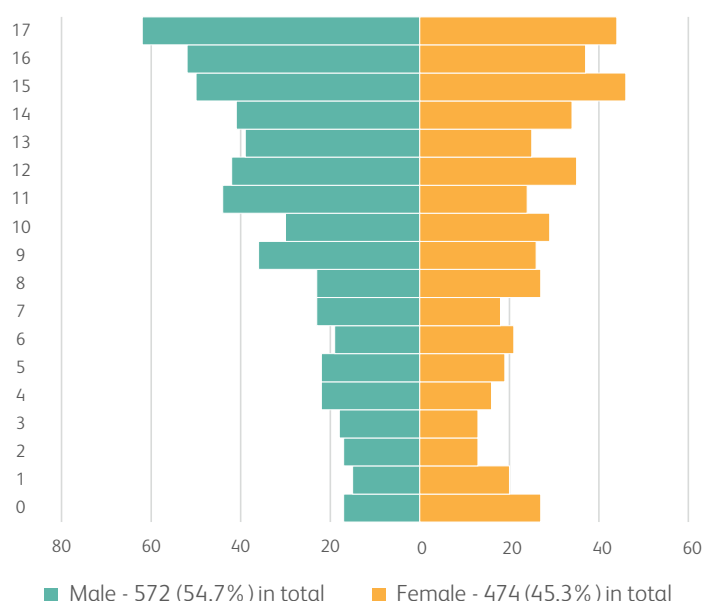
Children looked after per 10,000 population by Welsh Local Authority, as at 31st March 2023



At the 31 March 2023 the number of children looked after ranged from 130 in Ceredigion to 1055 in Cardiff. Cardiff stands out with more than 400 children above the next highest local authority (Rhondda Cynon Taf). The latest published data as at the 31st March 2023, shows Cardiff has 14.6 % of All Wales' Children looked after. Using the latest Stats Wales release Cardiff has 18 % of all the children in residential provision in Wales. Cardiff's rate of children looked after at 143.1 per 10,000 population places it above the all-Wales average (136.3) but below Torfaen (at 202.9) and Blaenau Gwent (156.3). Merthyr Tydfil which is also an urban area has the 3rd fewest number of children looked after in Wales due to the Local Authority's small size, but the fourth highest rate per population due to the level of need within that population.

Gender and Age

The number of children who are looked after by age and gender as at the 31st March 2024



Youngest Age Groups (0-5 years):

This group represents about 21.9 % of the total looked after children. There are 112 males and 117 females. This shows fairly even distribution across gender, with very slightly more females among babies and toddlers

Middle Age Groups (6-11 years):

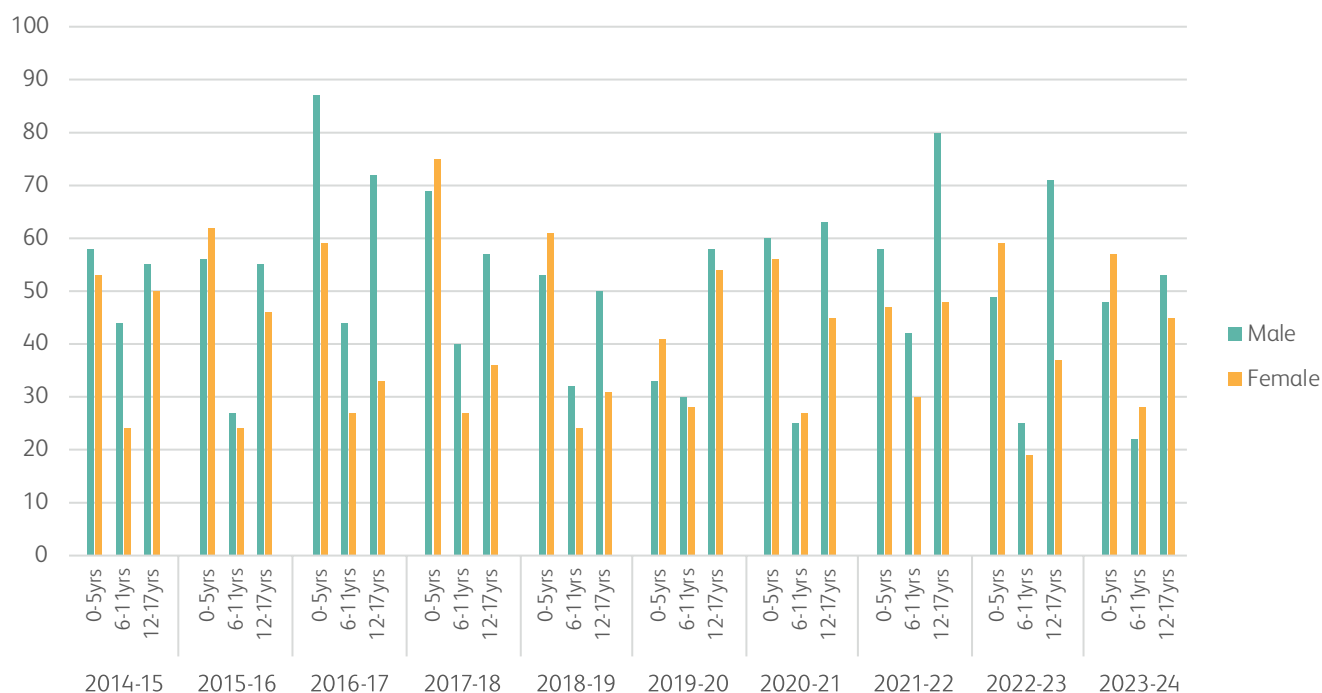
This group represents about 32.1 % of the total looked after children. 193 of these are males and 143 females. There is a higher percentage of males in this group.

Older Age Groups (12-17 years):

This group represents about 46 % of the total looked after children. There are 267 males and 214 females. This is the largest group, showing more older children and teenagers are looked after, peaking at age 17 (106 children) and with an increasing trend towards being male.

There is a noticeable rise in numbers of children from ages 10 onwards, with a significant number of teenagers looked after compared to younger children. The data therefore suggests a growing need for resources tailored to older children and teenagers, especially boys.

