

**HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**21<sup>ST</sup> MARCH, 2024**

**COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SHORT BREAKS FOR  
DISABLED CHILDREN**

**Purpose of the Report**

The report will provide an overview of our services for disabled children and their families. This will summarise our duties as children's services, our current team structure and illustrate the challenges we face of meeting an increasing demand for services.

**Duties**

The duties upon Children's Services in respect of disabled children and their families are complex.

- Children with disabilities were classified as ['children in need'](#) under the Children Act 1989. They were therefore entitled to services under the 1989 Act, but also to extra services because of disability, under [schedule 2 part 1 paragraph 6](#) of the Act. Provision of section 17 services was discretionary. This has changed under the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**.
- **Children with disabilities and their carers** who need care and support will be assessed under Part 3 of the Act.
- The **definition of 'disabled'** is taken from the Equality Act 2010: having a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on a person's ability to do normal daily activities
- If you are a **'disabled child'** the Local Authority has to assume that you need care and support, and should make sure you have a 'needs assessment' to work out what your needs are.
- Local councils should provide parents of disabled children with a short breaks services statement informing them what kind of short breaks are available, e.g. home sitting, respite by foster carers, etc.

## Service Configuration

### 0-25 Disability Team

A review of our Disability Services undertaken by IPC in 2016 highlighted the need to remodel our service to improve outcomes for disabled children and their families. Following an extensive period of development and consultation a 0-25 model was implemented in 2020.

The model built upon our existing strengths by:

1. Bringing together the Children's Disability Team and Transition Team into one **0-25 team**.
2. Creating an Early Intervention and Prevention Team, working from 0-25.
3. Bringing residential services for disabled children together into one service.
4. Implementing systemic practice and a multi-disciplinary approach across the service.
5. Increasing the role of specialist health staff to work with children up to the age of 18.
6. Bringing Educational Psychology into the supervision and case management of all disabled children and young people.

The aim was to enable us to deliver:

1. A single point of contact for referrals from 0-25
2. A consistent care pathway for through service from 0-25
3. We develop residential services that are fit for purpose and meet the future demand
4. We ensure that young people can continue their education in Carmarthenshire when they leave school
5. Services for children and young people are based on need not on age
6. The development of a clear local offer

This joint model was agreed by Education and Children's Services and Communities and subject to a Memorandum of Understanding between Directors.

We operate a single point of contact for all referrals for children within Carmarthenshire through our Central Referral Team. This includes services for disabled (including ASD) children aged 0-25.

This created 3 separate 'PODs' working with children and young people aged 0-25. A POD is the model developed in Children's Services where smaller teams of workers sharing responsibility for case management.



Cases are reviewed on a cycle within each POD with input from all members. CIW recognised in their Assurance Check visit in February 2021 which had a focus on Disabled Children of the positive outcomes this model was achieving.

## Early Help Team

Our Preventative services are overseen by the same manager and have brought together services from Communities and Children's Services to create an Early Help Team.



This brought together staff with different skills and experiences into one team. The ASD support and Carers Support ended due to funding, however Community Connectors transferred from adult social care and a Social Work Assistant had been working in the team on a temporary basis.

Work has been led through the early help team with our parents group to develop our 'local offer' which sets out the services and support available to families in Carmarthenshire. This is now published on our corporate website:

[Local Offer \(gov.wales\)](http://gov.wales)

## **Residential Services**

In Carmarthenshire we provide overnight short breaks for children at our residential children's homes at Llys Caradog and Blaenau. We also have a long term residential home for children and young people with autism, learning disability and complex needs: Garreglwyd.

These are all accessed following assessment by our 0-25 team.

In 2018 these services became registered under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (RISCA). This has increased the role of the 'Responsible Individual' to ensure there are robust and consistent quality assurance arrangements in place across our services.

We appointed a Residential Services Manager in January 2021. They became the responsible Individual for our 3 existing Residential Children's Homes. This has started a service wide approach to ensure there is consistency of delivery across settings.

