


Improving social care and childcare in Wales

Chief Inspector's Annual Report 2023-2024



Contents

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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Foreword

In my annual report last year, one of my priorities was to celebrate the success of social care and childcare in Wales. Too often when children's or adult social care services are in the spotlight, they tend to be presented as 'broken' services in need of fixing, or defined by questions such as 'how can social care help reduce hospital waiting lists?' These are important questions, of course, but the answers take us nowhere near articulating the true value of care and support.

While we all recognise, and grapple daily with the many pressures on the system and their consequences, we also see care at its best - transforming countless lives for the better.

When we view care and support in this way, we see its wider value. It helps maintain people's relationships and connections with family and friends as well as supporting local economies and enabling parents and unpaid carers to go to work.

People within the sector describe the value of social care in many different ways. However, the unifying theme is that care and support is a fundamental part of the social and economic fabric of our local communities.

The content of this report shows most care in Wales is 'good' care, with people supported to achieve good outcomes. I want this to inspire hope and ambition to do even more to help people who use services we regulate and inspect to live a good life.

G. Baranski

Gillian Baranski

Chief Inspector, Care Inspectorate Wales



Reflections

Last year I made several reflections and ‘calls to action’. While none of them can be said to be ‘job done’ as they are long-standing issues, we have seen positive progress.

Calls to action from 2022-2023	Progress to date
<p>A continued focus on investing in and developing early intervention and prevention services for children and adults; with integrated approaches to working across social care, education, health services, housing and the third sector.</p>	<p>In our work with local authorities and their partners we have found a strong commitment to develop preventative approaches in adults and children’s services. Prioritising investment in early help is still under significant pressure as services struggle to meet people’s immediate need for care and support to ensure they are safe, and their well-being promoted. Early intervention and prevention must remain of pivotal importance.</p>
<p>Continued investment in pay and progression supported by compassionate leadership, with relentless focus on staff well-being.</p>	<p>Where we find good and excellent services in our work with childcare, play, social care and local authorities, all have positive cultures which promote staff well-being alongside the well-being of people accessing services.</p>
<p>All partners to work together regionally and nationally to ensure the availability of an appropriate range of services that are able to meet the needs of children who are looked after.</p>	<p>We recognise local authorities have a legal duty to provide a home with care and support for children they are looking after. We reviewed our approach to securing improvement when local authorities operate a care home for children without registration. It was positive to see 20 new services registered by local authorities during 2023-2024. However, we remain concerned there are still children living in unregistered care homes.</p>
<p>Proactively celebrate success, promote positive practice and cultures and to support improvement. We encourage all services to continuously improve and aspire to excellence.</p>	<p>From our work, informed in part by ratings, we know the majority of childcare, play and social care services in Wales are good. Working with Social Care Wales, we have continued to explore the principles underpinning positive cultures: compassionate leadership; relationship centred and rights-based approaches; being a learning organisation which encourages innovation, reflection and learning; and values put into practice daily through the way people behave. Each of these principles must be reflected in the systems and processes that guide both day-to-day practice and longer-term planning.</p>

Priorities for 2023-2024

While it is positive to see progress in response to last year's calls to action, they remain issues of concern; we will continue to consider them in all aspects of our work.

This year I would like to focus on three vital issues; **leadership, continuous improvement and working in partnership.**

Our inspections continue to show the crucial part leaders play in creating an environment in which people can thrive. The better performing services tend to be those that support and inspire their team to do the very best for the people in their care. Strong **leadership** and effective quality assurance is critical. The financial context is difficult, but we know the best leaders find ways to motivate and inspire their teams in challenging times, often by doing the little things really well.

Call to action 1

Leaders at all levels in care services should be compassionate, motivating and inspire their teams. They should listen to staff and give them the tools and support they need to provide the best possible care for people.



Having a positive culture is closely associated with a commitment to **continuous improvement**, underpinned by reflection and learning. We will continue to support improvement by giving ratings in our inspections (published in childcare and play, and 'silent' or unpublished in adult and children's services), by identifying positive practice in our reports, and by developing new ways of publicising and sharing that positive practice. We see these as important levers to support improvement and encourage the pursuit of excellence.

A coordinated improvement offer for social care, childcare and play still needs further development with a continued focus on the workforce and maintaining well-being in challenging circumstances. It is essential we recognise the collective responsibility we all have to ensure positive outcomes for people accessing childcare, play and social care services.

Call to action 2

Positive practice should be shared by those providing services and by Care Inspectorate Wales, so a culture of continued improvement and reflection is developed and celebrated.

We strongly believe outcomes for people are significantly improved and change is achieved at a system level when we **work in partnership** with each other to deliver shared goals.

Call to action 3

Organisations and groups working in care should create and seize opportunities to work in partnership with one another.



Overview of our organisation

Who we are and what we do

We are Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), the independent regulator of social care and childcare. We register, inspect and take action to improve the quality and safety of services for the well-being of the people of Wales.

Services regulated and inspected by us

- Care home services (adults and children)
- Domiciliary support services
- Adult placement services
- Secure accommodation services
- Fostering services
- Adoption services
- Residential family centre services
- Advocacy services
- Child minders and day care providers

We refer to these as **regulated services**.

We also review the performance of local authorities in delivery of social services functions. We carry this out through a combination of inspection and performance evaluation activity.

In addition, we inspect:

- Boarding schools
- Residential special schools (boarding arrangements under 295 days)
- Further education colleges which accommodate students under 18
- Local authority fostering and adoption services



Our values

Our core values ensure people remain at the heart of everything we do. We aim to demonstrate our values in everything we do.

We recognise the vital importance of ensuring these are reflected in all we say and do, both in how we work with each other in CIW and with others.

To complement this, we encourage all providers to complete a post-inspection questionnaire to feed into our quality assurance process, helping us to know what we do well and where we need to improve. It was heartening to see very positive responses from providers who completed the questionnaire. For example, 98% of provider respondents said inspectors engaged with the people who used the service and 98% said inspectors treated people at the service with respect.

Here is what some providers said about their experience of the inspection process:

“

We felt well supported throughout the process and feel all feedback was given in a positive and respectful way. All staff felt comfortable and we are excited as a setting to use recommendations and ideas moving forward.

”

“

Inspectors were clear [about] areas of development and strengths so we were therefore able to clearly see the way forward to make improvements.

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Our guiding principles

The way we work, in line with our values, is guided by the following principles.

- **Putting people first:** the voice and well-being of people are at the heart of our work underpinned by a rights-based approach.
- **Being intelligence-led:** our work is informed by data and intelligence
- **Being risk based and responsive:** we take a planned, risk based, proportionate and timely approach to our work.
- **Working collaboratively:** we listen, share information and work collaboratively
- **Supporting improvement and innovation:** we use our knowledge and powers to support social care and childcare services to improve and encourage new ways of working.
- **Reflecting and learning:** we take time to reflect and learn from all aspects of our work, and to adjust our approach where necessary.

“

Most care in Wales is ‘good’ care, with people supported to achieve good outcomes. I want this to inspire hope and ambition to do even more to help people who use services we regulate and inspect, to live a good life.

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Our Strategic Plan 2020-2025

We have three strategic priorities:

- To be a trusted voice to influence and drive improvement.
- To consistently deliver a high-quality service.
- To be highly skilled and responsive.

We have continued to work towards achieving the actions set out in our [strategic plan](#). We will begin work on our new strategic plan for 2025 onwards, later this year.

Over the last two years, we have worked with our staff and key stakeholders to clarify our specific role in supporting improvement in social care and childcare. This resulted in our [improvement statement](#), and we have developed an action plan to support its implementation. We are clear that by carrying out our core functions of registration, inspection, performance review and enforcement, we are supporting improvement on a service-by-service basis. We are also in a unique position to have a national overview and are able to identify themes and trends to support and encourage sector-wide improvement.

Promoting the use of Welsh in all we do

Promoting the use of Welsh is an action in our strategic plan as well as a priority for Welsh Government.

Receiving services in Welsh is an integral part of good quality, rights-based and person-centred care. Adoption and delivery of the 'More than just words' strategy by social care and childcare services should help improve the quality of care and outcomes for people living in a bilingual country. The aim of 'More than just words' is to provide a greater level of recognition among service providers that the use of Welsh is not just a matter of choice but also a matter of need for many people.

A core aim of the framework is to ensure people who need services in Welsh have an 'active offer'. This is when a service is provided in Welsh without someone having to ask for it. It means providers naturally anticipate the needs of Welsh speakers. They do not wait for a person to ask for a service in Welsh but incorporate and promote the belief that if you are a Welsh speaker, being able to use your own language must be seen as a core component of your care and not an optional extra.