BLA starts by gender

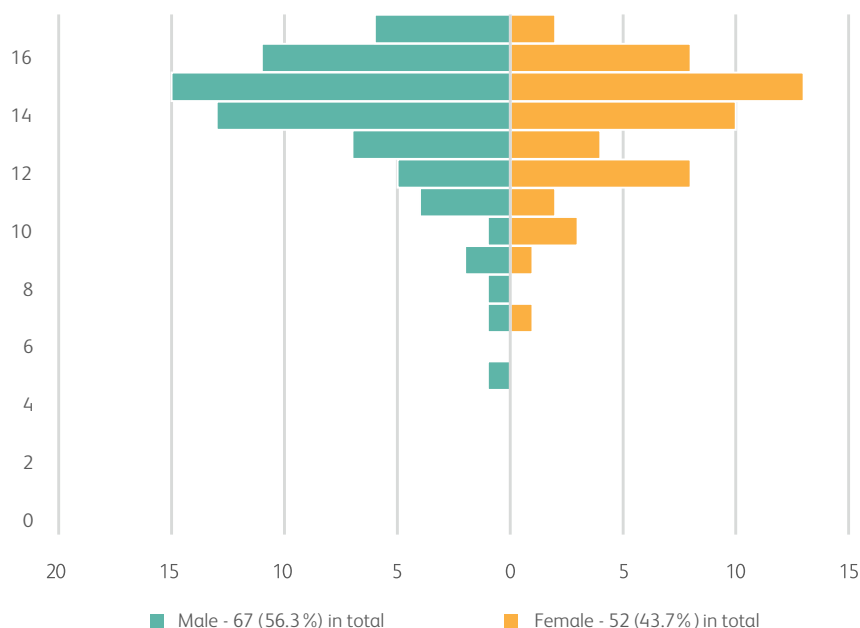


The data shows higher numbers of males becoming looked after in the 12-17 age group throughout the ten year period, with notable peaks in 2016-17 (72 males) and 2021-22 (80 males). The numbers have begun to show an emerging declining trend over the last 3 years.

Both genders show high variability in the 0-5 age group, with significant male spikes in 2016-17 (87 males) and higher female figures in 2017-18 (75 females). Females aged 0-5 becoming looked after generally increased after 2015-16, surpassing males in some years (2015-16, 2017-18, 2018-19).

The 6-11 age group generally shows lower numbers compared to the other age groups, with no significant gender disparities.

Graph showing the number of children in residential homes by age and gender as at 31st March 2024



This data includes residential schools and disabled children.

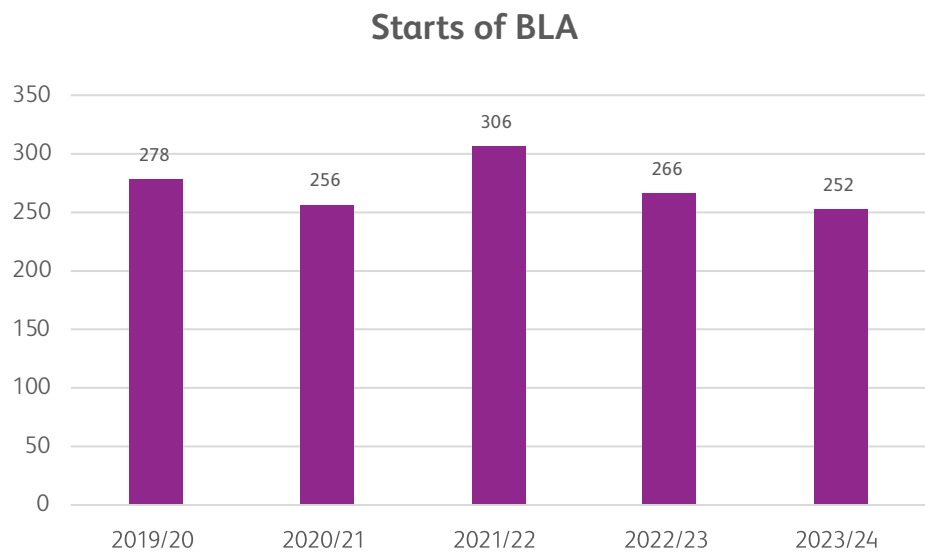
In most age groups, there is a higher proportion of males in residential provision than females, especially at age 14 and 15.

Females peak at the age of 15 (13 females), showing the highest representation of girls in residential care.

The data highlights a significant demand for residential homes for older children, particularly those aged 14 to 16.

Children Becoming Looked After

The data shows a degree of variability in the number of children becoming looked after over time. The number becoming looked after in 2023/24 252 is the lowest within the period.



The number of children becoming looked after in the first 6 months of 2024/25 (91 compared to 131 for the first 6 months of 2023/24) indicates a continuing decreasing trend.

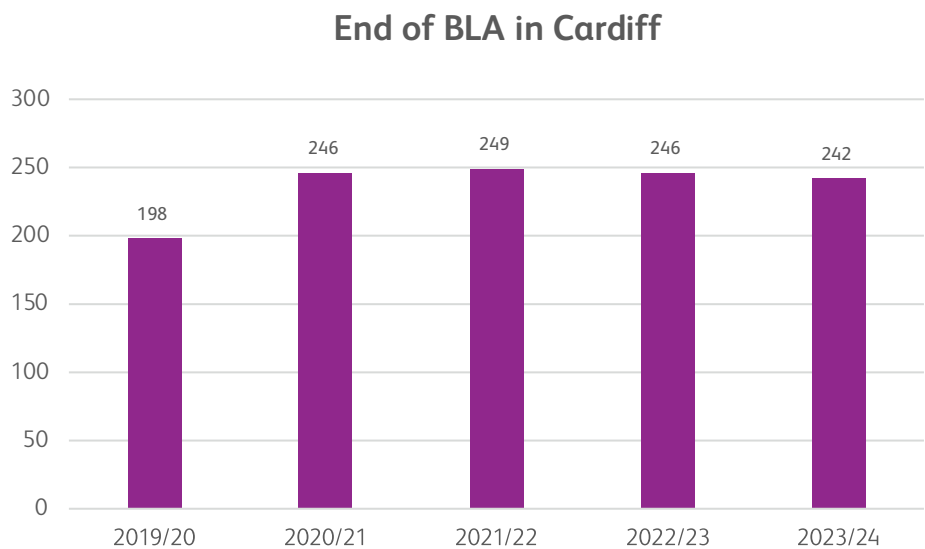
Should this continue for the next 6 months there will be a significant decline in the rate of children becoming looked after at the end of the year.

This decreasing trend evidences the emerging impact of Children’s Services early intervention and preventative strategy to Shift the Balance of Care, along with a reduction in children being Placed with Parents and increasing use of Special Guardianship Orders instead of kinship care.

End of being looked after

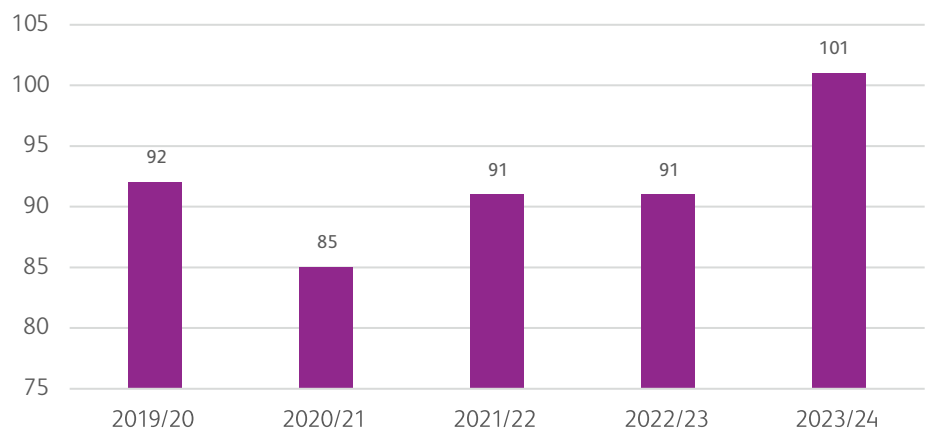
The number of ends of children being looked after increased from 198 (16.8 %) in 2019/20 to 242 (20.5 %) in 2023/24.

