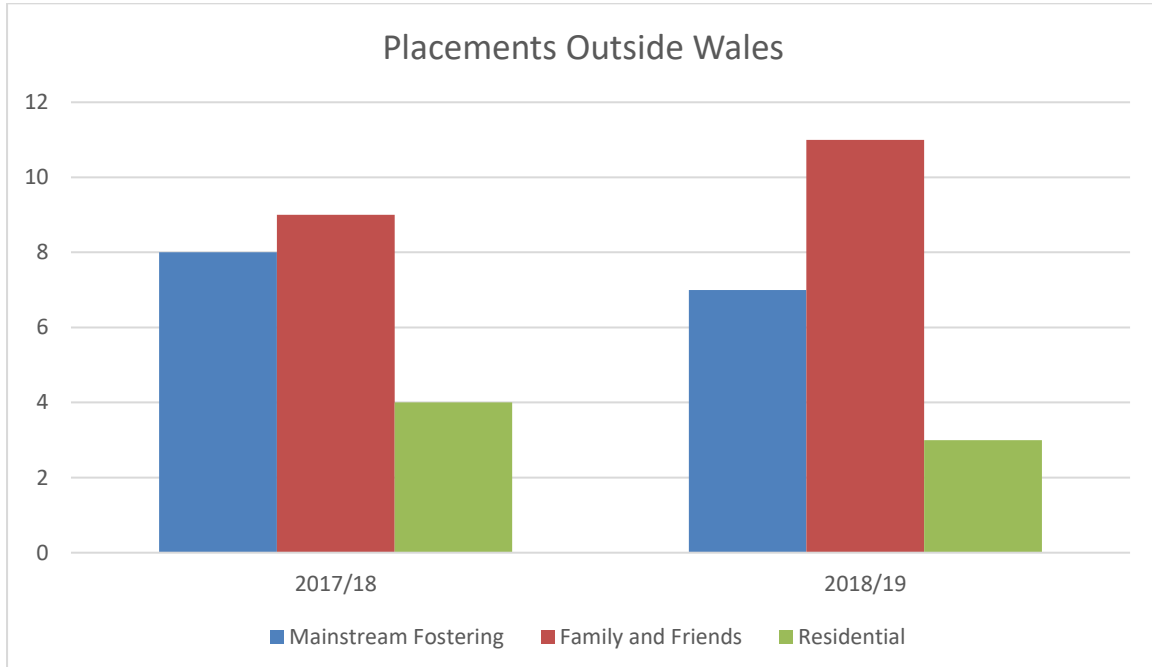
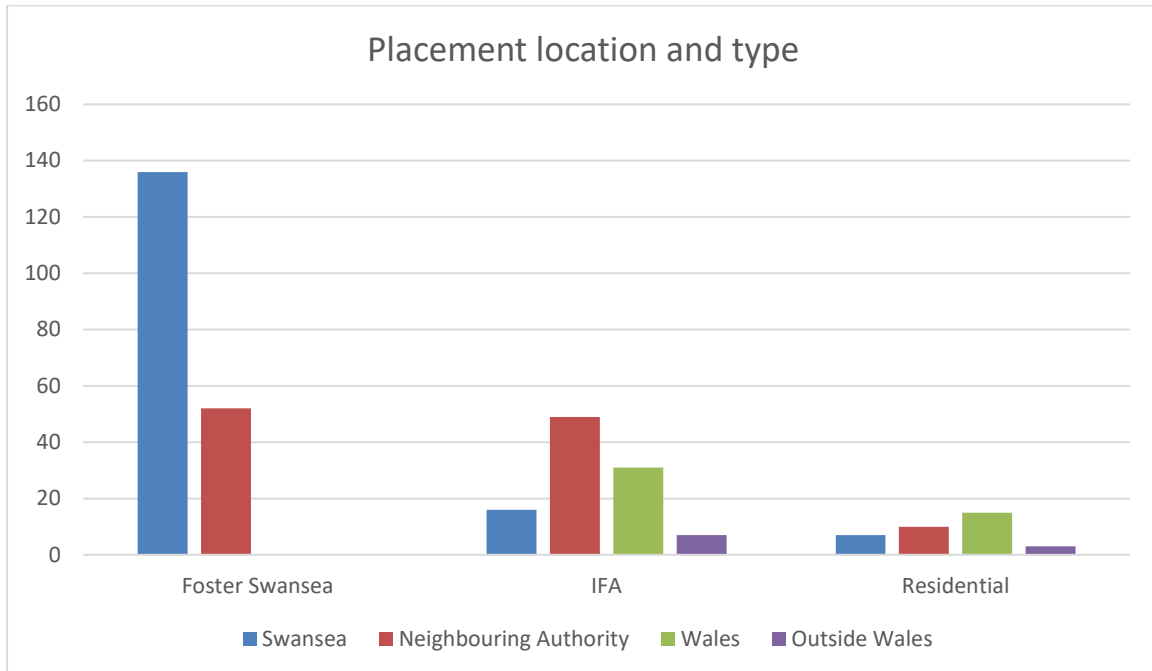