## **Services**

In Carmarthenshire, we meet the needs of disabled children and their families through a range of **short break services**. These services are allocated following an assessment of need and can include:

- Overnight Short breaks at our respite centres Llys Caradog and Blaenau
- We also commission organisations to provide support to access community activities or provide domiciliary care
- Specialist Weekend and Holiday Clubs and Activities

## **Direct payments**

We also offer 'Direct Payments.' These are a way for local authorities to help meet individual's eligible need for care and support or a carer's need for support. Direct payments are not a form of income but are paid specifically to buy services, as an alternative to those provided directly or commissioned by the council.

Payments can be made to a person with parental responsibility for a child who has needs for care and support, or to the child who has needs for care and support.

The person to whom the payments are to be made must consent to the making of the payments. Where the direct payments are being made to an adult or a child aged 16 or 17, the local authority must believe the person who is to receive the payments has the capacity to consent to the making of the payments.

In all cases the local authority must be satisfied that making the payments is an appropriate way of meeting the child's needs, that the well-being of the child will be safeguarded and promoted by the making of the payments and that the person who is to receive the payments is capable of managing them by him or herself or with support.

### **Direct payments to meet a carer's needs**

Direct payments can be made to meet the support needs of a carer. The direct payments must be made to the carer himself or herself, who must consent to the making of the payments.

In all cases the local authority must be satisfied that making the payments is an appropriate way of meeting the carer's needs and that the carer is capable of managing the payments, whether by him or herself, or with support.

## **Preventative Services**

Under the Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act we provide a range of services which do not require an assessment. These can be considered discretionary and are preventative. This includes:

- Holiday and After School Clubs
- Specialist Advice, Support and Information (via Early Help Team/Tim Camau Bach

## **Where are we now?**

Initially there were positive outcomes of the new model:

1. Transition Social Workers becoming involved in earlier planning for children.
2. Educational Psychology and health workers informing care and support planning based on the knowledge of children statements/IDPs.
3. Social Work assistants providing practical help and support to cases when required.
4. Children's Social Workers continuing to work with children beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday where that is the right thing to do.

However, the service has reported significant challenges. Specifically:

1. A surge in demand for assessment following COVID
2. An increase in demand and impact on the team of complex family cases where there are child protection concerns including care proceedings
3. Social Work Assistants carrying high caseloads and undertaking assessments
4. An increasing number of social work vacancies and reliance on agency staff
5. Senior workers and managers having to hold caseloads
6. Limited availability of services for community support and short breaks.
7. Preventative services being oversubscribed

The residential services have faced similar challenges, specifically:

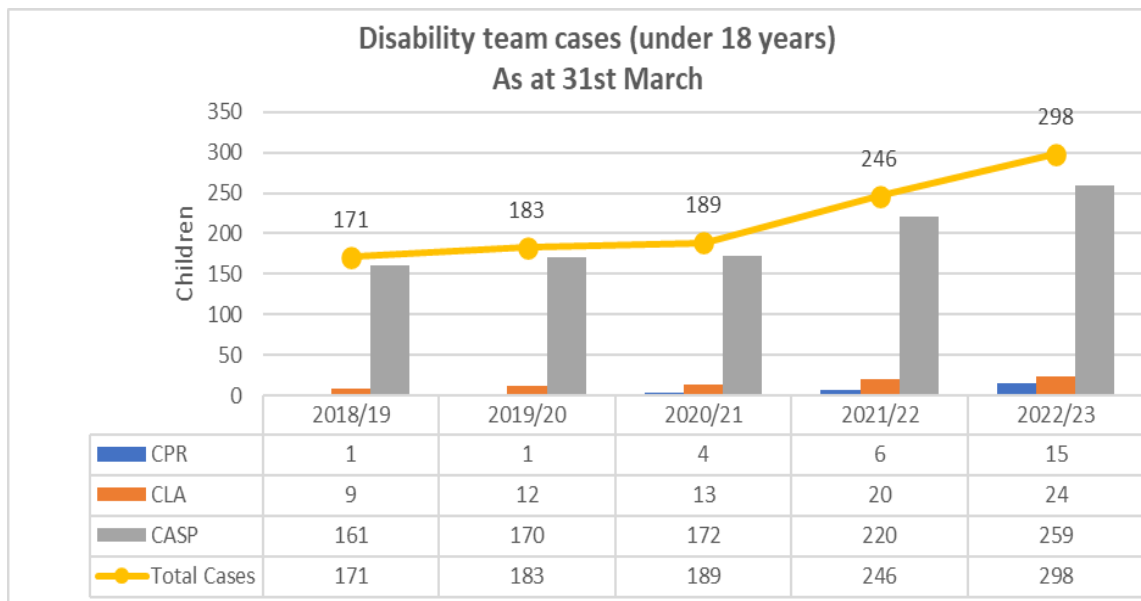
1. A reliance on agency staff and overtime (identified by CIW)
2. Managing emergency placements, rather than planned care
3. Long waiting lists for children requiring short breaks
4. Limited move on from residential services into adult services