The most notable increase occurred between 2019/20 and 2020/21, where the number increased by 48 (4 %). The numbers have stayed relatively stable, hovering around the 21 % since.



Disabled children

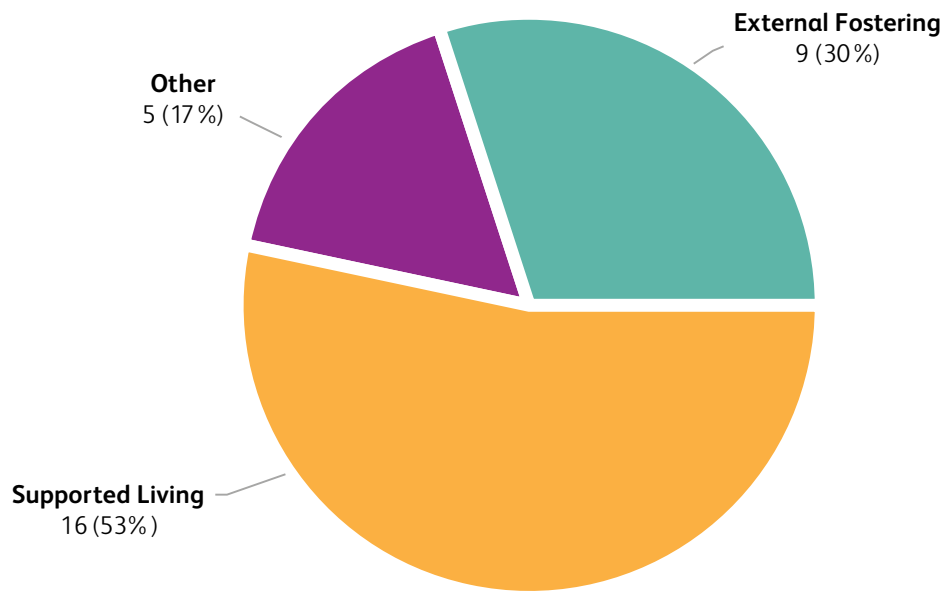
The number of Disabled Children Looked After



The number of disabled children has increased since 2020/21. This is a 19 % increase and about a 10 % increase compared to the previous stable years (2021/22 and 2022/23). This trend might be attributed to increasing need, improved referral and willingness to engage with Children’s Services, or potential variability in threshold.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children by home type as at 31st March 2024



The majority of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children are placed in supported Accommodation. This mostly reflects age, with those aged over 16, and those aged <16 requiring regulated provision i.e. foster care.

New Residential

From analysis of the types of homes children were in prior to their latest residential home:

- 34 from residential went into a different residential home.
- 25 from other went into residential care, including step down from OWR, Hospital and Secure.
- 13 from external fostering went into residential care.
- 7 from in-house fostering went into residential care.
- 6 from kinship care went into residential care.
- 2 from placed with parent went into residential care.

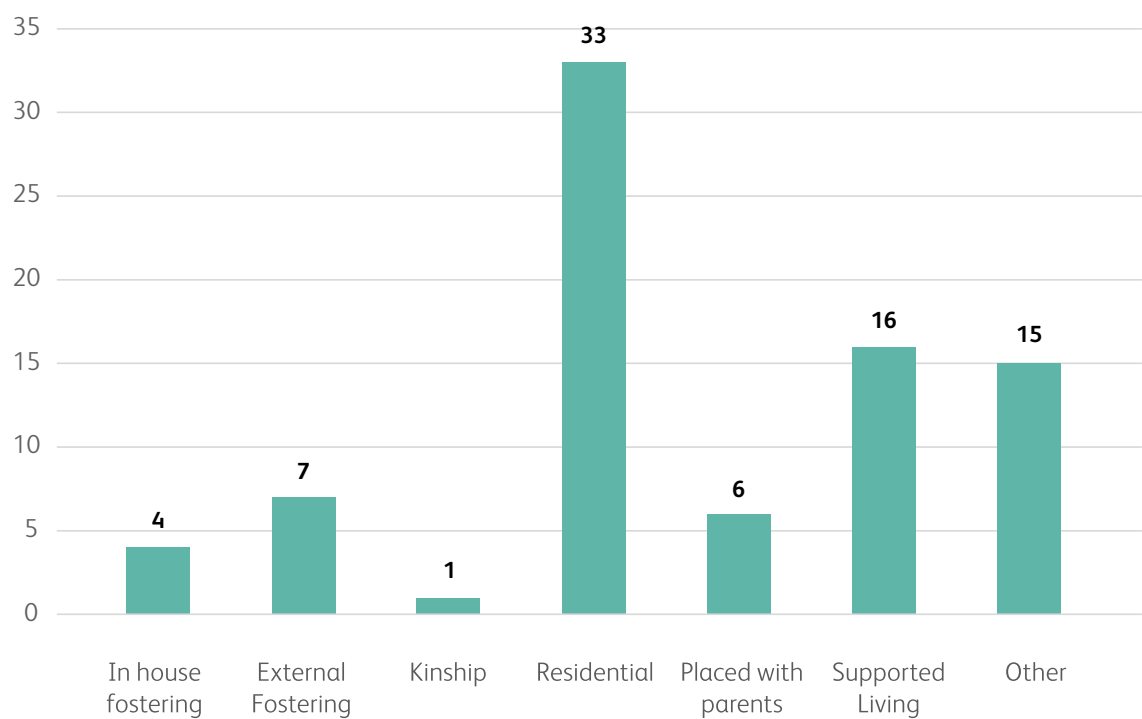
The high number of moves from other residential homes suggests that stability is an issue. With the exception of secure, where discharge from secure has to occur as a step-down plan when the Order is discharged. Secure is not a long-term plan.

The movements from kinship and in-house fostering suggest that while generally more stable, these settings also encounter challenges that occasionally lead to residential care needs, but also reflect the increasing difficulty of sourcing foster care homes.

Move on from Residential Provisions

431 children were in foster homes at the 31 March 2024. This is 79 % of homes provided for children and young people.

