

Councillor Chris Holley
Convener
Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny
Performance Panel
BY EMAIL

Please ask for: Councillor Rob Stewart
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Our Ref: RS/CM
Your Ref:
Date: 16th April 2019

Dear Councillor Holley

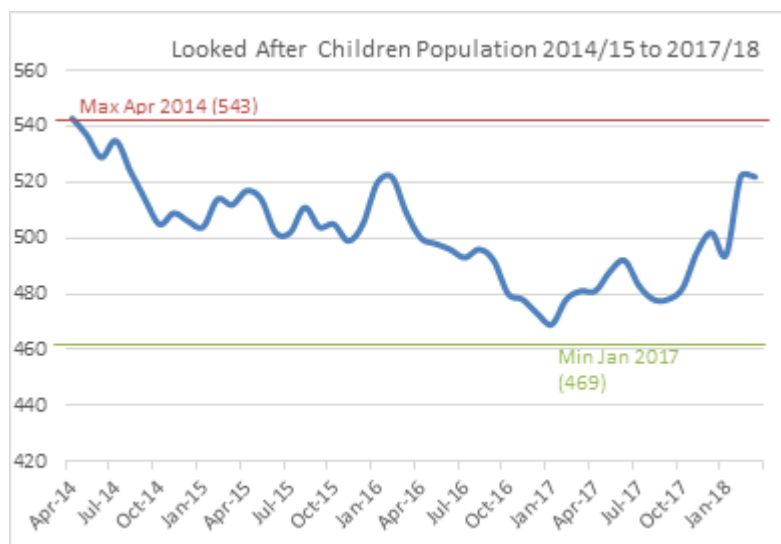
Thank you for your letter dated 31st January 2019 please accept my apologies for the delay in replying.

Response to Question 1

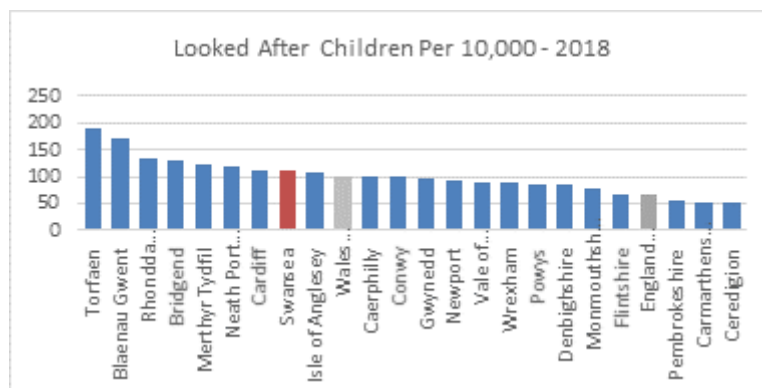
The information below details Swansea's position regionally and nationally and demonstrates that in line with CFS Safe LAC Reduction Strategy children are cared for within family settings and close to Swansea which promotes the best possible outcomes.

Children looked after in Swansea 2017 to 2018

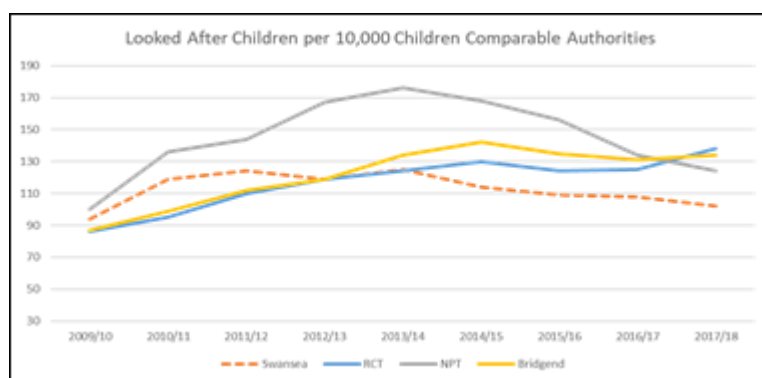
At the end of March 2018 there were 522 children and young people looked after by Swansea. This is an increase of 41 children from the beginning of April 2017, when the population reached 481. This follows the national trend of an increasing looked after children population in Wales and the UK.



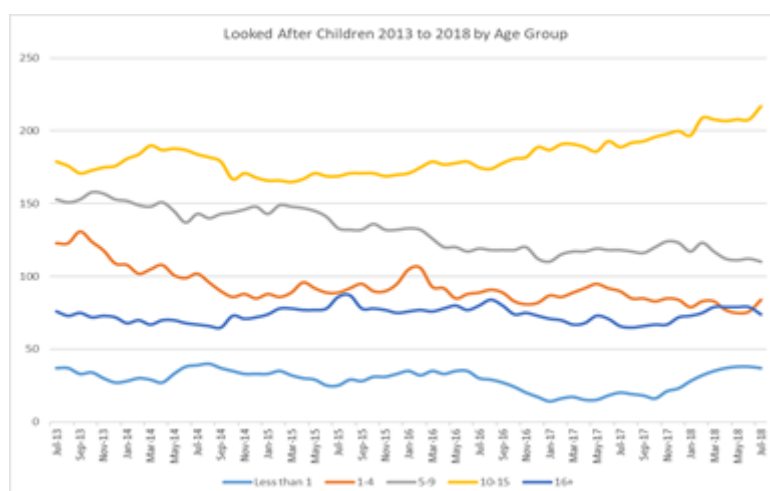
This increase will impact on the rate per 10,000 of the population. Swansea is just over the welsh average which is positive given that Swansea is a large urban area in Wales, with many areas ranked high in terms of deprivation.