Providing an active offer is about people's rights. When communication is improved then people's rights are more likely to be respected and protected. This is important in all aspects of daily living but never more so than in challenging times in people's lives, such as when they are being assessed under the Mental Capacity Act (2005) or moving to a care home, being cared for in a childcare setting or involved in child protection procedures.

Everyone who works in social care and childcare can make a difference by asking themselves: ***"What can I do to help improve Welsh language provision?"***

We have actively recruited inspectors and business support staff to ensure we are able to provide an 'active offer' and speak to people in Welsh should they wish. Our guidance for inspectors and providers makes clear what we expect providers to do to promote Welsh language and culture. Small changes can make a big difference.

Engaging with people

Hearing the voice of people is a core part of our inspection activity. Accessible feedback forms on our website are one way of increasing the amount of intelligence we have about individual services and the social care and childcare sector, as well as speaking to people while our inspectors are out visiting services.

Later this year we hope to fully integrate our surveys with our in-house database system so the two 'talk to each other' seamlessly and allow us to fully analyse all the rich intelligence and anecdotal information we receive from people across Wales.

You can find out more about how our local authority inspectors engage with people during their work, in the 'Providing assurance' section.

National Advisory Board

Reflections from Dr Ruth Hussey (CB, OBE, DL),
Chair of the National Advisory Board



As chair of the CIW National Advisory Board, I lead the Board in monitoring, scrutinising and raising awareness of CIW's work.

In 2023-24, the Advisory Board provided perspectives on many aspects of CIW's work, with our focus being on how we support and inform the way CIW continues to regulate, inspect and review services.

Strong themes are evident this year in our own sectors and areas, which are echoed in CIW's work and which we, as members, can comment on from our own experiences. These include ongoing issues with staff recruitment and retention, sentiment towards ratings being used in care services, and how safeguarding work is implemented.

This year we explored the pressures on the social care workforce and the importance of listening to unpaid carers. Members offered useful advice on the purpose and use of Priority Action Notices. The Board also

reflected on the coroner's prevention of future deaths notice issued to Ofsted and the impact inspection could have on individuals.

The Board considered the Chief Inspector's Annual Report, as well as the CIW Strategic Plan and welcomed the work underway to address equality, diversity and inclusion.

The 'silent ratings' pilot was discussed and we received a report from Practice Solutions Ltd which had been commissioned to undertake an evaluation of this work so far.

Children's services were discussed in the context of the proposal to eliminate profit from children's care homes. Useful perspectives were provided by those members who work in this field, exploring the impact on children, providers, placements and alternative approaches.

As part of the childcare and play improvement project, CIW held many successful improvement meetings. Members gave advice on a process for implementing the childcare and play project across other sectors, as well as how best practice might be shared more widely.

CIW demonstrated the new [self-reporting data tool](#) for the Self-Assessment of Service Statement, which would make data visualisation easier. CIW's online portal for all registered care providers continues to be developed, making it easier for providers to work with the inspectorate.

We also heard about a suite of safeguarding reports, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health review with Estyn and HIW, as well as the review of childminding.

Over the year, CIW has continued to make progress on its strategic plan, despite the budget constraints and the challenges facing the sector. The work the inspectorate is doing around improvement and working with providers, not just 'doing to', is now more established and we look forward to seeing how that will be applied more broadly across different types of services in the coming years.

I would like to extend my thanks to all the Advisory Board members who provide a vital perspective on CIW's work and to the team at CIW who provide the content and support to enable effective discussions.

More information about the National Advisory Board can be found on the [CIW website](#).



Our National Advisory Board members are busy people – be they unpaid carers, service providers or a representative from a public sector body. Everyone at CIW appreciates the commitment, insight and time members give to help us deliver our key priorities and ensure we make a positive difference for people who use and provide services. Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi gyd.

Gillian Baranski
Chief Inspector, Care Inspectorate Wales



Providing assurance

Local authority social services

Staff working in local authority social services continue to work tirelessly to improve outcomes for people. However, budget challenges, deficits in the number of practitioners and a competitive market have resulted in an increasing proportion of the workforce, including staff from across partner agencies, being newly qualified and inexperienced. This exacerbates the challenge of safeguarding people.

There remains a lack of suitable placements for children who are looked after. This has led to most local authorities providing improvised care and support arrangements, sometimes at very short notice, to meet the needs of some children. These services are often operating without being registered, as required by law, and the children living in these services lack the safeguards and protection provided by registration.

Local authorities continue to report on long delays in allocating, assessing and authorising Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications, resulting in many people in Wales being deprived of their liberty, with no legal protection in place and no opportunity to challenge whilst waiting for a decision to be made.

Our work this year

A large proportion of our work in 2023-2024 has involved working collaboratively with partners. As described in the 'Reflections' chapter, we know positively impacting change at a system level and improving outcomes for people is best achieved when partners across the system work together.

We continue to work jointly with Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and have completed a joint inspection of Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board Community Learning Disability Teams, with a focus on Rhondda Cynon Taf. In addition, we continued this work in Blaenau Gwent as a single inspectorate.

We also contributed to an inspection of youth offending services in Conwy and Denbighshire by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.

In early spring 2024, we began joint work with HIW and Estyn on a review to explore how healthcare, education and children's services support the mental health needs of children and young people in Wales. We will report on this towards the end of 2024.

As a single inspectorate we also completed inspections in [Flintshire](#) and [Monmouthshire](#) and a follow-up improvement check in [Wrexham](#).

In keeping with our commitment to the Welsh Language Standards, we have offered to engage with people through the medium of Welsh on all review activity.



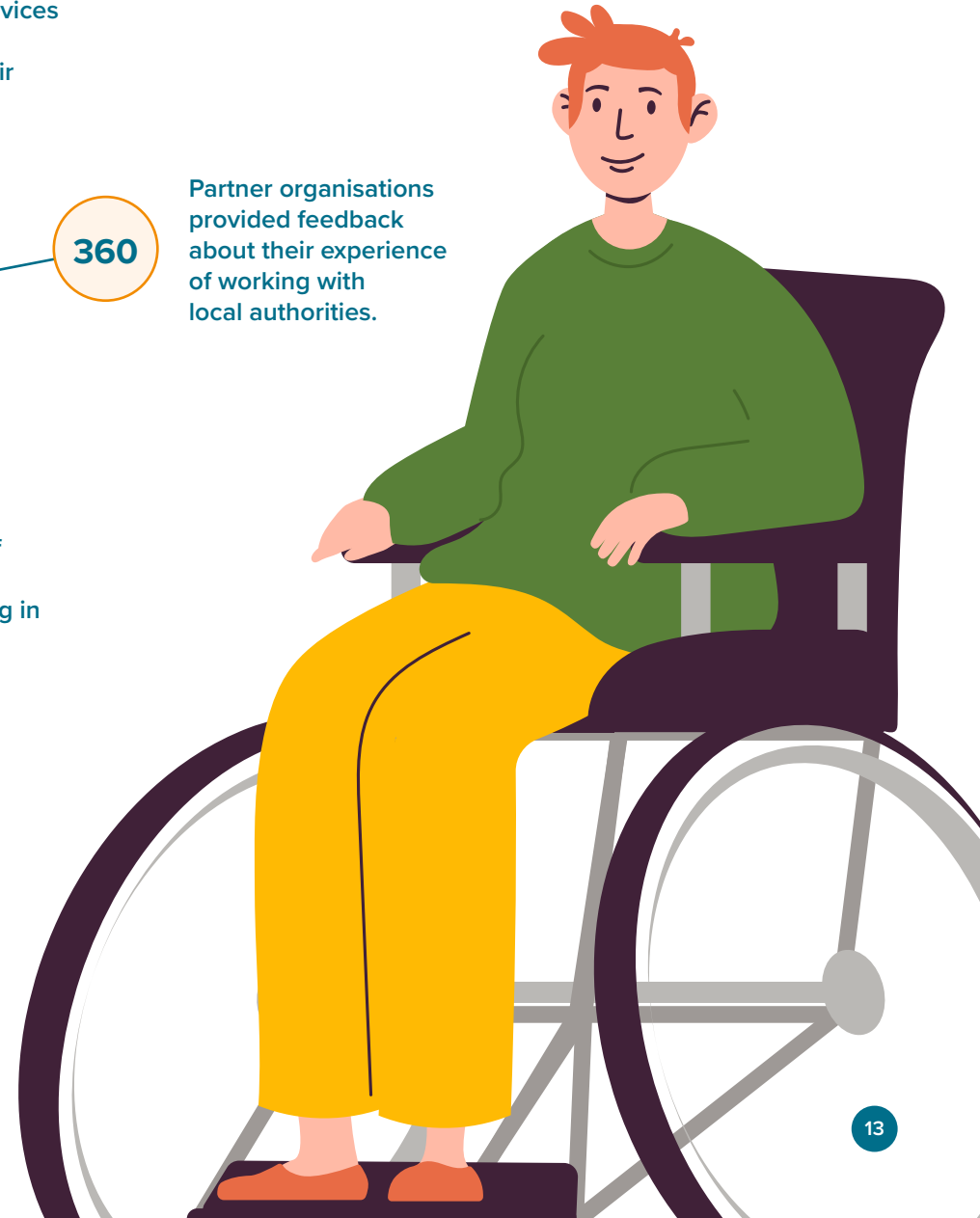
Feedback from people using and working in social care services

Ensuring we hear from people using and working in social care services is at the heart of our work. Last year we improved the way we engage with people online and in person, as well as streamlining how we capture this feedback. As a result, we increased the number of people we engaged with by 43%, rising from 820 during 2022-2023, to 1,172 during 2023-2024.