Types of Homes following Residential 2023-24

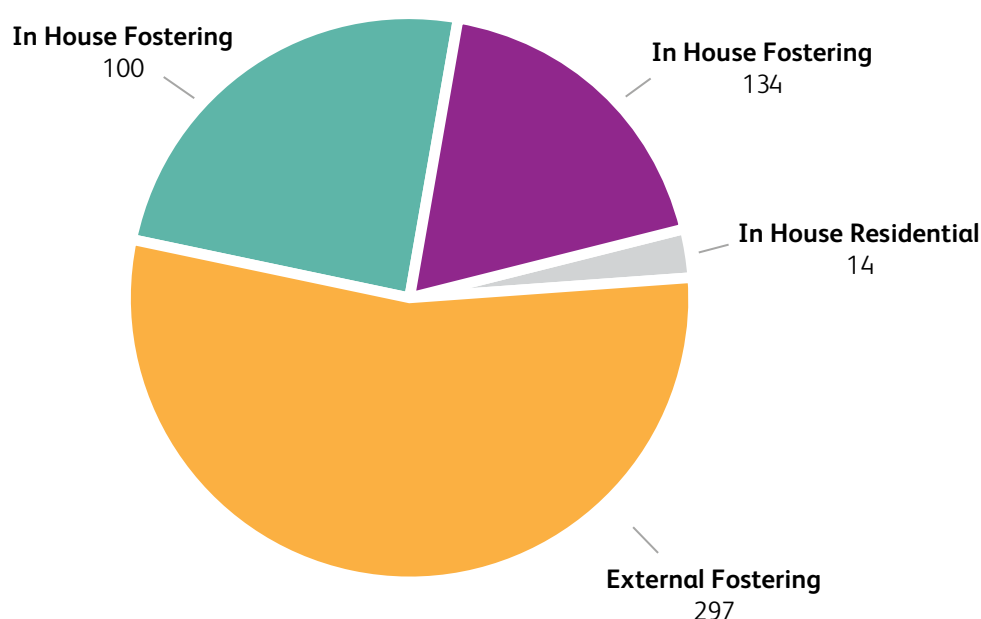


82 moves were made from residential care during 2023-24.

A significant number of children moving from children's homes moved to another children's home (33 children, 40.2%). 18 children (21.9%) stepped down into foster care, kinship or were placed with parents. 11 children (13.4%) of those into foster care. The majority of the remaining children transitioned into supported living (16 children, 19.5%) reflecting their age.

There are 114 children in residential care. This equates to 21 % of homes provided for children and young people.

Current Internal and external provision in CARDIFF AS AT 31/03/2024



Of the total 419 Foster Care homes used throughout 2023/24, 22 providers were off framework (5.25%), 79 (19%) providers were not for profit. There are currently 272 children in external foster homes, of which 220 are in for profit foster care agencies (81%).

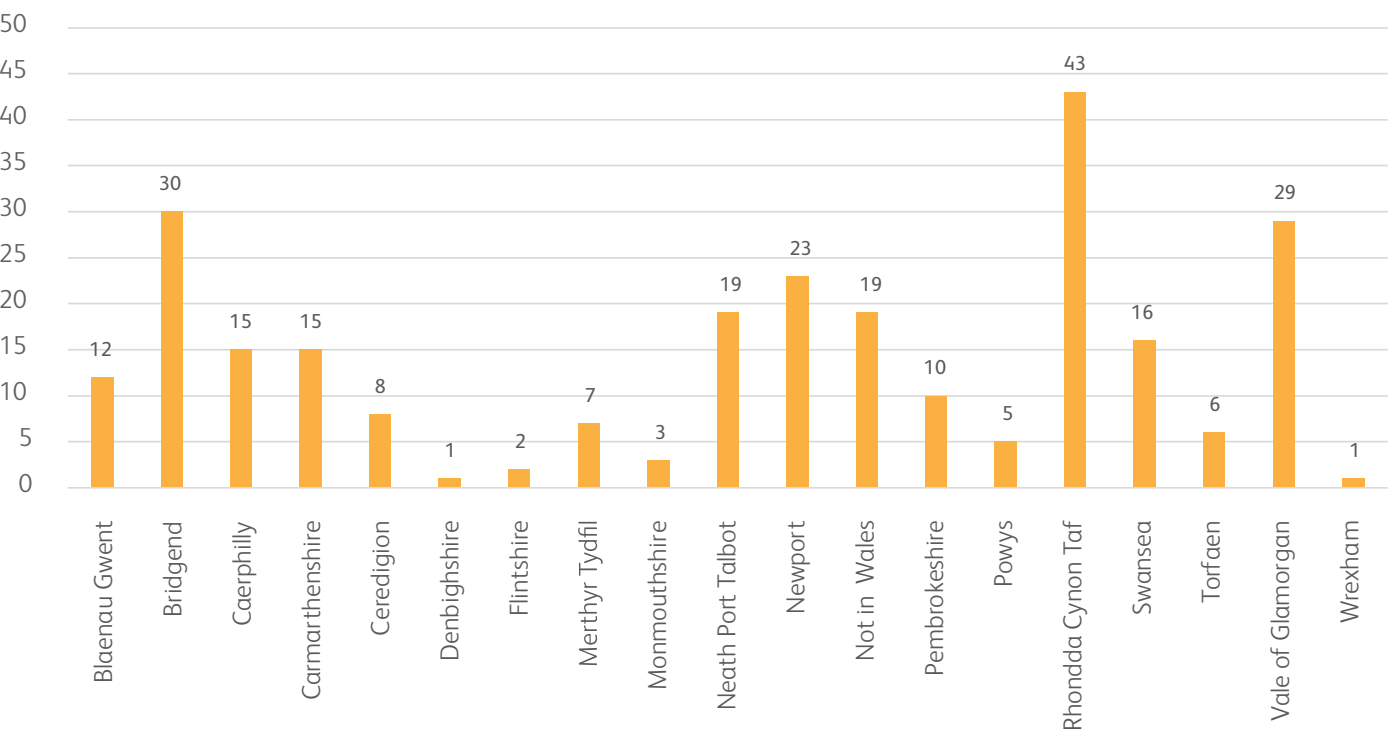
Of the total 195 children in residential homes for the year 156 were off framework (80.00%). Only 3 of the 195 were with non-profit providers of which 2 were secure. There are currently 109 children in external residential provision, of which 106 are in for-profit providers (97%).

External residential and foster homes (397 children, 73%) significantly outnumber in-house residential and foster homes (148 children, 27%).

Cardiff relies heavily on external providers for residential and foster homes and is particularly reliant on external Independent Fostering Agencies and external residential providers to be able to meet the scale of its demand.

Children’s Services currently have 282 children and young people in foster and residential homes within Cardiff. When local homes are unavailable, the service strives to place them in out-of-county homes as close to Cardiff as possible, with many situated in the South Wales region.

