



Gwynedd Council Annual Performance Report 2019/2020



Children and Supporting Families Department

Together with the work this Department undertakes to realise the Improvement Priorities in Part 1, the remainder of its 'day-to-day' work also contributes to the Council's ambition.

Practice and performance throughout the Children's field is generally strong. A Full Inspection Report by Care Inspectorate Wales in August 2018 confirmed this. They identified many fields for further development and, over the past year, we have proceeded to respond to those through the Supporting Families Strategy and our units' work programmes.

We have extended the Information, Advice and Support Service, focusing on how families access information. A virtual information Hub (Gwynedd Families Hub) has been established, with Community Connector roles also a part of the service.

Through the Information, Advice and Support Service, families have access to timely support. Families are also able to gain access to a wide range of therapeutic and support services in order to meet their individual needs. We are continuing to review what is available to families and, in 2019-2020, we undertook pilot work jointly with Y Bont and Barnados in the fields of managing conflict within families, and supporting children's well-being in order to address local needs.

We are continuing to maintain high standards when responding to referrals, which could be safeguarding referrals, or referrals for care and support.

Similarly, the Social Work Teams have offered prompt support and intervention for children and their families.

80% **Percentage of child protection reviews held within the statutory timetable during 2019/20**

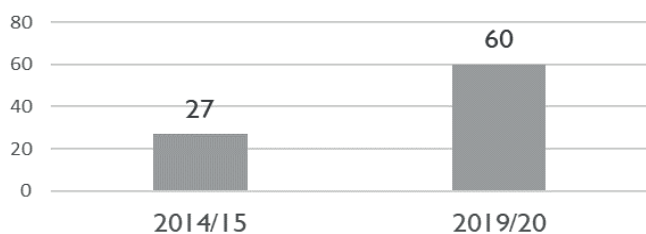


As part of the day-to-day work of operational teams within the department, workers offer professional support and intervention. In addition, they have the option of using more specialist interventions if appropriate. The Edge of Care Team works intensively with vulnerable children and families, and children who are on the verge of going into care. They are able to support the Social Work Teams and families with matters such as parenting, counselling, substance misuse, meetings in order to bring in members of the extended family, moderation, family therapy, support with coping with adverse childhood experiences (ACE's). We are continuing to develop this specialist support, depending on the needs and feedback of families.

The success of collaboration between families and the team means that a number of children have been able to stay at home with their families, some have been able to return home from foster and residential care, and it has ensured that vulnerable foster placements have been substantially stabilised. Although the number of looked-after children increased during the team's operating period, the number of children in foster or residential placements has remained stable.

At the end of March 2020 there were 291 children being looked-after by the Council. Compared with the number of looked-after children over a five-year period, the total has increased from 194 to 291, which is almost a 50% increase. Nevertheless, the number of children who are in residential placements has remained consistent, and the number of children in foster placements has reduced from 74% to 69% of the looked-after children population.

Children placed at home with their parents under a Protection Order to the Council



The increase in the number of looked-after children who have been placed at home with their parents under a Care Order for the Council continues, and has risen from 27 to 60 over the last five years.

The profile of the population of looked-after children has changed; the average cost of residential placements has increased, as have the complexity and intensity of cases. The lack of more specialist residential placements is also an enormous challenge for the Department. The lack of available residential placements, and the increased costs associated with them, is a matter receiving national and regional attention. At a regional level, under the leadership of the North Wales Heads of Children, we have been collaborating on establishing a Multi-disciplinary Sub-Regional Team which would provide intensive, short-term support for families with profound and complex needs. Though we developed a business case, agreed on various roles jointly with our

partners in health and education, and began the recruitment process, the pilot scheme had to be paused when the Coronavirus crisis began.

Children and young people come into our care under highly challenging circumstances, but we are as ambitious for these children as we would be for our own children. We have Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) who monitor the care plans of each child and young person we look after, and they assure us as a Council that the interests of the child are safeguarded throughout their time in care. In 2019-20, we reviewed the role of these Officers following feedback from children and young people about their experience, as well as feedback from the Full Inspection. Officers have responded to what matters to children and young people and have adapted their arrangements and ways of working.

According to our Independent Review Officers 94% of reviews are ambitious for children in care



Our ability as a Council to place children with foster parents is a key part of the service for children. We as a Council are extremely proud of our foster parents, and the Fostering Team continues to ensure that we have enough foster parents to meet the needs of children who cannot reside at home. However, ensuring the capacity and availability of foster parents is a challenge.

Hearing and listening to the voice of the child has remained a priority for us over the past year. The Corporate Parent Panel has been working to strengthen this element of its work so that it maintains close links with what matters to the children in our care.

In addition, the Children and Supporting Families Department has a Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit that assures the Council that our safeguarding arrangements are robust.

The reasons for any slippage in performance have been challenged and are mostly related to staff sickness, availability of colleagues from other statutory bodies, and families' availability. On the whole, the delay is short (days) and longer delays have been carefully assessed and have not led to an unacceptable impact on the child.

The pioneering 'Safeguarding Children Effectively' scheme continues to progress. Initial results show a clear improvement in terms of the efficiency of our safeguarding work with a better focus on change to keep children safe. Our aim is to share any lessons learned across the region as a model of good practice. The work is supported by the development of a practice pack and distance learning materials to disseminate the work to other counties.

We are extremely fortunate to have successful partnerships with the Health Board, schools, Police and many third sector organisations. In 2019/20, we saw that partnership work developing, particularly in terms of co-producing interventions and arrangements to prevent problems arising. We have collaborated with the Police on an ambitious training programme for the police workforce through the Early Action Together Programme; we have also established the Early Years Transformation Programme to create a single integrated system for care, education, health and play; and we have also led on establishing an Emotional Well-being Pathway for 11-25 year old Young People.

We are extremely fortunate of our workforce yet again this year. Our staff are committed and staff turnover has been very low over the

past year.

At the end of the year, all the Department's services and workforce refined their efforts towards supporting children and families through the Coronavirus crisis. The Department managed to keep in touch with children and families through visits, keeping in touch calls and virtually. More than ever, the Department made an effort to support the stability of families and placements, and provide every possible support to keep families together during this challenging time. We have led on providing food supplies to vulnerable families and young people leaving care; we have ensured that baby goods were sent to Flying Start families; and supported schemes to create and provide Arts and Gardening Activity Packs and Play Sacks to homes throughout the county. The county's young people have benefited from on-line chat and support forums, social activities such as making music, quizzes, fitness and cookery - all on-line - in an effort to build resilience and promote well-being in difficult times.

This Department's day-to-day work contributes towards the Gwynedd Well-being Objectives, ensuring that Gwynedd residents can:

- **Enjoy happy, healthy and safe lives.**
- **Live in a naturally Welsh society.**
- **Live with dignity and independently for as long as possible.**