The impact of these challenges has meant limited capacity for management oversight, planning and commissioning and a focus on managing operational risk. The current short breaks budget is forecasting an overspend close to £1.03 million.

There have also been changes to management portfolios with an Interim Service Manager overseeing adult Learning Disability services and the Residential Service Manager overseeing a range of new children's home developments and unregistered placements.

It is therefore prudent to review the current service model to evaluate whether it remains 'fit for purpose' and what actions can be taken to address the immediate and medium-term challenges for the service. This is already underway and a series of focus groups have taken place with staff and parents, with further sessions planned for the new year.

## Demand and Expenditure



There has been an increase in demand for assessment for support from the disability team since 2020. This requires further analysis however initial evidence suggests that an increase in awareness in relation to autism and neurodiversity may result in more families approaching the department for support. It is also the case that the COVID 19 pandemic and lockdowns had a disproportionate impact on families with disabled children who have sought support while other services, including schools have not been available.

## Residential Short breaks

Our residential short breaks homes at Llys Caradog in Llanelli and Blaenau are registered as children's homes with CIW. They have seen a declining number of nights provided and the overall number of children accessing the service in recent years.



The declining number of nights provided reflects the impact on capacity as a result of restrictions during COVID 19 pandemic. There is also an increasing trend of children



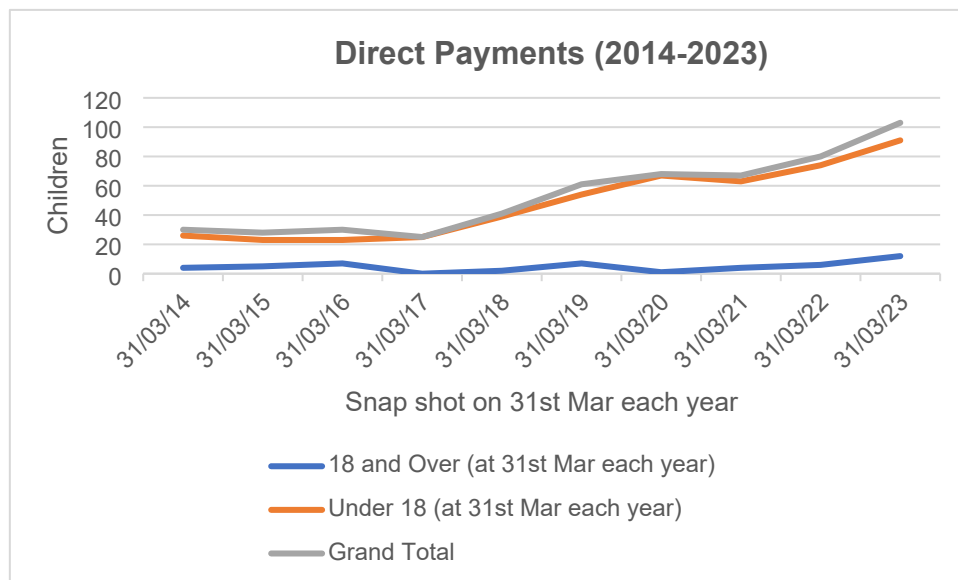
with more complex and challenging behaviours who cannot be safely matched with other children in that environment.

Also, the services have been required to manage increasing numbers of emergency placements in recent years which are outside of the Statement of Purpose.

There are significant numbers of children on the waiting list for Llys Caradog or Blaenau which reflects the limitations of the current model to meet the increased demand for support. The decrease in availability also helps to explain the shift towards greater use of community services for disabled children.