Feedback from people who access adult social services

During our assurance checks in Community Learning Disability Teams, we spoke with people using services, their parents and carers regarding services available to support learning and life skills. One parent commented: *“Even though they ask our opinion regarding future plans, they do not always take our opinions into account. I can understand that shortages of care workers and money impact what is available, but it does seem that sometimes they keep offering the same suggestions when they know that we are not interested.”*

A family member of a person receiving services commented: *“I am fortunate to have a named social worker who I can call on and who includes me in all decision-making.”*



What we found in adult social services

Protecting human rights

In February 2024, we published our joint annual monitoring report with HIW on the use of the [Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards \(DoLS\) in Wales 2022-2023](#). We found once people were able to be assessed, most people are supported and represented in matters relating to their deprivation of liberty.

However, there continues to be long delays in people being assessed. It is essential local authorities, health boards and care providers continue to follow the DoLS process to ensure people's rights are protected and care and support amounting to a deprivation of liberty is appropriately authorised.

Increasing demand and complexity

Local authorities are focused on people receiving reablement and community-based rehabilitation support. Reablement means important support to help people retain or regain as much independence and confidence as possible after a period of illness or injury. Where people are in hospital, the importance of timely hospital discharge is better understood across partner agencies and remains a priority. In general, we have found positive regional approaches which promote integrated partnership working between health and social services.

Many local authorities have waiting lists for assessments and other services such as domiciliary support and reablement. Whilst local authorities routinely take action to triage and monitor people on waiting lists, delays in receiving assessments and services can negatively impact people's well-being, including that of unpaid carers.

There are ongoing challenges in recruiting social care staff, especially domiciliary care workers and occupational therapists. Whilst people and their carers are given the opportunity to tailor and manage their own support using direct payments, the recruitment of personal assistants is also a challenge.

During our engagement in Bridgend County Council, we were told by a person in receipt of direct payments: ***"I have time to do things that are important to me, this makes a big difference."*** ***"It is the difference between living and existing."***

Supporting carers

In many local authorities we found the voice of carers is not always heard, and there is inconsistent practice in offering and undertaking assessments alongside the provision of support. There is a need for local authorities to collaborate with health boards to ensure carers' voices are heard in community and hospital settings.

Carers told us they value consistency of workers, being able to easily contact the local authority and being listened to by staff. Some carers we spoke with felt they were not always informed of their rights and entitlements, and they did not fully know what support or community resources were available, including the offer of direct payments.

While there are some examples of innovative support such as counselling, carers' forums, grants, direct payments and respite arrangements, overall, local authorities need to better promote carers' well-being by explicitly offering assessments to identify their support needs. It is also important for local authorities to improve communication about available support and community resources and ensure opportunities to assist carers are not overlooked or delayed.

What we found in children's social services

During 2023-2024, our local authority inspection team completed a programme of national thematic reviews with a focus on children's services. These reviews enable us to share learning across Wales while also reporting at a local level. The depth and focus of these reviews enabled us to collate national themes within children's services, acknowledging strengths and identifying areas for improvements across the system.

Our work at a national level has included publication of the [Child Protection Rapid Review](#), and Joint Inspections of Child Protection Arrangements (JICPA) in [Bridgend](#), [Powys](#) and [Cardiff](#). A national report, drawing together the themes from all JICPA inspections, will be published later in 2024. In addition, in January 2024 the [National review of care planning for children and young people subject to Public Law Outline pre-proceedings in Wales \(seven years on\)](#) was published. This considered the extent to which practice has progressed since the publication of both our 2019 report and the Public Law Outline (PLO) working group report including best practice guidance (2021).

We identified a number of key themes from our work:

- [Thresholds and information sharing](#).
- [Multi-agency arrangements](#).
- [Understanding children's individual needs](#).
- [Decision making/assessments and management of risk](#).
- [Placement sufficiency](#).

Thresholds and information sharing

Frameworks for thresholds (PLO pre-proceedings and Child Protection Registration) are generally well understood and applied, but there is some variation in how they are interpreted by different agencies and local authorities across Wales. Sharing information between agencies remains a challenge for effective child protection work, and current systems do not always support shared access to records, preventing or inhibiting truly integrated working across the system. Strategy meetings and child protection conferences are effective forums for information-sharing, planning and decision-making.

A parent told us: *"There needs to be better professional communication systems to stop oversights and speed up outcomes."*

Multi-agency arrangements

Children's outcomes are mainly positive as a result of effective partnership working. They are supported by timely, meaningful and outcome-focused care and support planning which promotes their safety and well-being.

We have found multi-agency meetings, including strategy discussions, Initial Child Protection Case Conferences and consultations prior to legal advice, provide a more cohesive approach to children's safety by drawing on the expertise and resource of several departments and agencies. Generally, these are well attended by partner agencies with the exception of Review Child Protection Case Conferences where there can be inconsistencies in attendance by police and health representatives.

Partners understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children. Local partnership working is supported by regional safeguarding boards and promotes the message that safeguarding is a collective responsibility. However, this collaborative working across strategic partners does not always lead to consistent oversight of frontline practice.

Children's individual needs

Our findings have identified the need to continue to focus on respecting the cultural and linguistic preferences of children and families. Ensuring essential information is available in people's language of choice, including easy read versions, supports greater communication and engagement. We have found care and support protection plans are often orientated towards adults and what they have to do, rather than what changes are necessary to ensure the child's safety and improve their outcomes.

Social workers aim to understand the child's point of view and include them (according to their age) in assessments and plans, but they could record the information from children more effectively, with more focus on the child's and social worker's concerns and priorities. Children benefit from thorough and careful work to find out their personal opinions. However, changes in social workers can affect the quality of their relationships with children and parents.

“

When my children were placed on a child protection register, nothing was clearly explained to me about any of the process - I felt I was not supported and was not checked in on by professionals, and not informed a new social worker had been appointed.

Parent/Carer

”

Feedback we have received from children and their carers

During our improvement check in Wrexham County Borough Council one young person was very positive about her relationship with her social worker and said: *“She listens and does stuff quickly.”*

- During our performance evaluation inspection in Flintshire County Council, a care leaver told us: *“Mine [PA] is helpful and would find the answers if she didn’t know. Previously I had a bad experience but now she is the first person I go to if I have a problem.”*
- Children and young people told us they value opportunities to socialise with others who have had similar experiences. They told us: *“I like meeting people who have experience of care,” “I’ve been coming to this group for eight years. It gets me out of the house”* The group had enabled some young people to advocate on behalf of care experienced children in formal meetings with the local authority, ensuring their voices are heard.

The individual voice of a child can also be missed when they are part of a large sibling group. However, across all partner agencies, there is improved commitment to ensure the lived experience of the child is understood.

Providing advocacy to children and young people at an early stage could help them participate in on-going processes. While recognising children and young people may not always be able to join meetings and conferences, depending on their age and level of development, their involvement needs to be further encouraged.



Decision-making and assessment/management of risk

We found Family Network meetings (also known as Family Group Conferences) are used to develop support networks for children and their families, as well as serving as useful forums for developing care and support plans. Children and young people are supported to remain with their families where it is safe for them to do so, in line with Best Practice Guidance.

In many circumstances, the use of Family Group Conferences at an earlier stage may prove to be more beneficial, especially when considering contingency planning.

Practitioners' focus on the risk of significant harm to a child is inconsistent. Child protection case conference chairs must ensure the focus remains on the risk of significant harm to children.

Multi-agency colleagues' understanding and application of the thresholds as part of the PLO process is inconsistent. Joint training and targeted involvement of other professionals in this process would support more robust decision-making.