Positive, stable placements

- Number of out of county placements (and type)
- Number of out of Wales placements (and type)

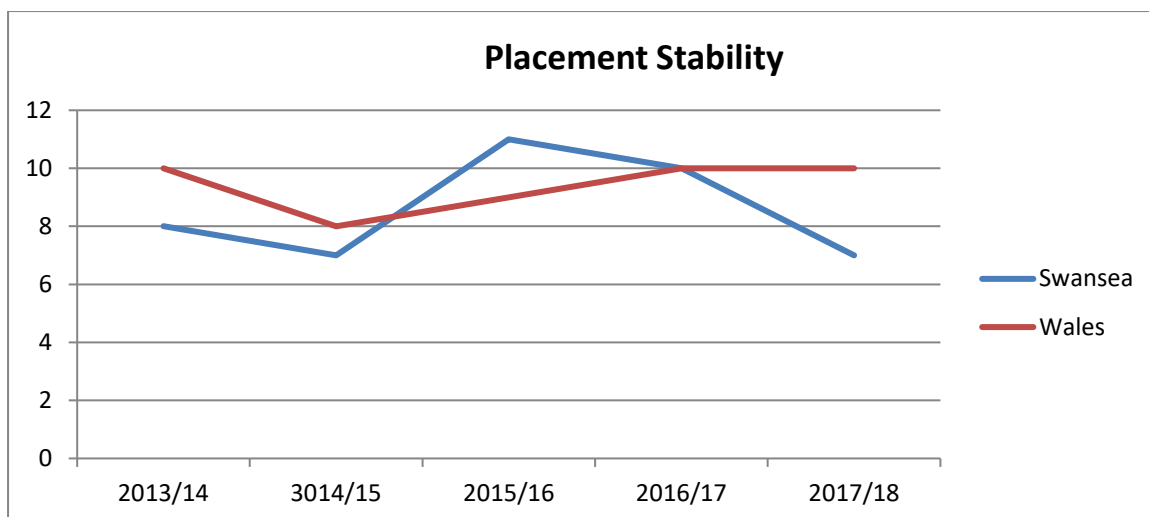


Swansea has done a lot of work to ensure more of our children and young people remain in or near to their communities despite the rising demand for placements. There are nevertheless circumstances when it will be appropriate to place children and young people further away:-

- In terms of the children and young people with mainstream carers (i.e. those with independent fostering agencies) these reasons include:
 - Of the thirty-one children and young people in foster placements in Wales but outside of Swansea, Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot, ten are in specialist placements due to a disability or to receive therapeutic support.
 - Three of the seven placed in England were previously subject to sexual abuse and were placed as young children in specialist residential therapeutic settings in England. They later transitioned to fostering settings in communities near to the residential homes where they had settled. Another young person is an unaccompanied asylum seeker who was placed in London in accordance with his wishes and feelings. Initially placed in Swansea, they were keen to be living close to friends they had made during their journey to this country. The most recent foster placement in England was made to enable a young person to live near to their family, including siblings who are living with members of the extended family.

- In terms of those in residential care, these reasons include:
 - Eight of the fourteen placed in residential care in Wales but in authorities outside of Swansea, Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot, have severe disabilities which required specialist placements. We have not currently got any provision capable of meeting these needs more locally but this will be changing in the coming months with the opening of the provision at Dan-y-Coed. Three of the fourteen are accommodated with providers who support young people presenting with sexually harmful behaviours. Three young people are placed in more standard residential provision which could have been provided more locally had vacancies been available.
 - Two of the three young people placed in residential care in England were subject to serious child sexual exploitation concerns which necessitated the Council sourcing specialist placements away from Swansea in order to promote their safety. The third young person in residential care was placed in a specialist short-term assessment centre during a period of crisis. At the conclusion of the assessment period he moved to a long-term home managed by the same provider to assist his transition.

