



Well-being Objective 1

Start Well - Help to give every child the best start in life and improve their early life experiences

At 167, the number of children looked after remains one of the lowest in Wales

The impact of COVID-19 has placed significant pressures on families and as a result the demand for our services has risen. This coupled with the effects of staff absence and recruitment difficulties has created increased challenges. However, despite this the pandemic has also created opportunities and more innovative ways of working in order to increase engagement with those who were previously harder to reach. The number of children looked after remains one of the lowest in Wales, and outcomes achieved by looked after children and care leavers overall has remained positive.

Why this Well-being Objective is important

- Because giving every child the best start in life is crucial to reducing inequalities across the life course
- Early intervention is key to long term health and well-being. What happens during these early years has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well-being – from obesity, heart disease and mental health, to educational achievement and economic status
- Because Looked After Children (LAC) are more likely to have been exposed to multiple risks associated with poor long-term outcomes before entering care.



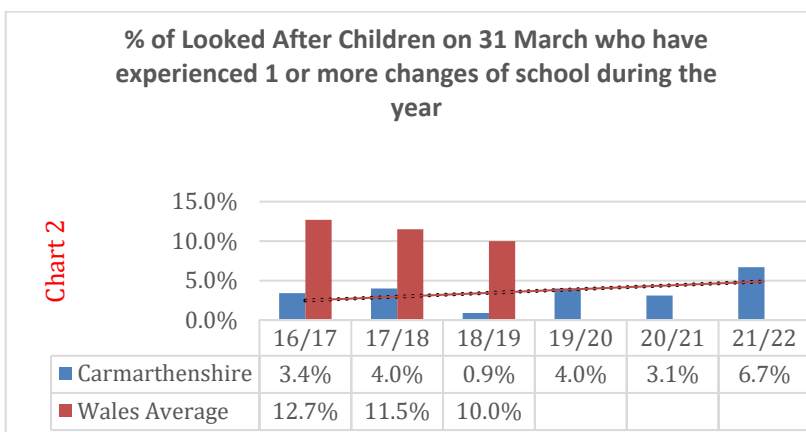
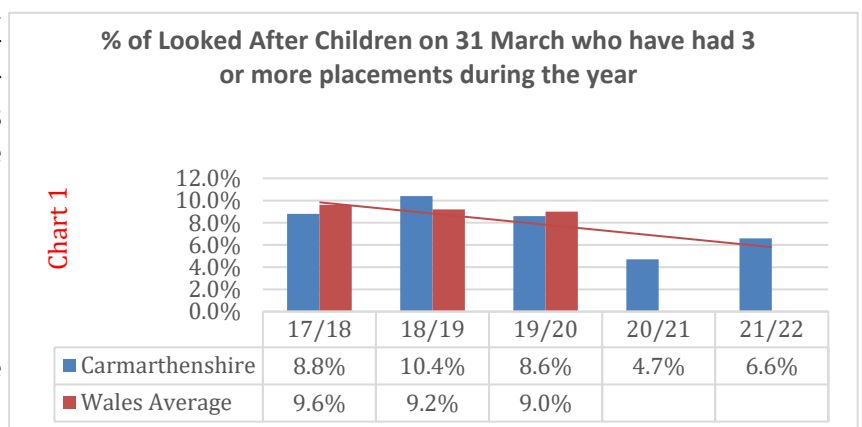
How well are we doing (and how do we know)? Sources of evidence

Success Measures / Explaining the Results

The % of children in care who had to move 3 or more times has reduced to **6.6%**



Of the 167 children looked after up to 31 March 2022, 11 children experienced 3 or more placement moves. This is a slightly higher result than last year of 4.7% with 7 of the 148 looked after children experiencing 3 or more placements. The children who experienced moves had Adverse Childhood Experiences, are less settled and have challenging and complex needs. We continued to focus on maintaining placement stability with good placement support being offered across the service to achieve this. *(See Chart 1)*




We have continued to work hard across teams to maintain placement stability, which remains excellent despite the added effects of COVID-19. We have successfully managed to maintain the majority of looked after children within county and in the same school which is important in helping improve outcomes. Seven children (out of 105) experienced a change of school during 2021/22. The increase in number compared to last year (which was 3 out of 96) can be partly attributed to sibling groups requiring a change of school. Stability is maintained wherever possible however this is not always in the best interest of a child e.g. distance to travel or child's academic needs not being met *(See Chart 2)*.

Our long-term aim is preventing the need for children needing to become looked after. There are robust systems in place to help achieve this including Accommodation Panel and provision of preventative services, focusing on good quality family network meetings. Early intervention working in partnership with families through care and support plans is key to achieving this.