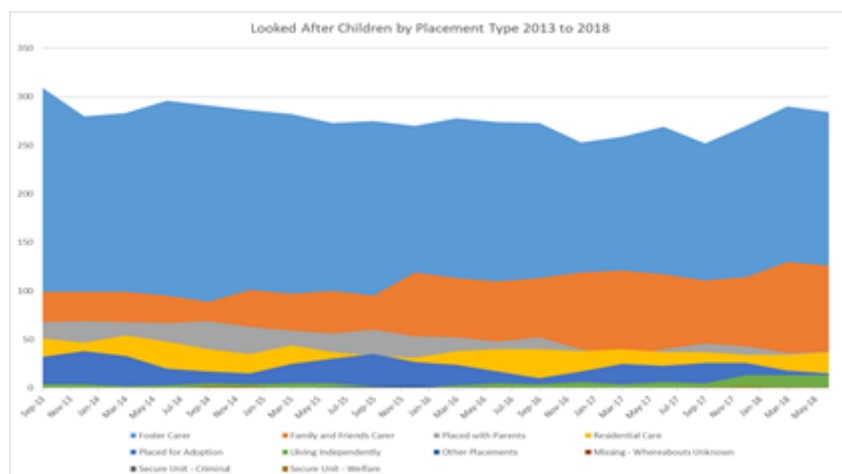
Despite the recent increase, Swansea is still performing well across the region, and with other comparable local authorities.



Significantly, we are seeing increasing numbers of looked after children within the 10-15 year age group. Fifty per cent of these children are new entrants to the care system and 50per cent moving out of the 5-9 year age group.



Looked after children in Swansea are primarily cared for within family settings. There has been an increase in children placed in friends and family arrangements over the last 5 years. This is consistent with CFS vision. Despite the increase in numbers the same percentage of children are placed with Foster Swansea (FS) carers. Typically, the FS/IFA split is 65%/35%. The numbers of children in residential homes is slowly reducing



The reasons for the rise nationally, and locally, in the numbers of looked after children are complex, and levels of deprivation and increasing social problems, such as parental substance use, domestic violence, mental health issues, county lines and CSE are significant factors. Currently county lines and adolescent mental health have resulted in increasing numbers of 10 to 15 year old children becoming accommodated. In 2018 there has been an increase in the number of young people requiring a secure placement which demonstrates the complex and high risk nature of the cases being managed. A further factor is the role of the Courts and Judiciary whose scope has increased in terms of monitoring the activity around the Public Law Outline Process and Care proceedings. This again is a National concern and there is dialogue with the Judiciary at both a local and national level to address these concerns.

Swansea was one of the first Local Authority's to develop a **Safe** LAC Reduction Strategy, which has been in place now for nearly a decade. This strategy has been reviewed regularly and refreshed according to the presenting issues. The CIW Inspection in June 2018 was a positive inspection, highlighting the safeguarding work, commitment to achieving good outcomes for children, and the innovative approach to SW practice delivered by the service. There are robust measures in place, via weekly panels chaired by senior managers monitoring all requests for a child to become accommodated, and preventing children drifting in the system. A monthly strategic meeting monitors all activity for the previous month and the impact of the work around edge of care and support services.

The Head of Service for CFS would be pleased to provide a presentation to the Scrutiny Panel on CFS Improvement Programme, the Safe LAC Reduction Strategy and the Corporate Parenting Strategy. This latter strategy is crucial, both to enabling more children to remain safely at home and ensuring those children who do become accommodated achieving good outcomes. This strategy details the actions required by partner agencies, education, health and early help services, as reducing the looked after children population requires a whole system approach. This work is being driven through the Corporate Parenting Board.

Response to Question 2

I agree with the panel that continued austerity and a lack of funding for often nationally agreed matters such as pay and pensions leaves this authority, in line with all in Wales, in an utterly invidious position. We have taken steps as a Cabinet to ensure the budget is technically balanced for 18-19 despite the enormous service and spending pressures, especially in adult social care. We have recently made our final recommendations to Council on next years budget and this will be considered at Full council on 28th February.

We have set out in our 19-20 budget proposals and our medium plan thereafter as to how we intend to continue our plans to shape Sustainable Swansea striking an appropriate balance between short term targeted use of earmarked reserves, taking advantage of the Council's recent changes to MRP policy to reduce our medium term costs of capital, taking full advantage of the extra Welsh Government capital support to reduce our longer term capital borrowing envelope, proposing a mix of service specific income increases, modest service reprioritisation to maintain front line service provision and a clear strategy for council tax, including openly recognising where we are asking Swansea residents to pay more than would otherwise have been the case to support our teachers and schools and social care for the most vulnerable.

We have also set out plans for the next phase of service savings and our zero based budgeting exercise. Future plans and savings will be no less easy to achieve than those that have come before, as austerity continues to bite hard. Recognising those real risks to delivery we have prudently doubled the level of contingency in next year's budget to provide greater financial cover and flexibility in our delivery plans.

Yours sincerely

COUNCILLOR ROB STEWART
LEADER & CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY & STRATEGY