- **Number of placement moves**



- **Average spend per looked after child**

The average weekly costs by placement type:-

	2016/17	2017/18
Foster Swansea	£394	£411
Friends and Family placement	£155	£149

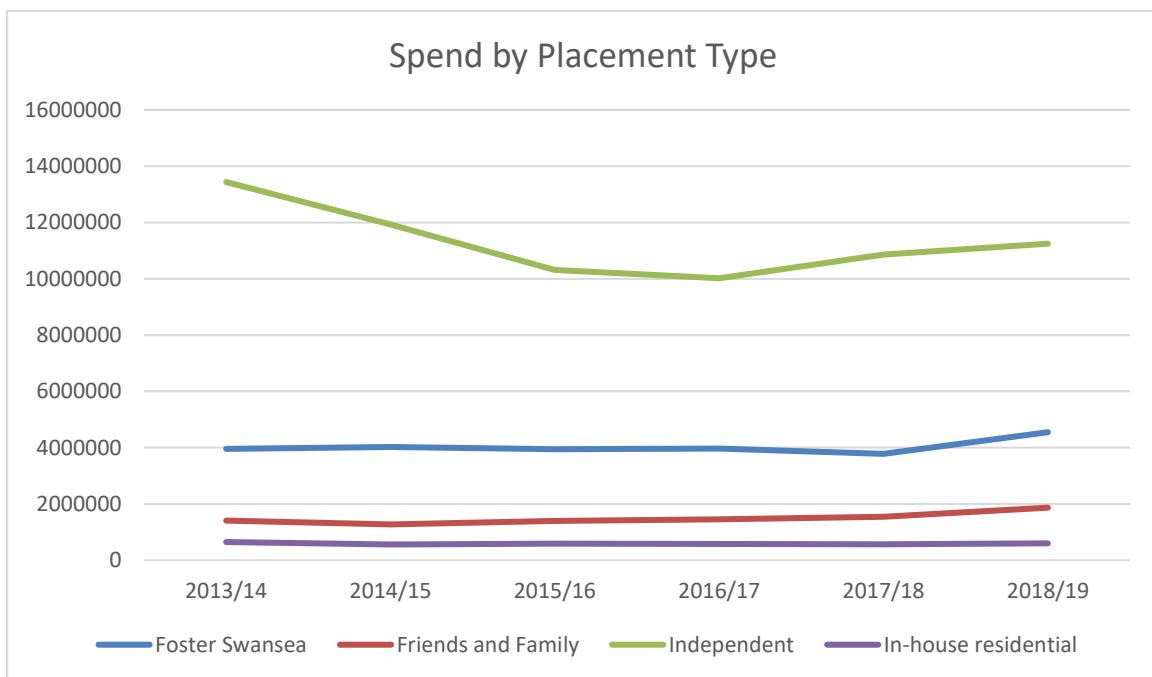
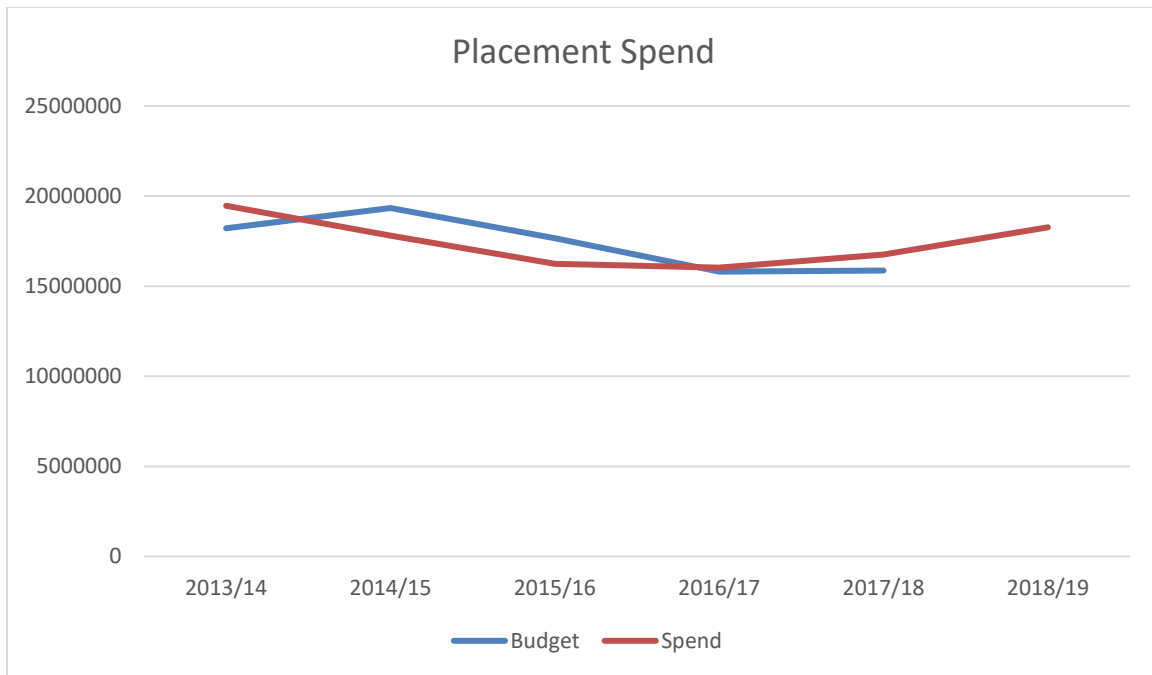
The above figures come from the National Fostering Framework return.