Home Location by Number



Of the 262 total homes outside Cardiff, 172 have been placed in nearby areas. The highest number in Rhondda Cynon Taf (43). This approach reflects Cardiff’s efforts to keep homes within close proximity to the city.



Homes Over Time



External Fostering is the most used type of home, though declining in use (from 373 (61.05 %) in 2019/20 to 297 (47.22 %) in 2023/24, 76 children). This is due to increasing challenges around availability.

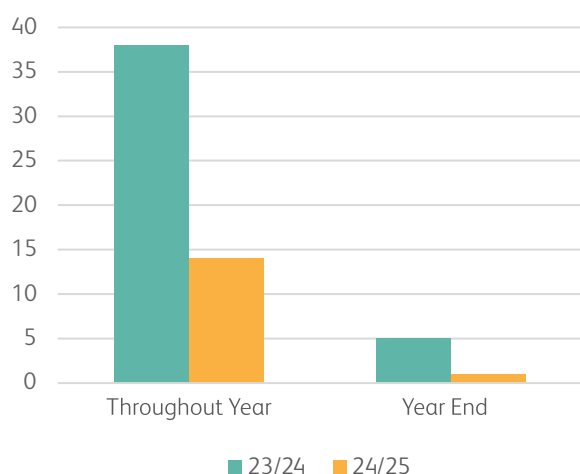
In-house Fostering is gaining traction (increased steadily from 100 (16.37 %) in 2019/20 to 133 (21.14 %) in 2023/24, 33 children), but increasing only at a slightly higher rate than use of External Residential (increased gradually from 82 (13.42 %) in 2019/20 to 108 (17.7 %) in 2023/24). A consistent upward trend suggests an increasing reliance on external residential homes (22 more children). In-house fostering is the preferred option.

The use of internal residential has begun to rise (by 7 children), reflecting a number of new homes provided in-house. Numbers remained low, with minor fluctuations from 6 (0.98 %) in 2019/20 to a slight peak at 13 (2.07 %) in 2023/24 reflecting the limited supply.

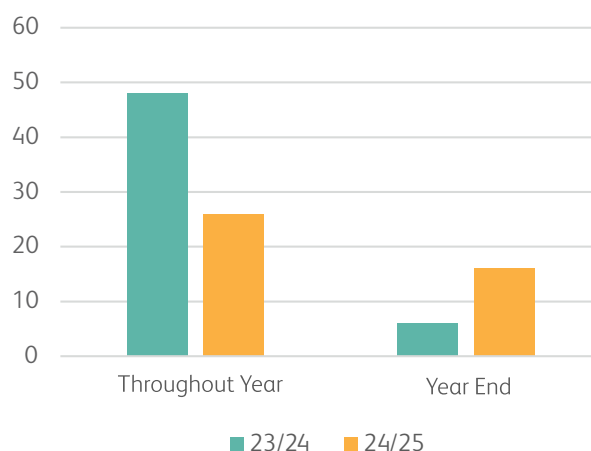
Supported Living numbers fluctuated, with a peak of 56 (9.11 %) in 2021/22 and a notable drop to 30 (4.8 %) in 2022/23, then rising to 49 (7.79 %) in 2023/24. This will reflect in part the age profile of children looked after.

Other home types fluctuated significantly, with a spike to 45 (7.21 %) in 2022/23 before dropping back to 29 (4.61 %) in 2023/24, reflecting use of supported living, spot purchased unregulated post 16 provision, and unregistered provision Operating Without Registration (OWR), among other unspecified types of homes.

OWR's 2023/24 and 2024/25



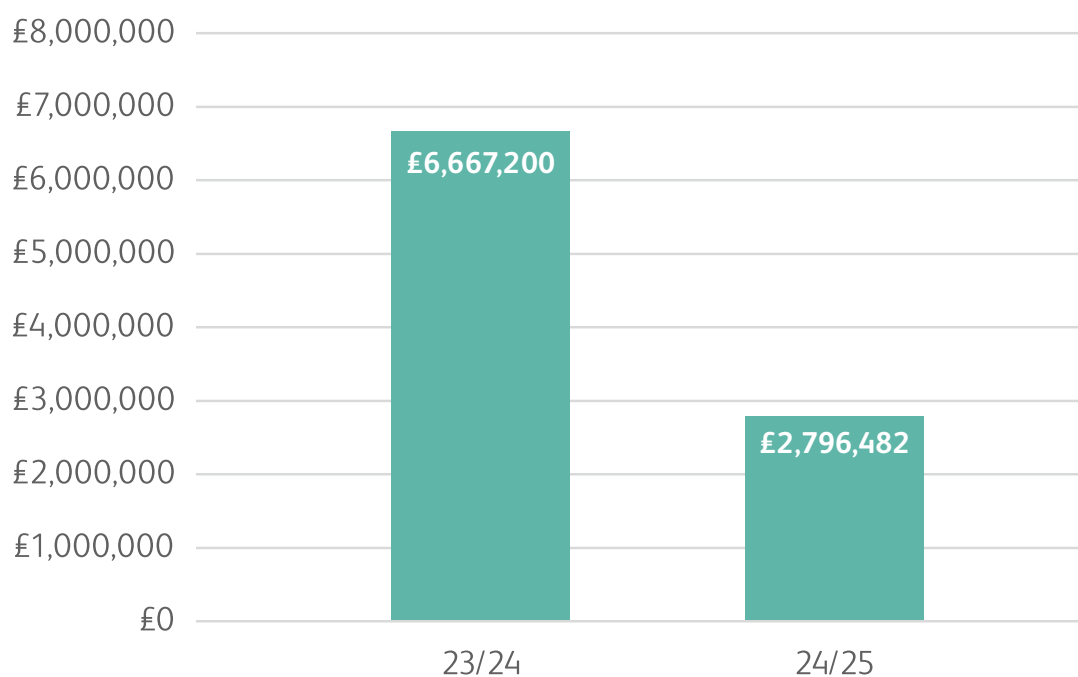
Support Packages 2023/24 and 2024/25



In 2023/24 the spend was £6,667,200 for 38 OWR homes and 48 support packages throughout the year with 5 OWR & 6 support packages at year end.

In 2024/25 the projected spend is £2,796,482, with 14 OWRs so far this year, 26 support packages with 1 OWR & 16 support packages as at September 2024.

Spend in 2023/24 and 2024/25



Financial Analysis

Children Services is currently operating with a Monitoring expenditure budget of £112.7 million, which is funded by £14.6 million of grant and £98.1million of Council base budget. Children Services base budget since 2019/20 has increased by 60 %, and external homes budget (Residential and External Fostering) has increased by 85 %.

The ratio of external homes budget in 2019/20 was 1:1 between External Residential and Fostering, whilst in 2024/25 it is 3:1. Current External Residential budgets is £37.5million and External Fostering is £15 million.