During one of our PLO inspections, one parent told us: ***“My children aren't in foster care. They have supported me to keep them safely. I understand about parenting now and am a better father. I can't think of anything they could have done better.”***

The positive impact this can have on outcomes for children is illustrated in one parent's feedback about how much they valued the time a social worker had spent with their children helping them make sense of

recent changes in their family: ***“The social worker is great with the children. Always made the visits fun and the children never felt like they were being watched or checked up on. Very child focused like that.”***

Placement sufficiency

We remain concerned about the number of children living in services operating without registration. This continuing problem is exacerbated by a growing demand for services and the increasing complexity of the needs of children. As always, complex problems can rarely be solved by a single agency and requires collaborative effort across the health and social care system. Meeting the needs of children who are looked after is a corporate parenting and multi-agency responsibility. We have found not all partners are as engaged in meeting children's needs as they should be. This requires a collective resolution and action by all partners in safeguarding children who are looked after.

In 2023 we published a [national report](#) on care homes for children operating without registration. During 2023-2024 we determined 117 services were operating without registration. It is a concern that limited progress has been made.

This year we revised our approach to services operating without registration, to ensure we continue to work and make decisions that place children's well-being and rights at the centre. Our approach can be found in our [Securing Improvement and Enforcement Policy](#).

We will continue to further explore the commissioning plans of local authorities and their partners, to ensure sufficiency of services to meet the care and support

needs of children and young people. However, commissioning new services and buildings takes time and is exacerbated by the pace and increase in demand for these types of services.



Adult and children's regulated services

Key facts

Services: 2,151 on the register

We saw an overall increase in services (+4%) compared to last year. The largest percentage increase was in children's care homes, with 37 (+13.4%) more services and 43 more places compared to 2022-2023. This includes 15 additional care homes operated by for profit organisations and 22 operated by not for profit organisations.

Concerns: 2,276 concerns received

There was a small increase (+1%) in the number of concerns received compared to last year (from 2,254 to 2,276). The majority of concerns (69%) were raised in relation to care home services, with a further 21% raised in relation to domiciliary support services. The most common themes for concerns received were Leadership & Management followed by Care & Support.

Inspections

We undertook 1,396 inspections of 1,282 services. This is almost the same as the number of inspections undertaken in the previous year (1,397).

Notifications

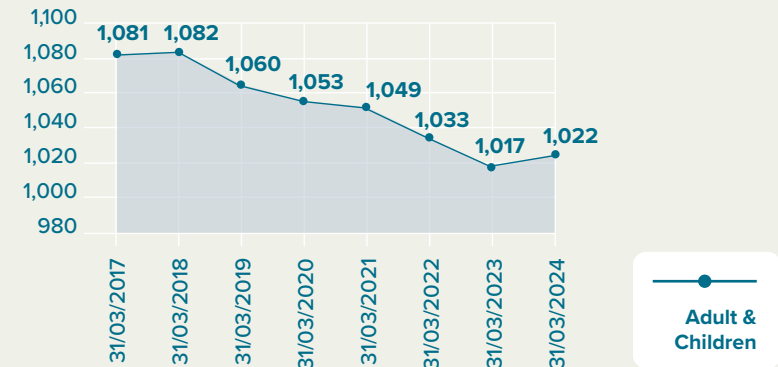
The number of notifications we received reduced from 35,604 to 32,950 (-7.5%).

Enforcement

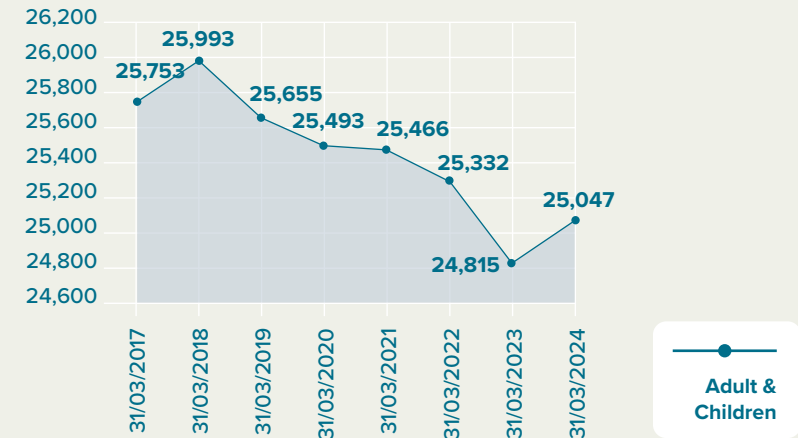
A total of 480 Priority Action Notices were issued to 96 services during 2023-2024 (compared to 858 to 158 services in 2022-23).

Registration

Number of Adult Care Home Services as at 31st March each year



Number of Adult Care Home Places as at 31st March each year



Care homes for adults

During 2023-2024, we saw a very small overall increase in the number of adult care homes (+0.6%) and number of places (+0.9%) available across Wales, compared with the previous year. A greater proportion of the additional places were in care homes for people without nursing needs, with 333 (+2.6%) new places available for people.

However, we saw a further reduction in places for people requiring nursing care, a reduction of 101 (-0.8%). This is part of a downward trend in numbers of care homes providing care for adults with nursing needs over the last three years, from 263 services on 31 March 2021 to 248 services on 31 March 2024. This represents a loss of 501 (-4%) places in care homes for people with nursing needs since March 2021.

Despite a 14.6% increase in new registrations (six) this year, overall, there are 59 (-5.5%) fewer adult care homes in 2024 than in March 2017, resulting in the loss of 706 (-2.8%) places available for people. While this reduction may reflect the aim of supporting people to continue to live in their own homes, there are concerns about the decreasing number of nursing places available for people with more complex care needs.

Of the 15 adult care homes services which stopped operating during 2023-2024, the most common reasons given by providers were:

- the service was no longer financially viable – seven services (46.7%)
- the service was no longer operating – four services (26.7%)

- issues with premises' lease – one service (6.7%) or
- CIW cancelled the registration of three (20%) care homes as part of our enforcement process, due to quality and safety concerns.

Domiciliary support services

The number of domiciliary support services registered continued to rise this year. This represents 100 additional domiciliary support services rising from 595 in March 2021, to 695 in March 2024. Despite this increase, we are aware there is a shortage of care to support people to live in their own homes. This is leading to pressures on family carers and people being unable to leave hospital in a timely way or having to move to a care home which may not be their preference.

Care homes for children

There were 48 new care homes for children registered in 18 of the 22 local authorities of Wales, increasing the number of children's care home services from 277 in March 2023, to 314 in March 2024. However, 11 services also cancelled their registration resulting in a net increase of 37 services. This resulted in 43 new places available for children. Of the new services registered, 28 (58%) are owned by private providers, with 20 (42%) being provided by local authorities. Despite this increase in the number of places available, there remains a lack of sufficient placements for children whose needs are more complex, resulting in some children being cared for in services operating without registration.

Inspection

We carried out 1,396 inspections	
Care home services for adults	813
Residential Family Centres	2
Care Home Services for Adult and Children	5
Care Home Services for Children	167
Secure Accommodation	1
Adult Placement Services	1
Boarding Schools	1
Domiciliary Support Services	389
Fostering Services	13
Residential Special Schools	4

We plan and prioritise our inspections using the information we hold about services. Our inspections focus on the outcomes for people using the service. We use key lines of enquiry from our inspection framework at every inspection, with additional areas of focus, informed by our analysis of the information we hold about individual services. During 2023-2024 we undertook 1,396 inspections. This included 94 services being inspected on more than one occasion to check improvements had been made since our previous inspection.

What we found in regulated adult and children's services

Leadership and management continued to be the area where we found most issues with 55% of Priority Action Notices (263) issued under this theme. Strong leadership and management of a service is vital as it has a direct impact on the quality and safety of care provided, and the experience and well-being of both service users and staff.

This year, inspectors have reported improvements in the extent of meaningful activities made available to people living in care homes. Taking part in such activities supports people to fulfil their potential by doing things that matter to them and makes them happy.

However, there continue to be issues with recruitment and retention of staff in adult services leading to concerns about workforce stability. Some providers continue to rely on agency staff to meet their staffing ratio requirements and we have seen an increase in the use of overseas workers who are playing an increasing and important role in the delivery of social care services.

Case study: Supporting inclusion and diversity

A small and relatively new domiciliary care service is taking steps to offer significant support to new staff recruited from overseas. The Responsible Individual is delivering a series of essential skills workshops focused on increasing care workers' understanding of local culture and practices, such as making local foods, use of domestic appliances, as well as local phrases. This is having a positive impact for people receiving support by ensuring staff feel confident to undertake all aspects of their role. Staff have given positive feedback about the level and accessibility of support from leaders.

Case study: Celebrating improvement

A provider responded positively to addressing a number of failings identified by CIW. As a result, outcomes for people have significantly improved. Examples of this include people being actively encouraged to have new experiences to enhance their quality of life. We saw photos showing people bowling, playing golf, going on boat rides, visiting arcades, fun fairs/theme parks, spa hotels, going in the sea and sledging. People have also been supported to walk up Yr Wyddfa and Pen y Fan.