### Direct Payments and Community Support

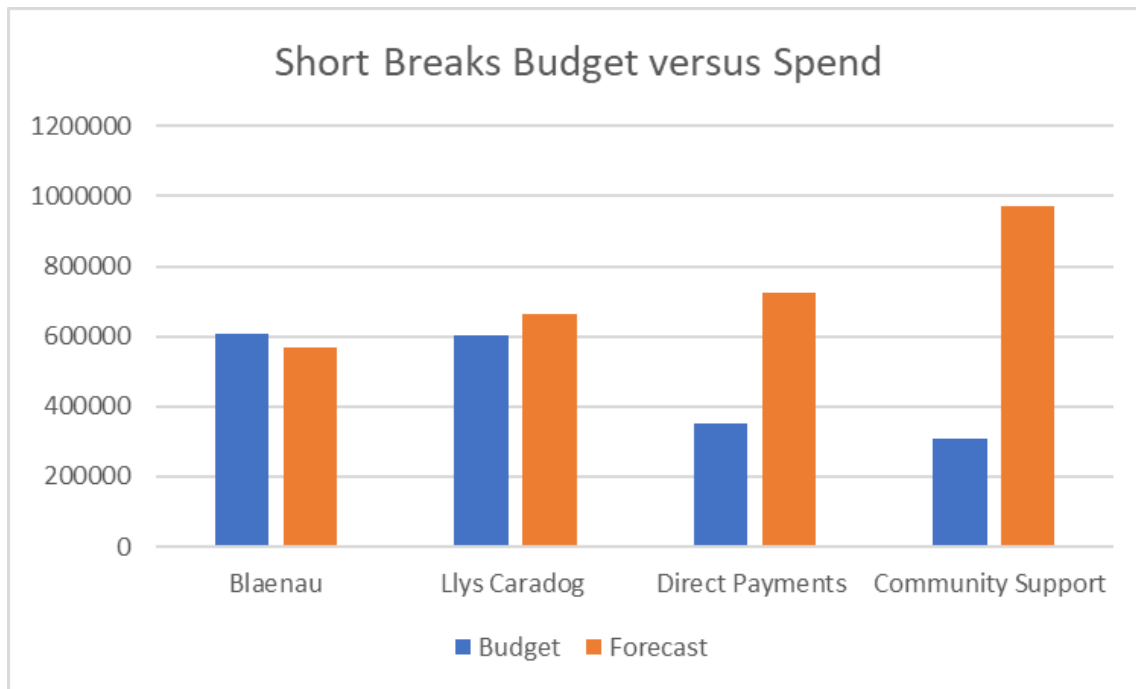
There has been a significant increase in the use of Direct Payments and Community Support for Disabled Children in recent years.



There has been a general increase in use of Direct Payments since 2017. This growth follows the changes since the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act came into force on 6 April 2016. The act requires local authorities to consider direct payments as an integral part of meeting people’s needs through care and support planning.

**Since 2021 there has been a 50% increase in demand for direct payments. The impact of COVID19 is one factor, whereby Direct Payments provided an option for 1-2-1 as opposed to group support for children which was considered safer.**

There has been a similar increase in expenditure in community short breaks. This comprises of support commissioned from 3<sup>rd</sup> sector/private care providers locally. This is largely undertaken on a ‘spot purchase’ basis and to provide a short break to the family usually by supporting a child to undertake an activity in the community.



The overall level of expenditure significantly exceeds the available budget. This has been a pattern for a number of years, with insufficient budget to keep pace with the growing demand. We have seen a sharper increase in demand since COVID.

There is a lack of policy or guidance to support the allocation of resources for disabled children. This results in workers and managers making decisions on a case by case basis and trying to ensure consistency. A review of services for disabled children in Carmarthenshire undertaken by IPC in 2016 found that there was:

- A mismatch in allocation of resources relative to need
- A mismatch between demand and supply &
- an under use of direct payments in the service.

Following the review, efforts were made to address the systemic issues that contributed to these factors. This included the development of a RAS (Resource Allocation System.) Plans were developed to pilot the system in 2020, shortly before the COVID19 Pandemic which was not able to be implemented.

### Next Steps

As part of the review of the service model we will consider with families and other stakeholders the options for modernising the way we allocate resources as a service. This will include consideration of a RAS as well as the development of a short breaks policy.