Expenditure for External homes between 2019/20 and 2023/24 grew by 50 %, whilst the number of children placed in external provision decreased by 12 %. The cost increase is due to a shift in increasing use of external residential provision over external foster care, reflecting the numbers over time and significant inflationary increases, especially over the past two years.

The number of External Fostering Homes between 2019/20 to 2023/24 decreased by 20 %, whilst inflationary pressure of 15 % over the time eroded the cost reduction. At 2019/20 there were 373 provisions at a cost of £16million of External fostering spend at average cost of £830 per week, whilst in 2023/24 there were 297 external fostering provision at a cost of £14.75million at an average cost of £954 per week. Inflationary costs of external fostering has been significant with a 9 % increase in 2022/23 and 6 % in 2023/24.

The number of children and young people in External Residential Provisions between 2019/20 to 2023/24 grew by 27 %, whilst inflationary pressure of 68 % resulted in increase in costs of 113 % from £15 million to £32 million. As external homes have stabilised in 2022/23 – 2023/24, the cost base has increased due to inflation of 15 % in 2022/23 and 20 % 2023/24.

Inflationary costs within external residential homes have two drivers, fee uplifts and costlier new provisions replacing elapsed homes. During 2022/23 the primary driver for inflation was fee uplifts as a response to cost-of-living crisis and increases in Real Living Wage. The primary inflationary driver for 2023/24 was the cost of new homes compared to elapsed, with on average a cost differential of 30 %.

The strategy aims to address stability and reduce the number of residential-to-residential moves. The shortening of the duration of stay, is having a significant financial impact, with the 34 residential moves made in 2023/24 from other residential homes having a full financial year cost of £3 million.



The disproportional impact and funding challenges

As detailed above, Cardiff Children's Services has been provided with £14.6 million of grant funding in 2024/25.

In this year and previous years, the Radical Reform Grant (£1 million per year over two years) along with Regional Integration Funding has funded many of the services and interventions listed under Shifting the Balance of Care objective, and has indeed begin to show outcomes in the emerging trajectory of reducing numbers of children looked after.

The Eliminate Profit Grant (£1.7 million per year over two years) has been used to purchase and renovate a number of properties which have already become or are intended for use as children's homes. Further information on these is provided in the Commissioning Intention section of this report.

Without this money we would not have been able to achieve the significant progress we have made in recent years in adding additional homes to our in-house portfolio.

The Commissioning Intentions section of this report will show our next step will require a significant expansion of our portfolio of commissioned children's homes. This will require significant additional Capital and Revenue investment.

However, the implications of The Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill will disproportionately affect Cardiff compared to other areas, both in terms of numbers of children looked after and our reliance on the external market. This will require disproportional investment in Cardiff compared to other Welsh Local Authorities.

At 1055 children looked after at the 31 March 2024, Cardiff has approximately double the number of children looked after compared to the next highest Local Authority (Rhondda Cynon Taf at 625 children) and more than double the third highest Local Authority (Swansea at 485). The number of children looked after across the remaining 19 Welsh local authorities ranges from 130 to 465. Cardiff has 14% of all Wales Children Looked.

To compound this, Cardiff is more reliant in terms of absolute numbers on external residential homes and to a lesser extent external fostering, than any other Welsh Local Authority. Cardiff has 18% of all the children in residential provision in Wales. 54% (297 children) are in External Fostering. This number in external fostering is more than the entire looked after population of 13 of Wales's Local Authorities.

Currently the funding allocation to Local Authorities associated with the Bill does not fully reflect this differential impact of demand, and the disproportional challenges Cardiff will face.



Key Messages

Cardiff is starting to see success in reducing the number of Children Looked After from a high in March 2023 of 1,057 to a current figure of 1,006 as at the end of September 2024. This is due to the reduction in the number of children becoming looked after and those numbers have decreased for the last two years.

The exception to this trend is a 19% increase in the number of disabled children being looked after in 2023/24 (101 children) compared to 2020/21 (85 children) and about a 10% increase compared to the previous stable years (2021/22 and 2022/23: 91 children). Although Statistical significance of this should be treated with caution because the numbers are relatively small.

Using the latest published data as at the 31st March 2023, Cardiff has 14.6% of All Wales' Children looked after. Using the latest Stats Wales release Cardiff has 18% of all the children in residential provision in Wales.

The number of children we are able to place in external foster homes is decreasing at a worrying rate. Of the overall numbers of regulated homes for children and young people in March 2020 – 61.05% were external foster homes, that has dropped to 47.22% in March 2024. The in-house provision has not been able to grow to bridge that gap.

There are currently 272 children in external foster homes, of which 220 are in for profit foster care agencies.

There are 109 children in external residential homes, of which 106 are in for profit providers.

The overall commission budget for residential provision has seen significant increase, due to the unit costs increasing.

Children Services base budget since 2019/20 has increased by 60%, and external provision budget (Residential and External Fostering) has increased by 85%. The primary driver for inflation increases were fee uplifts in response to increasing real living wage and cost of living crisis.

In 2023/24 this is much more driven by frequency of elapsed homes requiring a new provision and these cost differential (c30%), reasons providers give for these significantly higher costs are that they are more complex and require specialist and/or solo provision.



Children's Services Commissioning Intentions

We know that today too many children are having to live away from their wider support networks, including having to move schools because of the scarcity of suitable foster or residential homes.

Our approach to commissioning will be in line with the "The National Framework for the Commissioning of Care and Support in Wales: Code of Practice".

The Code of Practice sets out that statutory partners must consider as part of the commissioning process, ways in which children and young people can be accommodated and cared for closer to home more often, so they can continue to be part of their community and maintain their support networks, in living arrangements which are locally based, locally designed and locally accountable.

In 2023 Cardiff's **Right Place Accommodation Strategy & Capital Plan** began to set out in more detail the model we will deliver and how we will begin to make inroads into addressing the issue of sufficiency by ourselves buying houses to be children's homes in Cardiff.

The Shifting the Balance of Care work continues as the main objective of our Core Children's Services Strategy 2023-26: Striving for Excellence.

That allows us to focusing on 2 Broad Priorities in this latest version of the Homes for Children Commissioning Strategy.

- **Priority 1: Children's Homes**
- **Priority 2: Foster Care**

As this commissioning program is implemented provision will be accessible to all young people based on their own unique set of circumstances, including support for those affected by disability and ill health, those affected by adverse childhood experiences and requiring emotional and mental health support, those from BME communities and those affected by any form of exploitation including unaccompanied children seeking asylum. Thereby continuing to encompass all of the original priorities.



Priority 1: Our Children's Homes

Our objectives are

- To significantly increase the number and range of children's homes in Cardiff to meet demand,
- Including children who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), Trauma, and for children who are experiencing disability and / or ill-health.
- To design and implement a model of care that achieves the desired outcomes for children and young people.
- To create better sustainability, through developing a commissioner led, mixed economy of joined-up in-house and independently provided provision, for children's homes within the City.