For the first time everyone went out for a Christmas meal in a restaurant except for one person who chose to stay behind and had a Chinese takeaway instead.

Improvements to the environment included enhancing the outside space with a new decking area with picnic benches, a swing and giant plastic bricks. People have different areas allocated for them taking in to account their sensory needs and interests. One person is helping to sand down all the benches and paint furniture ready to be used. Two planters are full of sensory plants which are safe and nontoxic. There are fairy lights, wind chimes, different colour fabrics and garden ornaments dotted along the pathway with wildflowers growing.

A family member told us: *"My son has become happy and settled here. He has a routine and a weekly programme of activities. Keeping fit is encouraged with walks on the beach or in countryside which helps with mental health. When I visit or phone the staff are friendly and keep me informed of what he is doing. They organise full day trips to theme parks, Blackpool or the pantomime. He is really enjoying his time here."*

From June 2023 we implemented a pilot of ‘silent’ or unpublished ratings for care home and domiciliary support services, as part of preparations to publish ratings under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act.

A rating for each of the four themes was awarded on each inspection:

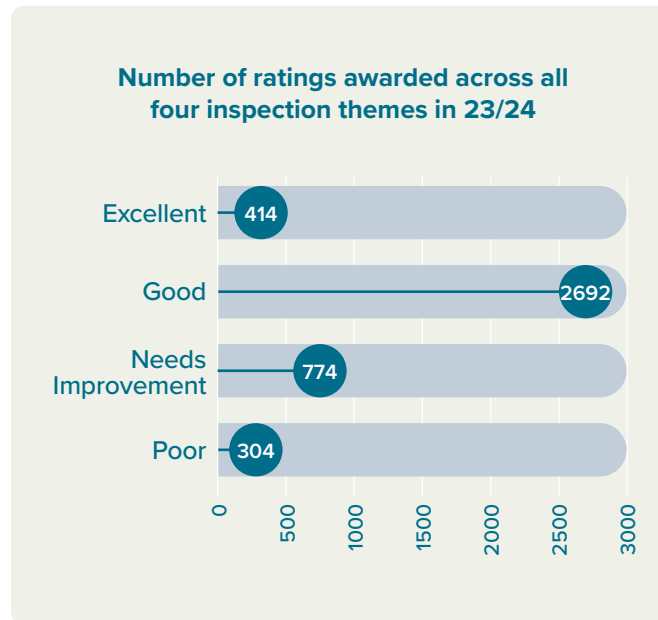
- well-being
- care and support
- environment
- leadership and management.

This means services do not receive a single, overarching rating but four separate ratings. Some services will not receive all four ratings during their inspection, for example domiciliary support services would not receive a rating for ‘environment’ because the care is being delivered in the person’s own home.

We shared and discussed our ratings with leaders of the service being inspected but we did not publish the ratings in the inspection report during this test phase.

The pilot has demonstrated a large proportion of services are good or excellent. Overall, 3,106 (74%) of the ratings awarded were ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ with 1,078 (26%) being ‘needs improvement’ or ‘poor’.

We commissioned an independent evaluation of our approach to ratings to ensure we can learn from the pilot and prepare in the best possible way for the introduction of published ratings in our inspection reports from April 2025. The evaluation report will be available in May 2024.



Feedback from people

We seek feedback from people about their experience of using or working in the services we register and inspect. The main way we do this is by talking with people during inspections. This includes visitors who are at the service during an inspection. We also encourage people to complete our feedback surveys. We received 1,253 surveys from family or friends, 655 from people using services, 3,811 from staff working in services and 83 from other professionals. This really important feedback is used to inform our individual inspections. We are in the process of changing how we collate this valuable information to enable us to report on themes and trends in the future.

Feedback about services that received an excellent rating

Here are some examples of what people receiving care and support told us during our inspections in services that had received an excellent rating.

“The staff go above and beyond for my mother.”

“The management and staff’s professionalism are of the highest standard” and “These are angels in tunics, my mother feels completely in safe hands.”

“I cannot find the correct words that recognise how much we value them; we are so thankful.”

“The staff here treat all the residents like a member of their own family.”

Examples of what staff working in services with an excellent rating told us:

“We have amazing managers who go out of their way to make sure their staff team is happy.”

“My job is rewarding – I like that I make a difference.”

“There is fairness as well as incentives to recognise our hard work and achievements.”

Each provider is encouraged to complete a post inspection feedback questionnaire about how they experienced the inspection. The responses to our post inspection feedback questionnaires are consistently positive with 98% of responses received between February 2023 and March 2024 agreeing the inspection focused on the outcomes and experience of people receiving the service.

“The inspector interacted very well with the people supported and was understanding of their needs whilst still able to complete their role.”

“Inspectors were clear [about] areas of development and strengths, so we were therefore able to clearly see the way forward to make improvements.”

“This year we also began to ask people for feedback on our inspection reports. 67% of respondents said they found the information in the reports ‘excellent or good.’”

“It covered all the areas that I feel are important to residents & concerned friends.”

“It was thorough and has given me a good insight.”

Other less positive comments have also been valuable in highlighting where we need to improve:

“It was all very generalised.” “It gave me the information but felt it was long to read.”

Welsh language

Promoting Welsh language and culture is an essential part of promoting people’s well-being. We saw a small increase in the number of services with Welsh provision; one adult care home service (+24 places) and two children’s care home services (+3 places).

We are keen to promote positive practice and here is just one example of what we’ve seen.

In one service we found people could receive care and support in the Welsh language if they wished as there were enough Welsh-speaking staff to support this. Support workers could attend weekly Welsh classes with a local college, and had access to a translation app. The service provider had a bilingual website, and documents could be translated into Welsh.

It’s the little things

‘Gwnewch y pethau bychain’ or ‘Do the little things’ are considered to be St David’s most famous words. He believed the people of Wales should do the small, considerate things which often make a big difference.

We asked our inspectors for examples of the little things they had seen that improved outcomes for people and here’s just a selection of what they told us.

“A person living with dementia and in receipt of home care services reported the carers were very good to them, treated them with respect and let them do the things they can still do, like ‘when they pass me a banana, they let me unzip it, that’s important for me.’”

“Staff and management from one registered service worked with a local charity to deliver a three-course Christmas dinner to people, especially those that live alone.”

“One care home resident has only one relative, who lives alone. The relative is warmly welcomed into the home and supported and included in the events in the home.”

“One younger adult with a life-limiting illness had dreams to be reunited with a sibling after eight years and to go on a holiday. Staff at the service were able to make both these things happen for the person.”

“One person living in a care home wanted to celebrate a big birthday at a ‘Bingo Bonanza’ in Blackpool. After the trip the person said it was a ‘brilliant experience’ and one they would remember forever.”

Notifications

Service providers are required to notify us of certain events which affect people using their service.

There has been a further decrease in the number of notifications we received this year (-7.5%). This is primarily due to a large decrease in the number of notifications of outbreaks of infectious diseases, such as COVID-19, reducing from 6,907 in 2022-2023 to 818 in 2023-2024.

There was a 35% increase in the number of notifications of children living in care homes who go missing, increasing from 1,968 in 2022-2023 to 2,657 in 2023-2024. In some cases, children missing can relate to children not returning to the home at the agreed time but only being absent for short periods and where they have not made contact to let staff know they are staying out. However, children missing is closely linked with exploitation of children.

The Welsh Government protocol, '[Reducing the criminalisation of care-experienced children and young adults](#)' sets out expectations for practice across agencies to reduce unnecessary criminalisation of care experienced children. Whilst some recommendations within the protocol have been achieved, we believe much more can be done to ensure more robust arrangements are in place when children go missing from care.

As a result of the steady increase in the number of children going missing from care being notified to us, we wrote to all providers in September 2023 to remind them of the importance of ensuring children are appropriately protected and that arrangements are in line with the '[All-Wales practice guidance: safeguarding children who go missing from home or care](#)'.

We have asked providers to work with local authorities and police to develop more effective processes to ensure children are better safeguarded when they go missing from care.

Notifications about allegations of abuse in adult and children's services have increased from 3,252 in 2022-2023 to 4,013 in 2023-2024. These do not always meet the threshold for a local authority to take forward its formal safeguarding process but will always be considered by an inspector and further information sought if needed to inform our inspection planning.

Concerns

The number of concerns we receive has remained relatively static, with 2,254 concerns raised in 2022-2023 and 2,276 in 2023-2024.

Of the 2,276 concerns received in relation to adults and children's services during this period, 1,125 were about Leadership & Management; 1,069 were about Care & Support; 819 were about Well-being; 169 were about the Environment; 27 were in relation to Discrimination; and 10 were in relation to COVID-19. A concern can be in relation to more than one theme.