	March 2019
Inter-authority and third sector fostering	£692
Private independent foster agencies	£893
Independent residential	£4300*

*This figure includes education and health costs charged by the provider. Nearly 60% of children currently in residential care are also receiving registered education from the same provider.

- **Proportion of LA spend on children's services**
- **Proportion of spend on placements and factors driving costs**

The total departmental spend on Child and Family Services in 2018/19 was just over £38m. This equates to around 9% of the total Council budget including monies delegated to schools. (Please note that all spend information for 2018/19 is indicative at this stage). Spend on accommodation services for looked after children equates to about 48% of the £38m.



Factors influencing the rising costs:-

- Fundamental market forces of demand outstripping supply. Demand for placements across England and Wales is high and increasing as the number of children in care nationally has grown year-on-year. At the same time, local authorities have generally struggled to maintain sufficient supply, with falling numbers wanting to foster being a particular problem. This toxic combination means independent providers are often in a strong commercial position to increase their prices.

- Another consequence of the shortage of placements is that, in a thankfully small number of instances, it has been noted that young people may have been placed in residential care when we would have historically expected to have identified an appropriate foster placement.
- The capacity and quality of services delivered with and by partners is a factor that influences costs and will vary from authority to authority. Some of the particular challenges that exist in Swansea is the absence of a Special School for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and the relatively small size and nature of our Special Schools for children with disabilities. A project team has very recently been formed to look at how the Council can potentially enhance its Special School offer in the future.
- It is hypothesized that the number of children and young people being supported with very risky or complex needs has risen. This often cited observation may be due to social changes but it is also likely to be a reflection that we have become progressively more successful at identifying the issues. Irrespective of the reasons, there is a small but growing cohort of young people whose needs require particularly intensive and specialist support.
- Changes to the allowances and rates paid to foster carers. Since the introduction of the national minimum weekly allowance rate in 2011, the average allowance across the different age bands has risen by more than 20%. Further, the fact there are fewer individuals coming forward means providers (including local authorities) are having to increase their fees to attract new and retain existing carers. Our in-house fostering services introduced a new framework for fees and allowances last year. Furthermore, acknowledging the need to compensate family and friends carers in a manner commensurate with mainstream carers has also had a financial impact.
- The majority of the cost base for residential care providers are the employment costs of staff; most of whom are paid at or close to the National Minimum Wage. Increases to the minimum wage baseline invariably leads to significant increases in the running costs, which providers seek to pass on when they have the opportunity. As has been the case in previous years, the government announced increases to the national minimum and living wages to take effect from April 2019. Since 2012 the increase for staff over the age over 25 has been nearly 33%, and for those aged 21 - 24 years the increase has been nearly 25%. Legal uncertainty regarding the application of the national minimum wage to sleeping-in time has been an additional factor with some providers.
- The UK Government has introduced their new pension auto-enrolment policy. From February 2018 service providers were required to make a contribution of 2% to the pension fund for eligible employees. This cost will rise again in April 2019 to 3%.

- The rising costs of employing staff means financial pressures are typically felt most keenly in the support of those with the most complex needs. Children and young people such as those with severe and profound disabilities may require 2 or even 3 dedicated members of staff to supervise and keep them safe at any point in the day.
- Placement agreement frameworks have slowed down the increase in prices to some degree. However, some providers have found ways around the agreements in order to charge more and prices have tended to rapidly escalate following any framework break / review period.
- A final observation is that the ambition to keep children and young people in placements close to Swansea is skewing the market place by supporting the creation of monopolies / duopolies. For example, where we are seeking to identify a specialist placement for a child with severe and profound disabilities then the options in south Wales are limited to 1 or 2 providers.