We will do this by:

Reducing our reliance on the market, by moving from individual tendering. This will involve creating new contracting arrangements with providers, from which we will be able select providers to deliver children's home contracts. These will be provided by contracted providers within our own Council owned buildings. Providers will become part of a collective working together to develop and deliver best practice. Providers will work alongside and with our already expanded in-house provision. We will aim to deliver approximately 20 new homes with providers in the market within this commissioning model.

These children's homes will be provided by contracted providers operating within Council owned buildings.

Providers will become part of a collective working together to develop and deliver best practice. Providers will work alongside and with our already expanded in-house provision. Providers will specialize in particular cohorts, including children who are experiencing disability and / or ill-health.

We will aim to deliver approximately 20 new homes from providers in the market within this commissioning model.

The model will give us opportunities to deliver efficiencies in areas such as, training, recruitment, ICT and the purchasing of goods and services.

We are looking for providers who:

- Can demonstrate how they have met or plan to meet the not-for-profit definition set out by Welsh Government.
- Demonstrate their readiness to assume operational responsibility for the residential children's home/s and achieve successful registration with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

In addition, each home will need:

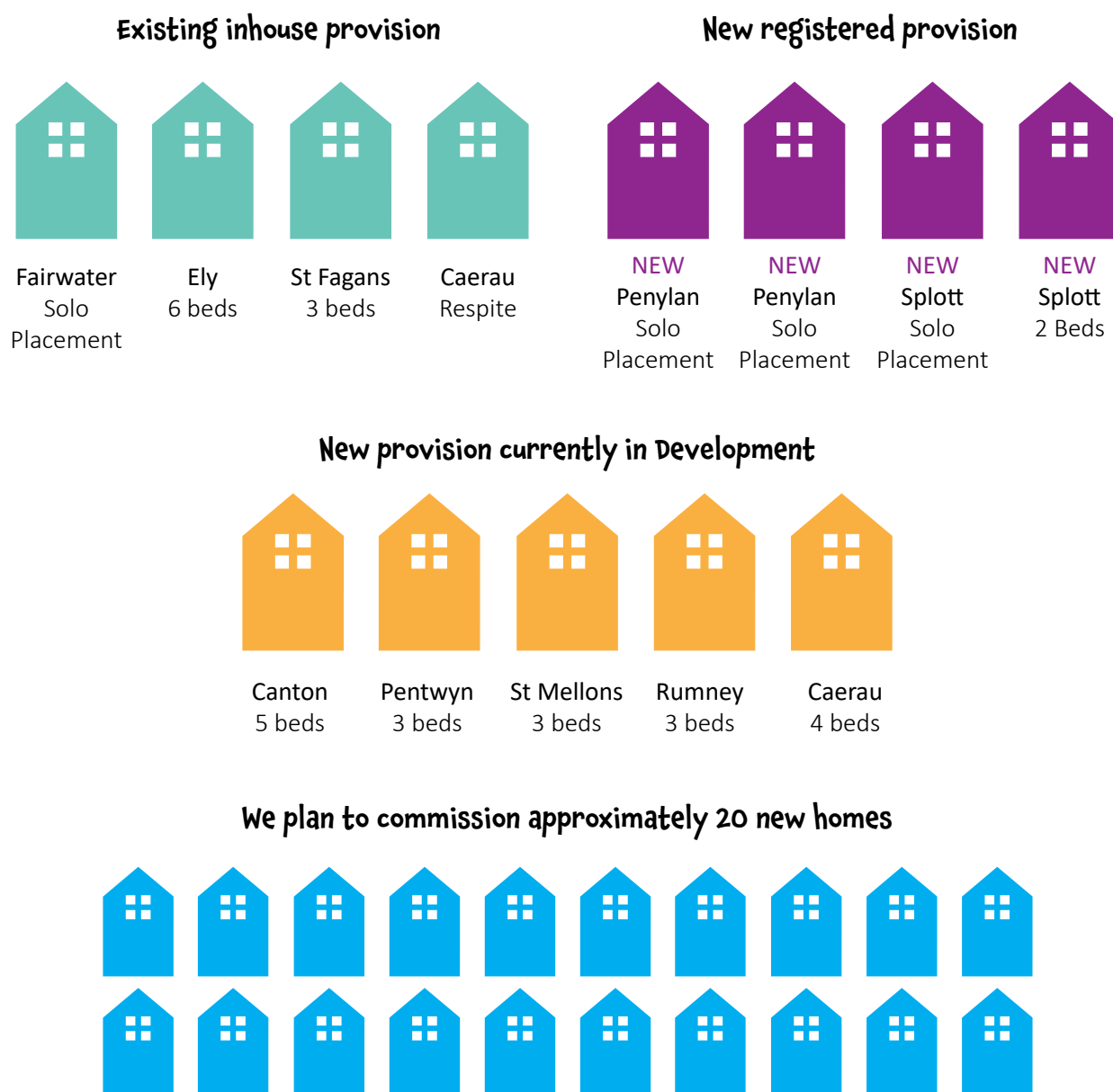
- To provide a space where children and young people are safe, nurtured and protected.
- Have a core staff team, who are suitably trained and supported, to provide 24/7 support to our children and young people.
- Have a qualified and experienced Registered Manager to oversee the provision and Responsible Individual (RI) have oversight of the homes and ensure the quality of care in each property.

Outcomes

To have purposeful cost-effective residential provision in Cardiff.

- This will mean the need for out of area homes and for sourcing through individual provision tendering will be substantially reduced to as close to zero as possible.
- We will be better able to target areas where there are gaps in provision.
- More children will be looked after in or closer to their communities and networks.
- More children will have their needs met with the right support, from the right person at the right time, in the right place at the lowest safe level of intervention, towards reducing the length of stays, and so that children achieve their full potential.
- Our position as a commissioner will be improved in the market by being less reliant on third party providers.

Progress



Market Engagement

On the 15th of July 2024, we posted a Prior Information Notice on Sell2Wales. Organisations were invited to a market engagement session on 2nd September 2024. Over 70 provider representatives attended. Feedback was positive, indicating that many would be keen to deliver within this service model.

The main feedback from providers was:

- The importance of long-term contracts in enabling providers to invest in staff and deliver consistency of relationships. This is necessary to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people.
- A desire by providers for block contracting to reduce the impact of empty beds arising from difficulties in matching. Providers indicate being assured of this would reduce the unit price.
- A desire to be part of greater collaboration across providers and public agencies.
- The need for consistency of practice and opportunity across providers if they are to work coherently together as a collective for Cardiff Children's Services.
- That once part of the collective, competition would have a negative impact. That outcomes are most likely to be achieved if providers work together. This will require coordination of systems, processes and infrastructure by the Council.
- That good providers require assurance that being part of the collaborative would not require the dilution of models of care and associated practices that they have built into their ways of working.
- That most providers feel they needed further clarification on how they can apply the proposed legal structures set out in The Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill 2024 to their businesses.
- That in early September 2024, most providers seemed to have made very little progress in identifying how they will respond to The Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill 2024.
- That given the uncertainty about how they will respond to The Health and Social Care (Wales) 2024, this may impact on timescales for contracting with providers and establishing new homes.