Staff working in care services raised 474 concerns. These are classed as 'whistle blowers' because they are protected in law when making disclosures to us. It is positive care workers are prepared to come forward with their concerns.

The action we take varies according to the issue raised. We may decide to: inspect (we did this on 193 occasions); where appropriate ask the provider's Responsible Individual to investigate (707 occasions); refer to another agency such as Social Care Wales / Health and Safety Executive (146 occasions); or report to the local authority safeguarding team (229 occasions).

Guidance on registering care home for children

During this year, we began work on developing guidance designed to ensure organisations planning on opening a children's home in Wales have a good understanding of what is important to young people. As part of this work, we asked a group of care experienced children and young people to tell us about:

- What makes a house feel like home.
- What the right size is for a good home and how many children should live together.
- What the inside of a good home should look like, including their thoughts on their individual rooms and shared spaces.
- What the exterior of a good home should look like, including the gardens and outside space.
- Where a good home should be located and what should be in the surrounding community.

You can read the fantastic suggestions from the children and young people we spoke with [here](#).

The completed guidance will be published during 2024-2025.

Some examples of what the children and young people told us

“Understanding people, who will listen to our story.”

“Nice people make it good.”

“I don't want to live with people who shout, or I will shout back.”

“Smaller homes teach children to share and respect each other, this doesn't happen when they live alone.”

“A nice normal size house, four people is plenty.”

“It should look like a normal house and not like a block of flats.”

“Being close to your school, family and friends makes you feel safe.”

“Avoid big cities, must have low crime rates.”



Enforcement

In 2023-2024 we found:



96 services did not meet legal requirements.



We issued **480** Priority Actions Notices (PANs).



The majority of these related to **Leadership and Management**.

Our follow-up visits confirmed that:



62.5% of providers (60) had taken appropriate action by March 2024.

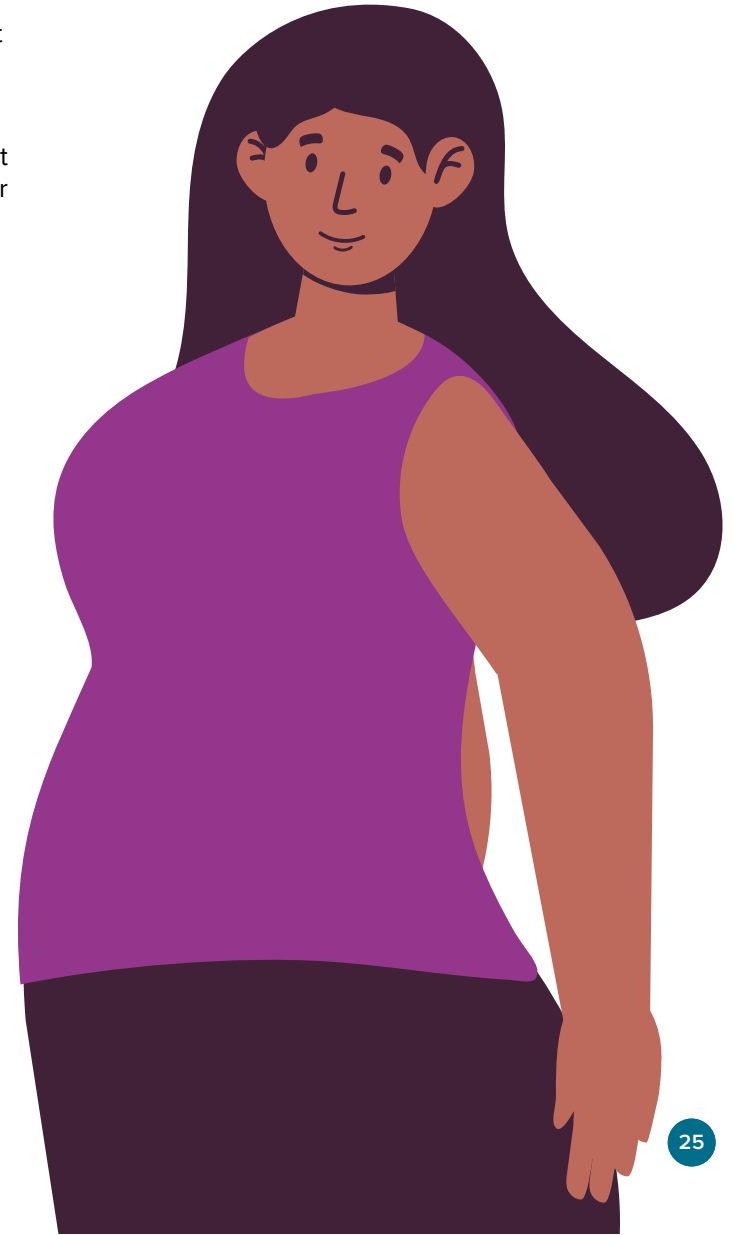


The remaining **36 services** had been given time to make the required improvements and we will return to test this at inspection.

Where we find a service is failing to meet regulations and this is impacting on outcomes for people, or there is a significant risk of this happening, we use our enforcement process to require the provider to improve by issuing a Priority Action Notice (PAN).

We have reviewed our approach to securing improvement and enforcement, including our escalation process. Rather than automatically escalating an outstanding Area For Improvement to a Priority Action Notice, we now consider whether it is impacting on or posing a significant risk to the well-being of people. If it is not, we still expect the provider to rectify the problem, but do not issue a Priority Action Notice. This change of approach is evident in the decrease in the number of services being issued with Priority Action Notices (down to 96 services compared with 158 last year). In some services we identify the need to improve in more than one area which results in several notices being issued. In total we issued 480 Priority Action Notices.

The greatest areas for improvement related to leadership and management, followed by care and support, which mirrors the concerns raised with us. In those services where we issued a Priority Action Notice, 62.5% (60) had taken appropriate action to make all, or most, of the improvements required by the end of March 2024. Of the 36 services with a Priority Action Notice still open at the end of March, these are on our enforcement pathway, some having target dates for improvement beyond March.



Childcare and play services

Key facts

Services: 3,336 on the register

We saw an overall decline (-2.9%) in the number of services on the register. However, there was a growth of 0.4% in the number of places for childcare and play, with full day care recording an extra 2,119 places (5.2%) and an additional 47 services registering with CIW. The largest decline in number of places was for sessional day care (911 fewer places), followed by childminders (553 fewer places). While the decline in childminding services and places in recent years is well-documented, the decline in sessional day care in the last three years (-18.7%) exceeds the decline in places for childminders over the same period (-10.9%).

Concerns

We received 552 concerns, 17 more than we received the previous year. The majority of concerns (69.2%) were about full day care services. The most common theme of concerns received was Leadership & Management, followed by Care & Development.

Notifications

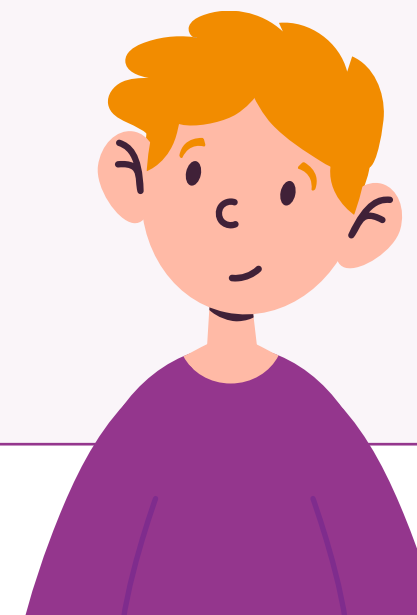
The number of notifications we received reduced from 9,764 to 8,721 (-10.7%). This was across all service types, except open access play. The most common notifications we received concerned changes to the statement of purpose, followed by changes to staffing at the service. Notifications of allegations concerning harm or abuse to a child increased for the second year in succession; up from 141 to 254. There is no evidence from our inspections of a noticeable increase in children coming to harm in settings. It is more likely the increase reflects heightened awareness of the need to notify CIW of events that fall into the category of 'Any other significant event which is likely to affect the welfare of any child on the premises'. We will continue to monitor this trend and provide further guidance about what should be notified to CIW.

Inspections

The number of inspections increased slightly from 716 to 725. This included 57 services being inspected on more than one occasion to check whether the improvement required had been made. We also undertook 60 improvement meetings as part of the process of testing the main features of the childcare and play improvement project (discussed below).

Enforcement: 155 Priority Action Notices issues

The number of Priority Action Notices decreased from 252 last year to 155 in 2023-2024. This is largely attributable to a change to our processes. Rather than automatically escalating an outstanding area for improvement to a Priority Action Notice, we now consider whether it is affecting the well-being of children. If it is not, we still expect the provider to rectify the problem, but do not issue a Priority Action Notice.