Progress on the steps we are taking to achieve this Well-being Objective

Supporting Families

INTERNAL AUDIT	SAFEGUARDING - CHILDREN	ASSURANCE RATING						
	During the year Internal Audit looked at Safeguarding referrals, to ensure that relevant policies and procedures have been established and relevant legislation is complied with.	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>HIGH</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>ACCEPTABLE</td> <td>✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td>LOW</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	HIGH		ACCEPTABLE	✓	LOW	
	HIGH							
	ACCEPTABLE	✓						
LOW								
<p>COMMENT</p> <p>An action plan to address identified issues was agreed and these are monitored on PIMS. a follow up review will take place in the next audit plan year.</p>								


- Children’s services have seen significant increase in demand for services and support with the **number of contacts** to the department continuing to rise. However, it continues to perform well despite these added pressures.

Demand	2020-21	2021-22	Comment
Contacts	7644	9625	Increasing
Referrals	1854	1754	Decreasing
Total	9,498	11,379	Overall increase

- 90.2% of new assessments were completed within statutory timescales.
 - There continues to be **good evidence in assessments of the views of children and what life is like for them.**
 - As part of the assessment process social workers are speaking to both parents whether they are involved or not on a daily basis.
 - Increasingly assessments refer to the contribution that a family network meeting has made to the assessment in terms of identifying sources of support and has helped in devising a safety plan.
- The relationship-based approach to delivery of social work services to children and families incorporating systemic thinking and the principles of Signs of Safety is embedded in all childcare teams including the 0-25 disability team. Contributions from Adult Services has incorporated different perspectives about a family into pod discussions and consequent actions and plans.
- We continue to ensure regional thresholds are working effectively in respect of multi-agency child protection arrangements and in line with agreed policies and procedures that are designed to keep children safe and at the heart of practice and decision-making.
- Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic all vulnerable children have continued to receive support via the childcare teams and Corporate Parenting team to ensure they are safeguarded and able to reach their potential. Outcomes for looked after children and care leavers is also regularly monitored.
- The Flying Start App has continued to be integral in reaching families, providing key messages and links to support services, supporting engagement with families, especially those harder to reach. We have met with Welsh Government to evaluate the success of the App, especially during COVID-19, with the aim of it being rolled out to other local authorities as a tool to communicate and engage with families.
- !** The number of children on the **child protection** register increased last year – 102 (as at 31/3/22) compared to 78.
- !** The number of **children looked after** has also seen an increase this year, 167 (as at 31/3/22) compared with 148 at the same time last year. However, Carmarthenshire remains proportionately, amongst the lowest LAC population in Wales.

- ⊙ Choice of available **foster carers** is something we continue to make steady progress on. We have recruited 12 new foster carers during 2021/22 which is an improvement as previously the pandemic had impacted on recruitment.
- ⊙ We have continued to develop our services for **disabled children aged 0-25** since implementing the new structure during 2020/21 bringing together our statutory and non-statutory teams for children and young people.

External Regulatory Findings

 <p>REGULATORY REPORT</p>	<p>In November 2021, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) published its Assurance Check 2021 letter on Carmarthenshire County Council</p> <p>In summary:</p> <p>Children's Social Care Assurances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Approachable and supportive leaders</i> • <i>Culture of co-production and personal outcomes being developed with people</i> • <i>Clarity in operational methodology</i> • <i>Strong multi-agency cooperation</i> • <i>Positive integrated approach to a culture of prevention through joint working</i> • <i>Low children looked after population</i> • <i>Makes a positive contribution to the well-being of people in the pandemic period</i>
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Additional Learning Needs

- ⊙ The Council continues to support Welsh Government's (WG) Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Transformation programme by supporting schools and a diverse range of stakeholders to implement all transformation plans with an ongoing schedule of work that is reviewed and updated regularly to capture updates from WG.

THE NEW ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS SYSTEM

The system for supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disability in Wales is changing.

From September 2021, Welsh Government has brought in a more flexible and responsive system of meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities to deliver a fully inclusive education system for the learners of Wales.

Key changes include:

- The term Additional Learning Needs (ALN) will replace the terms Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD).
- The current graduated system of Early Years/School Action, Early Years/School Action Plus and Statements is being replaced. All children and young people with an identified additional learning need (ALN) that requires additional learning provision (ALP) will have an Individual Development Plan (IDP) which will replace all other individual plans.
- There will be increased opportunities for children, young people, parents and carers to contribute to the creation and maintenance of IDPs through Person-centred Planning.