Risks

- The scale of Cardiff's Population and its city demographics and historical trends, mean that it has the highest number of children looked after in Wales in for profit provision. This means that the impact of The Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill on sufficiency will be greater on Cardiff than any other Welsh Local Authority.
- Some children cannot safely be looked after within their home local authority. Other children require very specialist models of care and are too small in numbers for any one local authority to viably set up or commission a provision on its own.
- Our experience in our in-house provision, as well as market engagement, highlighted that the increasing trend in the number of children and young people with the most complex needs, where matching to live alongside other children is challenging, is a significant concern. Where difficulties in matching leads to lower than planned occupancy, this will impact on whether our planned scale of expansion is sufficient as well as impacting the overall budget.

Commitments

1. Commission 20 new children's homes to be provided from Cardiff Council owned buildings.
2. Collaborate with partner agencies to manage increased local service demand from greater numbers of children being looked after within county.
3. Assess the need for homes connected to schools or residential schools.
4. Commission variously sized homes, including solo homes.
5. Plan for psychology and therapeutic support in homes.
6. Conduct market engagement and tender processes.
7. Engage with the Welsh Government on sufficiency plans for out of county homes where they are essential.
8. Support small organisations in competing for framework inclusion.
9. Develop workforce plans with providers, considering joint training and salary harmonisation

Action plan

1. Issue further information to the market in the form of FAQs.	November 2024
2. Issue questionnaire to the market.	October 2024
3. Agree Route to Market.	November 2024
4. Request Cabinet authorisation.	November 2024
5. Identify service requirements and prepare specifications and procurement reports.	November & December 2024
6. Issue Contract Notice- Tender to Market	January 2025
7. Contract Award	March 2025
8. Identify operational requirements.	March- June 2025
9. Contract commenced	July 2024

Funding Requirements

To deliver on aims within this strategy Cardiff will specifically need additional monies including:

- Capital to purchase and redevelop new homes. Circa £18 million for 20 (£900k per home).
- Revenue to support the following:
 - » Set up costs for the homes, including staffing, training and onboarding ahead of young people, and young people to move in on a phased basis - £4 million (£200k per home).
 - » Additional resource to implement the project.
 - » £800k per year to implement the programme including (programme manager and analyst, commissioning, legal and financial, quality assurance, workforce development).

As discussed above, currently the financial allocation from Welsh Government does not reflect the disproportional number of children looked after in Cardiff compared to the other 21 local authorities in Wales.

Priority 2: Fostering

Our objectives are

- To increase the number of In-house foster carers.
- To maximise the capacity of our in house foster carers.
- To execute targeted recruitment for sibling groups, parent and child carers, teenagers, and children with additional needs.
- To support children and young people at the edge of care, and at risk of breakdown through short break care and wraparound support.
- To increase the diversity of our foster carers to better support cultural matching.
- To increase stability. Conduct a stability review exploring most unstable age group, consider precipitating events, behavioural and support needs that have led to the breakdown. Understand stability barriers for foster carers and young people.
- To continue to work together with Independent Fostering Agencies to maximise availability of homes for Cardiff children
- To engage with IFAs to determine their plans in response to The Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill 2024.

Outcomes

That all Cardiff Children are in the right home that best meets their needs.

Progress

Foster Wales was launched in July 2021. It is the nationwide collective of the 22 Local Authority fostering teams including Cardiff. Its objectives include working collaboratively to increase the number of in-house foster carers available.

According to the national objective of Foster Wales, we have redesigned our Local Fostering service with the aim of increasing our numbers of Internal Foster Carers and ensure the process is fit for purpose. Work to grow the in-house fostering service is progressing well.

We have a fully staffed engaged fostering team, which has a good conversion rate from enquiry to home visit. Staff have good relationships and rapport with the current cohort of carers.

Campaigns to grow our in-house fostering service continue. We have piloted a 'Teen Scheme' which aims to help young people step down from residential to foster care.

Risks

- Whilst we are aware of a small number of providers who are considering transferring to one of the proposed principal legal structures for not-profit organisations, none have yet confirmed.
- It is highly unlikely that the in-house service can grow sufficiently to offset all risk if providers withdraw from the market as a result of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill 2024.
- The ability of in-house foster care teams and IFAs transferring to one of the legal frameworks required under the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill 2024, to take transfers from those who decide to withdraw from the market, will be limited by their workforce social worker size and capacity to undertake fostering assessments and manage the transferring foster carers.

Commitments

- **Collaborate with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)**

We will actively engage with IFAs to ensure they can continue to provide short, medium, and long-term support for Cardiff's fostering needs, while fostering stronger partnerships to meet local demands.

- **Support IFAs in transitioning to not-for-profit models**

Through engagement meetings and forums, we will support IFA's in transitioning to not-for-profit structures, in response to the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill 2024.

- **Expand In-house fostering capacity**

We will continue to implement our strategy to grow the number of in-house foster carers, focusing on areas with the highest need such as sibling groups, teenagers, parent-and-child, and children with additional needs. This is critical to reduce reliance on external homes and ensure better local outcomes.

- **Strengthen brand awareness for fostering in Wales**

We will implement and promote the All Wales Fostering Brand making it clear that we are the local authority.

- **Enhance community engagement and recruitment**

We will increase our visibility within communities through more localised, in-person outreach and digital engagement. This includes bolstering the presence of recruitment campaigns, fostering events, and utilising diverse marketing channels and platforms to attract a wider pool of applicants.

- **Support retention**

We are committed to support our foster carers by offering training opportunities, a peer mentor support programme (pioneers), holding regular consultation events and seasonal retention event for foster families to show our appreciation. We also commit to upholding the foster carers charter.

- **Prioritise stability**

We will conduct a stability review exploring most unstable age group, consider precipitating events, behavioural and support needs that have led to the breakdown. Understand stability barriers for foster carers and young people.

- **Meet In-house foster carer targets by March 2025**

We are committed to achieving our target (of 160 in-house foster carer places) by March 2025, ensuring we have sufficient capacity to meet the needs of Cardiff's children.

Action Plan

1. Develop a model of practice to improve support to foster carers.	
2. Execute a 12-month marketing plan and communication strategy.	Current and ongoing
3. Execute a 12-month recruitment strategy with focus on need.	Current and ongoing
4. Undertake analysis of recruitment and retention activity quarterly.	Quarterly reporting
5. Utilise the pioneers to support retention.	Current and ongoing
6. Review existing support and expand where necessary.	
7. Regular staff information bulletins, through Council staff Information bulletins.	Yearly
8. Develop a stability support package.	March 2025