Registration

Number of Services and Places						
	Number of Services		% Change in Services	Number of Places		% Change in Places
	31/03/2024	31/03/2023	31/03/2024	31/03/2024	31/03/2023	31/03/2024
Childminders	1,502	1,589	-5.5%	12,267	12,820	-4.3%
Crèche	13	16	-18.8%	438	474	-7.6%
Full Day Care	1,091	1,044	4.5%	42,629	40,510	5.2%
Open Access Play Provision	37	37	0.0%	2,812	2,758	2.0%
Out of School Care	316	330	-4.2%	12,888	13,229	-2.6%
Sessional Day Care	377	418	-9.8%	8,489	9,400	-9.7%
Grand Total	3,336	3,434	-2.9%	79,523	79,191	0.4%

The growth in full day care services and places is likely to reflect efforts by Welsh Government to expand the availability of childcare for parents and carers. Given the initial focus on expanding the provision of Flying Start places for childcare, it is perhaps not surprising to see noticeable growth in full day care services and places. There is some evidence of existing services expanding their numbers as the most common variation we received from full day care services was to vary their maximum capacity (143 variations received from 130 services). The decline in places for sessional day care is likely to reflect, in part, existing sessional day settings changing their registration status to full day care as they expand their opening hours in response to parental demand and government initiatives. More generally there is likely to be a drive to achieve economies of scale to counter problems with financial viability and staff retention.

There are early indications that efforts by Welsh Government to expand the amount of childcare available are achieving some success.

Our inspections continue to show the crucial part leaders play in creating an environment in which children can thrive. The better performing services tend to be those which support and inspire their staff teams to do the very best for the children in their care. Consequently, it is encouraging efforts to expand the amount of childcare available are coupled with a renewed emphasis on quality through the creation of the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Quality Framework.

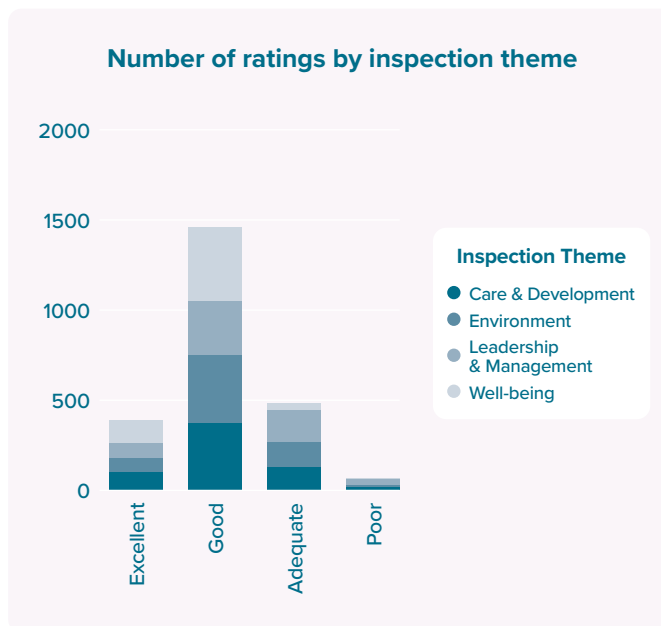
Given the expansion of childcare and play services in Wales, it's important there is a mix of different types of provision which allow parents and carers to choose between a range of options for childcare.



Inspection

No. of inspections performed 2023/24	
Child Minder	246
Crèche	2
Full Day Care	340
Open Access Play Provision	5
Out of School Care	53
Sessional Day Care	79
Grand Total	725

Most services do a good job caring for their children. The ratings we award at inspection show most services to be performing in line with the National Minimum Standards with adequate or good ratings, or a combination of the two. We continue to find the better services to be ones where leaders and managers create a culture focused on improving the experiences of children. Crucially, these services usually have leaders who work tirelessly to support their staff team to do the best they possibly can for the children who attend. These are the services that are most likely to achieve an excellent rating for one or more of the four inspection themes.



Rating	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor	Total
Care & Development	82	361	114	17	574
Environment	69	360	136	6	571
Leadership & Management	70	304	173	31	578
Well-being	107	410	52	2	571
Total	328	1435	475	56	2294

The current economic climate continues to be difficult for providers. Many remain concerned about the financial viability of their businesses and are constantly battling to recruit and retain staff. Competition for staff from other parts of the economy can be fierce. The impact of the pandemic is still felt, with some reporting children to be behind in meeting their developmental milestones when joining day care. Lengthy waiting times for help with speech and language development can exacerbate behavioural and educational challenges in day care. At times, providers struggle to provide enough support for children while they wait for further specialist help. While CIW welcomes recent changes to staff qualification requirements for safeguarding, securing the training for staff has been difficult for some and we regularly receive queries and concerns about deploying the correct balance of qualified people in the staff team.

Given this context, it is heartening that so many services do so well in our inspections. We will continue to do all we can to provide assurance about the safety of services, while working hard to support providers to improve still further.

Case study: Staff retention and well-being

Little Ferns Day Nursery is a childcare setting in Rhondda Cynon Taf providing day care, wrap-around care and holiday schemes for a maximum of 42 children. In a joint inspection with Estyn we found leaders manage staff very effectively and give professional development a high priority. They help potential future leaders develop the skills needed to lead at various levels within the setting.

There is an ethos of shared ownership, and this motivates and inspires staff, resulting in high levels of job satisfaction. Individual performance is reviewed regularly, and practitioners prioritise their own areas for improvement to develop their career plans.

To reward staff, leaders celebrate 'employee of the month', with staff and parents involved in voting. The award is accompanied by a small incentive. All staff are thanked at Christmas time with a supermarket voucher. To further support well-being, staff can access a staff room with a fruit bowl and food cupboard which they can use anonymously if

required. Staff take part in regular well-being events; for example, the nursery cooks and prepares meals for staff, with food purchased from a dedicated well-being budget.

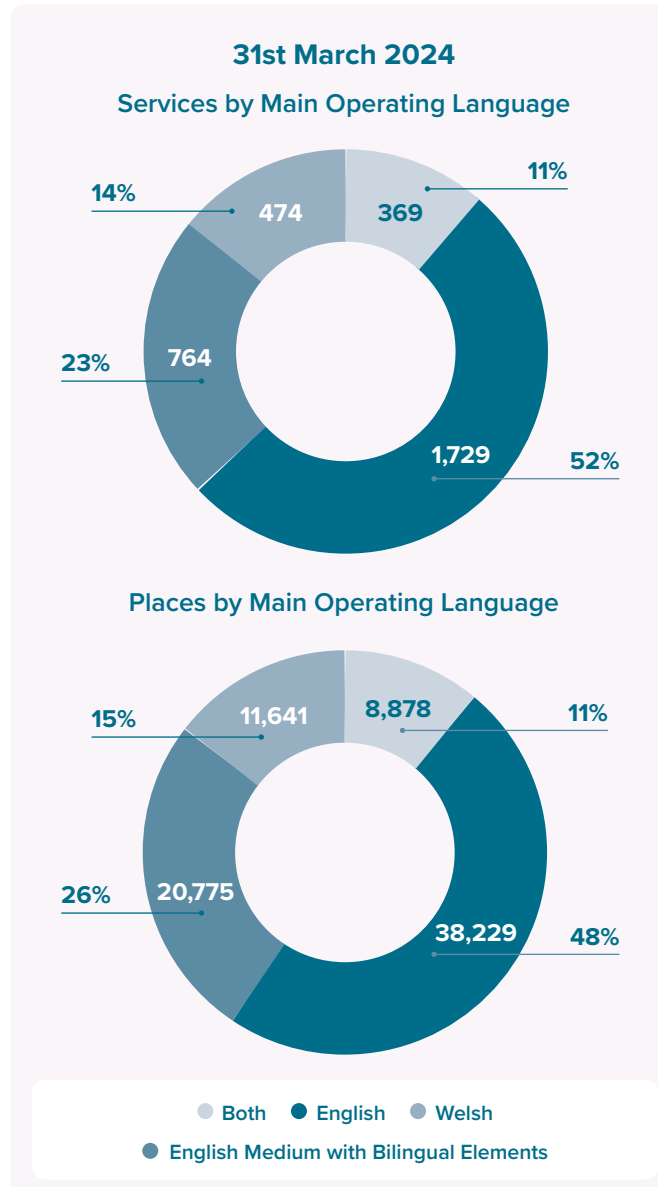
The impacts are that staff feel highly valued and are loyal to the setting and turnover is very low. Children are cared for by highly motivated individuals who have the skills and qualifications to undertake their roles to a very high standard. As a result, children make very good progress.