CASE STUDY

Process of admission to school:

Learner A is currently a foundation phase aged pupil attending a Carmarthenshire mainstream primary school. Prior to commencement at school, there was the need for a carefully planned transition package due to significant and severe physical and mobility needs.

Learner A was previously attending the local Ysgol Feithrin. It was apparent that Learner A was settled, progressing and thoroughly enjoying their time there. Learner A became known to the Inclusion Department via the Entry to Education system where the need for a carefully planned transition was identified. A person-centred planning meeting was arranged, where services known to the family worked in partnership with the family to plan for transition including representation from the Ysgol Feithrin, primary school, specialised health colleagues and the local authority's inclusion team. Key information was shared with all participants and the case was discussed using a clearly defined decision-making process, with Learner A being central to all discussions and decisions. It became apparent that Learner A was a sociable, confident and determined young child who would thrive within a mainstream primary setting, albeit with the correct level of support to ensure her safety and successful transition due to her complex additional needs. Following the person-centred planning meeting, the views of all attendees were captured in an Individual Development Plan (IDP) which contained the specific and achievable outcomes for Learner A along with the proposed level of provision. Carmarthenshire's Inclusion Panel then considered the IDP and agreed to issue and secure the proposed provision. Building adaptations soon followed in readiness for transition.

Progress in school? What have they achieved?

Learner A transitioned well into school. Progress is evident as Learner A feels included, all barriers have been removed and they can access all learning. Independence is encouraged whenever possible and specific support utilised, as necessary. Despite complex physical and mobility needs, Learner A has transitioned into a busy mainstream environment with her peers where she is happy, settled and progressing. Not feeling any different to all those around her thanks to a carefully planned transition and implementation of suitable inclusive provision - developed and agreed in partnership with all who know the learner best.

How did all participants, family and professionals, feel about the process?

All were extremely positive about the process. A new process to all with many commenting on the benefit of less bureaucracy. All being empowered to have an equal voice in the purposeful discussions and action planning around the learner. They felt that time was well spent and there were less barriers and 'loopholes' to overcome. Purposeful, efficient and effective.

⦿ Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Provision

The Department for Education and Children currently (21/22 academic year) has the following places across the county to facilitate specialist provision for pupils with Autism:

- Primary – 64
- Secondary - 84

! Since September 2021, there has been a significant increase in the demand for ASD provision and in the 2021/22 academic year there was a shortfall of 30 places which is an over capacity of 20%.

In recent months a significant increase in the demand for specialist ASD places for the 2022/23 academic year has been experienced by the department and the projected position for September 2022 is as follows:

- Primary – Required number of places / available - 20
- Secondary – Required number of places / available -10

There will also be a projected continued shortfall for the academic year of 23/24 of a minimum of 26 places as it currently stands which does not take into account incoming pupils and mainstream school pupils with identified needs over the 22-23 academic year.

The significant increase in demand experienced as a result of:

- Inward migration – families relocating to Carmarthenshire
- A significant increase in the number of pupils being diagnosed with the additional needs/ASD medical diagnosis which is recognised as a national trend. Health Board has increased the capacity of the neurodevelopmental team to process the backlog of ASD referrals resulting in an increase of ASD diagnosis. Across the last 3 years this has seen over a 100 children in Carmarthenshire with ASD diagnosis in our schools.
- School capacity - growth in local school population/building suitability
- Covid related disruption of well-established early identification processes
- Early identification processes re-established

The Local Authority has a legal obligation to make provision for these pupils by September 2022 and could face costly legal challenge that has the potential to cost up to £30,000 in legal fees per case. If need is not met locally this could result in the legal obligation to secure expensive out of county independent placements costing upwards of £150,000 for a given year.

Parents have already advised the Department that if specialist provision is not provided they will be taking legal action via SEN appeals processes.

- ⦿ Going forward we have been chosen as a “*pathfinder*” by Welsh Government for developing closer integration across childcare, health and early years education.

Childcare Provision

- ⦿ The 5th [Carmarthenshire Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-27](#) has recently been drafted and has been forwarded to Welsh Government. It gives an overview of the childcare market and the impact of COVID-19. We consulted extensively and response rates were exceptional. Some key conclusions are:-
 - Since our last full Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (2017-2022) the number of childcare places and providers has increased and remained fairly stable despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - A number of childminders have de-registered since our last Assessment and we will need to recruit, train and support prospective childminders to fill these gaps.
 - Affordability of childcare for those families that cannot access funded childcare continues to be a significant issue.
 - Childcare is acting as a barrier to certain parents’ employability and is not sufficient for some of these parents’ needs
 - The extension of the Childcare Offer for 3 and 4 year-olds (the 30 hour free childcare offer) suggests an increased demand is expected for part time registered childcare.
- ⦿ Almost a third of children are living in poverty. See **Well-being Objective 4**

Is anyone better off?



JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2021



OCTOBER '21 TO MARCH '22

The Welsh Government provided Carmarthenshire with £270,00 towards the Summer of Fun and £434,689 towards the Winter of Well-being to support children and families as part of their recovery from the pandemic and its restrictions and ensure that no family or child was left behind because of the pandemic. Approximately 15,000 children and young people have benefitted from these activities across the county from 0-25 years old. A significant package of support was provided to fund initiatives designed to help children, young people, families, and the services they use to recover and move forwards. Several organisations and services within Carmarthenshire received funding. These included Family Centres, Children's Centres, the Youth Service, Menter, Urdd, Actif, Pembrey Country Park and theatres where children and young people were able to access free activities that were designed to have a positive impact on their well-being. Some of the activities included holiday clubs, swimming sessions, mountain biking, horse riding lessons, soft play sessions, cookery classes, baby massage groups and outdoor play activities in rural areas. Workshops included music, writing and podcast development, along with trips to Folly Farm, soft play, trampoline park, botanical garden, and visits to see Father Christmas and Christmas shows.

Well-being and activity boxes were created and a range of state of the art sensory and IT equipment were purchased that continue to have a positive impact on children and young people.

Some of the parents and children who benefitted from the programme said:

"Just seeing my child enjoy himself, and I enjoyed being with other parents"

"It was amazing -Thank you. Just to see other parents and socialise was so good for my mental health"

"It's so cool to just play what I want"

"Can we come here every day?"



What and how we can do better

Our delivery plan to achieve this objective

Ref	Actions and Measures	Date/Target	Owner/Resp. Officer
A	Supporting Families		
1	We will continue to transform children's social work practice through a Relationship based approach that incorporates systemic thinking and the principles of Signs of Safety. <i>(PIMS ref. 15351)</i>	March 2023	John Fleming
2	We will continue effective management oversight & challenge of Assessments & Care & Support plans to ensure they are outcome focused, evidencing the voice of the child, & reflect the underpinning principles of the Social Services & Well-being Act (SSWBA). <i>(15352)</i>	March 2023	John Fleming
3	We will review and monitor the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy ensuring the council fulfils its Corporate Parenting role and that our looked after children and care leavers have the opportunity to reach their full potential. <i>(15368)</i>	March 2023	Rebecca Robertshaw
4	We will continue to develop and deliver the early intervention support services (0-25) for disadvantaged children, young people, and families across the county in line with the Family Support Strategy, utilising opportunities for integrating services across the Children and Communities Grant and flexible funding opportunities with the Housing Support Grant. <i>(15356)</i>	March 2023	Noeline Thomas
5	We will maintain the focus on increasing the range of placements to ensure placement stability and stability in education in respect of looked after children, including accommodation through the implementation of an in-house supported lodgings service. <i>(15375)</i>	March 2023	Jayne Meredith
6	We will continue to aim to reduce the number of children becoming Looked After and number of care proceedings in accordance with our LAC reduction target as agreed with Welsh Government, utilising appropriately Edge of Care (EOC), Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) and Family Intervention Team (FIT). <i>(15364)</i>	March 2023	Jayne Meredith
B	Additional Learning Needs		
1	We will continue to ensure the Council fully responds and complies with the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs transformation programme. <i>(15453)</i>	March 2023	Rebecca Williams
2	We will continue to support schools to develop their person centred planning approaches to identify need, deliver personalised additional learning provision and provide holistic integrated responses through multi-agency working. <i>(16126)</i>	March 2023	Rebecca Williams
C	Childcare Provision		
1	We will work towards addressing the gaps identified in our fifth Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (2022-27) and accompanying Action Plan and continue to promote and further develop Welsh medium childcare within the County. We will support the childcare sector to recover from the Pandemic and remain sustainable. <i>(15357)</i>	March 2023	Noeline Thomas
2	We will share the findings of the new Play Sufficiency Assessment (2022-27) with key stakeholders and partners and agree and implement the 2022/2023 Action Plan to address the gaps identified to ensure that local children and young people have access to wide and varied play opportunities and experiences. <i>(15359)</i>	March 2023	Noeline Thomas



View our [detailed progress commitments and targets here](#) for 2021/22 against this objective