Key questions:

What steps are being taken by the LA to fulfil its sufficiency duty, and how do these feed into local and regional placement commissioning strategies?

We have a placement sufficiency strategy (Placement Strategy 2018-21) in accordance with our duties under the SSWA. We have an associated fostering recruitment strategy and are currently in the process of developing a market position statement which utilises the guidance and template developed by the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs).

We work closely with the 4Cs and have shared with them our placement strategy. There are common issues where we can and do work collaboratively with regional partners: e.g. the appointment of a manager for development of fostering services across the RPB and the formation of the Multi-Agency Placement Support Service utilising ICF monies. However, it is also important to recognise that each authority is different with their individual placement needs. Swansea, for example, has a different need for residential care compared to that of our neighbouring authorities. This presents challenges when we are considering how to improve local sufficiency for specialist services that we presently need to source from further afield.

What commissioning arrangements are in place and how might these be improved?

We have a designated placement officer who is responsible for finding placements. In addition, we have a member of staff who supports the identification of placements for those with the most complex needs. This officer also has a range of other commissioning responsibilities in terms of independent provision such as contract compliance, service monitoring and regular provider liaison.

What efforts are being made to promote kinship care and find more family-based solutions (e.g. use of SGOs)?

Swansea has a dedicated Friends and Family Team which specialises in supporting kinship foster care and the use of SGOs, and we are presently engaged in a regional project which is exploring how we can further improve our arrangements regarding SGOs.

Swansea has obtained Invest To Save funding to roll out the Family Finding approach in our practice. Further information about the innovative approach has been provided separately.

What efforts are being made to increase the number of LA foster carers?

Please see the Foster Swansea Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

What efforts are being made to develop in-house residential provision and emergency / crisis provision (including regional approaches)?

In 2018/19 the Council obtained ICF to support the relocation of its in-house residential provision. This move has now been completed and, in contrast to the former setting, is in a property and location which is homely and of a high standard. This home offers emergency and short- to medium-term accommodation.

In 2019/20 the Council has sought ICF funding to develop a second in-house children's home. The new home will provide respite to families and will form a part of a much broader but integrated edge of care service for adolescents and their families.

While the proposed service is a bespoke solution for the challenges faced locally, it leans heavily on examples of good practice - particularly the No Wrong Door (NWD) model developed by North Yorkshire and the Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) run by Blackburn with Darwen. The new edge of care service will have the following principles at its core:-

- The need for a dedicated worker for the family.
- The need to offer families very practical 'hands on' support.
- The ability to adopt a persistent, assertive and challenging approach.
- The need to consider the family as a whole.
- To create a common purpose and agreed action.
- The importance of being theory informed.
- The provision of extensive training and supervision of staff.
- The need to take an individualised approach.
- To have strong links with partners.
- The involvement of children and families.

Do you use a Family Group Conference type of approach to help families identify ways in which children can remain within the wider family?

Family Network Meetings are an intrinsic part of our practice framework, Signs of Safety. We are also seeking to enhance our capacity to identify a supportive network of family and friends via the implementation of the Family Finding programme.

What local information is there about the cost of out of county and out of country placements?

General information on costs is provided above.

There is evidence that the costs of independent residential placements in Swansea are lower than those placed out of county. At the time of writing the average weekly cost is £300 less. This figure would be much higher if it were not for one particularly high-cost package for a young person previously in secure. One of the reasons for this is the fact many of our specialist placements, and therefore more expensive placements, happen to be located outside Swansea. However, it is also true that it is possible to form stronger relationships with local providers which are mutually beneficial and can lead to financial savings via price discounts.

How are decisions made about out of area and cross-border placements, and which partners are involved?

We recognise our duty to ensure a child is placed within Swansea (section 81(9) of the Act), unless it is not reasonably practical to do so or there are over-riding reasons for placing a child out of area. When choosing a placement we ask ourselves how far any proposed placement will meet the needs of the child and contribute to their well-being outcomes, given their past history and current circumstances? Examples of the circumstances considered are:

- if it meets the needs of the child as set out in their care and support plan;
- will it disrupt the child's education or training (section 78(2));
- will it enable the child to live together with any siblings who are also being looked after by the Council;
- does it offer accommodation which is suitable to the child's needs if the child is disabled;
- the views, wishes and feelings of the child (in accordance with the child's age and understanding);
- the views, wishes and feelings of parents or other person with parental responsibility (as appropriate);
- the child's religious persuasion, racial origin, and cultural and linguistic background
- the child's sexuality and gender identity;
- any emotional, behavioural, physical and/or mental health needs;
- contact arrangement with family; and
- arrangements to spend time with friends and maintain sporting, social and leisure pursuits.

How do you consider the views of children and young people when making decisions about the geographic position of placements?

Foster Swansea is considered to be an example of good practice and has delivered training to the other Welsh local authorities on the preparation of child-centred placement referrals which capture the voice of the child and young person.

Please see the All About Me for an example of the tools utilised.

How effective are local out of county placement panels?

The Complex Needs Panel is convened every fortnight and considers all children who move out of county. It is not as effective as we would wish. Perhaps the critical problem has been securing appropriate representation from the Health Board. Their organisational structure is fragmented in a way that it makes it difficult to identify one or a small number of individuals who can represent all the key service areas within the Health Board, e.g. paediatrics, learning disabilities, continuing care, CAMHS, NDD, LAC Nursing, Commissioning etc. We have also been unable to secure the attendance of someone who can commit the Health Board to funding decisions on placements. These issues have threatened to damage professional relationships between the two organisations, but the RPB has initiated a project to explore how we can address these issues.

What factors are driving any increase in out of county and cross-border placements?

The increase in the number of looked after children means local provision is nearing capacity. The same situation in other parts of the County means more children from outside of Swansea are being placed in local independent provision. This has the effect of reducing placement capacity for Swansea children and young people.

What factors are driving the cost of placements, especially expensive specialist placements?

See above.

How can placement costs be reduced whilst maintaining quality and value for money, and ensuring positive outcomes for children?

Swansea fully supports decisions to better remunerate foster carers and care staff. It should be noted though that, while residential care staff may enjoy pay increases as a result of changes in the national minimum wage, they are still amongst the poorest paid jobs in the job market. This is despite the fact that they typically support the most complex children and young people in our communities.

Safely reducing the number of children needing to be looked after is obviously a key objective. It is also, however, imperative that we ensure that public resources are used to maximum effect. This is already a highly regularly sector and it is proposed that Welsh Government has the levers necessary to support local authorities to this end.

We recognise that many independent fostering and residential providers deliver a quality service that achieve good outcomes. Nonetheless, there are inherent issues in terms of the current market place:-

- The difference in price between local authority and independent foster placements is too large to justify. Would Welsh Government consider legislating to prevent organisations from profiting from fostering? This would not purely be a savings exercise as some of the money realised could be reinvested in developing fostering services and paying higher allowances and fees to carers.
- It is suggested that there may be scope for the Welsh Government (with CIW) to help shape the residential care market:
 - Some of the national work on residential care has been useful but has not driven change at the speed required. It is suggested that the Welsh Government could potentially support local authorities by the development of a national strategy. Having closed down much of their own provision in the past two decades, it is anticipated that local authorities are going to have to re-enter the market in the coming years. Local authorities are ultimately responsible for the children in care and are probably best placed to support many of those who other providers find too complex and risky. A national strategy would help to coordinate local authorities as they open their own provision and to shape the independent sector as it changes to reflect an evolving market.
 - Residential homes are poorly spread across the country. Swansea presently has 13 homes registered with CIW at the time of writing and we are aware of plans for at least another 4 homes to open in the next year. At the other end of the spectrum, authorities like Cardiff have very limited provision. On paper, Swansea already has more than enough local beds to meet our needs. The issue is that the local services are often in locations or operating service models which are ill equipped to meet the needs of the young people in need of residential care. We regularly meet with providers to try to shape the market and are in the process of finalising a market position statement for this purpose. However, the case remains that many providers are motivated to develop services in areas where property costs are favourable as opposed to responding to local need. In the current climate this is not a commercial problem for providers. There are an abundance of authorities looking for placements so our influence on them is quite limited. While some providers may be happy to operate on this basis, it has an impact on the children being imported into Swansea and it has an impact on local services who are struggling to support greater numbers of vulnerable and complex children. It is suggested that there may be merit in a discussion with CIW about the thresholds for registration in areas where there is already an oversupply of placements. Obviously any such policies would need to be implemented carefully to avoid exasperating overall sufficiency issues. However, it is suggested that the fundamental issue with residential sufficiency is not the number of beds available but rather the capacity of the existing provision to meet the increasing complexity of need.