The setting welcomes visits from other nurseries in the local area and has prepared a detailed case study, which will be published on CIW and Estyn websites.



Welsh language

Welsh Government continues to have ambitious plans to expand the number of childcare places and, as part of that expansion, increase the number of places for Welsh language provision. This is in addition to the aim to strengthen support for the Welsh language across all childcare and play services. The data for 2023-2024 shows a slight decrease in the number of services where the language of provision is either Welsh (-2%), or English with bilingual elements (-2%). Contrastingly, there was a slight increase in the number of services where the main operating language is recorded as both Welsh and English (+4%). As last year, the largest number of services are those which operate through the language of English only (1,729). The largest number of places continues to be for English only provision, although 2023-2024 did see a growth in the number of places in settings using both English and Welsh (+8%), English with bilingual elements (+7%), or Welsh only (+1%).



Feedback from people

We seek feedback from parents and carers, staff and children about their experience of using the services we register and inspect. In addition, each provider is encouraged to complete a post-inspection feedback questionnaire about their experience of the inspection itself.

This year we received 2,481 survey responses from parents and carers. Over 90% of respondents thought their child was happy at the service, was safe and secure, and had access to a wide range of good quality toys and learning materials. 89% rated the leadership and management at the service they used as 'Excellent'.

The feedback from the 911 responses from staff was similarly positive, with, for example, 99% saying children are either always or sometimes happy in their care and 98% saying children are cared for safely.

Responses from children were also positive. However, it should be noted, for younger children in particular, assistance will have been provided by parents or staff to complete survey responses. Nevertheless, it is positive that 37 of the 39 responses from older children (95%) said they could tell someone who could help if they felt sad.

The responses to our post-inspection feedback questionnaires are consistently positive with 99% of responses received between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 finding the inspection to be carried out in a manner sensitive to the needs of people at the service. One childminder said: *"The inspector was discreet and did not impose on the day to day running of the setting. She explained everything clearly and was understanding of the fact this was my first inspection."*

Concerns

The number of concerns received (552) was similar to last year (535). Most concerns related to leadership and management and care and development. Eighty-eight of these concerns were raised by staff working in a care service. These are classed as 'whistle blowers' because they are protected in law when making disclosures to us. It is positive care workers are prepared to come forward with their concerns. The majority of concerns raised with us, however, came from members of the public or others who do not qualify as whistle blowers. The action we take varies according to the issue raised. For example, we may decide to bring forward a scheduled inspection, undertake an urgent inspection, or discuss the matter in detail with the provider. Where the concern relates to a potential safeguarding issue, we will work closely with the relevant local authority's safeguarding team and the police as necessary. Our priority is always to provide assurance about the safety and quality of a service for the children using it.

Joint inspections with Estyn

Our joint inspection programme with Estyn was established in January 2019. Together, we inspect the care and education of children in non-maintained settings which are eligible for funding for part-time education.

Since resuming joint inspections in January 2022 after the pandemic, we continue to find many providers do a good or excellent job in providing safe and appropriate care for their children. We found knowledge and

understanding relating to safeguarding children has improved and the majority of inspections showed positive outcomes for children. Generally, children settle well and form strong relationships with their friends and staff. While a minority of services need to do better in supporting their staff, most leaders have a clear idea of what they are working to achieve for children with a good focus on well-being. We continue to publish case studies highlighting notable practice on [our website](#).

The joint inspection programme reached a five-year milestone in January 2024. An independent review was commissioned commencing in January 2024, concluding in May 2024. The review was commissioned to gather views on the effectiveness of the programme and to consider what improvements could be made. The resulting report is due to be published in summer 2024. CIW and Estyn will carefully consider the findings of the review and how to respond to the resulting recommendations.

Childcare and play improvement project

This project aims to ensure we do more to support improvement in childcare and play services, both for individual settings and across the whole sector. This year we tested the use of improvement meetings with 60 providers. These meetings are an opportunity for providers to tell us about the progress they have made since their last inspection and what their plans are for further improvements. Where helpful we will signpost providers to sources of advice and support, including examples of good practice from our own inspections. We discussed the experience with the providers who took part and responses were overwhelmingly positive. We aim to expand the use of these meetings between inspections later in 2024. The ultimate test of their success, of course, will be even better outcomes for children who use childcare and play services in the years to come.

We have also implemented a new approach to recognising, recording and promoting the good practice we find on inspection. Where inspectors find practice worth sharing, they will discuss this with the provider with a view to sharing more widely across the sector, both in person and through our digital channels. Over time we will build a resource library of good practice to support improvement in the sector. We will hold the first of our quality conferences in late 2024.

Enforcement

In 2023-2024 we found:



46 services did not meet legal requirements.



We issued **155** Priority Actions Notices (PANS).



The majority of these related to **Leadership and Management**.

Our follow-up visits confirmed that:



72% of services (33) had taken appropriate action by March 2024.



The remaining **13 services** had been given time to make the requirements improvements and we will consider this at an inspection.

While most providers in Wales are performing well, a minority fail to meet regulatory requirements which has a negative impact on the children in their care. In these situations, we will take action to protect children. Most of the time, the action we take when services are poor leads to improvement. When this happens, a service will no longer be subject to our enforcement procedures and moves back to our routine inspection process. In a very small minority of examples, services do not improve sufficiently for us to be confident about the safety and quality of the service for the children who attend. If this is the case, we may conclude the service is unlikely to improve sufficiently to meet the standards required for registration with CIW. When this happens, we will cancel the registration of the service and it will close. This year we enforced the cancellation of four day care and one child minder service.

Securing improvement in outcomes for children

We visited a nursery 15 times to undertake 11 inspections over 28 months. We issued a total of 27 Priority Action Notices relating to 15 different regulations. While some improvements were made during this period, they were either not sustained, or replaced with different failings. The leadership of the Responsible Individual (RI) and the provider was not good enough to support the staff team to keep children safe and serve them well. Of particular concern was the provider's consistent failure to provide adequately for children's play and learning. While our approach is always to give services every chance to improve, it is not proportionate for us to devote limitless time on a service that cannot sustain improvement. We decided to suspend the registration of the service and begin the process to cancel its registration and the service closed permanently. We worked closely with the local authority to ensure parents and carers were supported and signposted to details of alternative options for childcare.

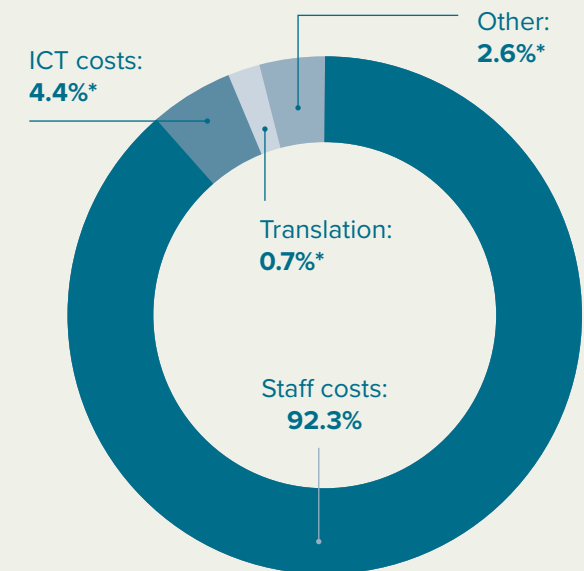
Annex

Financial budget and breakdown

Our allocated budget for 2023-24 was:	£15,058,000
We also received additional Welsh Government funding to support:	
Introducing ratings for care homes and domiciliary support services, and introducing special school residential services as a new regulated service	£671,209
Delivering joint inspections with Estyn	£192,000
Joint Inspections of Child Protection arrangements (JICPA)	£89,924
Total funding	£16,011,133
Costs	
Staff costs including fee paid inspectors	£15,213,357
Non-staff costs (ICT, translation, telephony, travel and subsistence etc)	£1,269,503
Total costs	£16,482,860
By the end of the financial year, £15,213,357 was spent on staff costs and £1,269,503 spent on non-staff costs.	

The £471,727 pressure in 2023-2024 was reported through normal financial management practices and managed within the wider Finance and Local Government Main Expenditure Group.

CIW expenditure breakdown for 2023/24



Note: 'Other' is an amalgamation of smaller costs, such as recruitment, legal fees, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and staff training.

Communication and engagement

Engaging with our stakeholders

We provide a range of opportunities for people to keep up to date with what's happening across CIW, while ensuring we make it as easy as possible for anyone to give us feedback or raise a concern quickly and easily.

Here's summary of what we did during 2023-2024.

Stakeholder events

We held **11** online provider events

attended by
→

951 care home and domiciliary support service providers

We held a further **2** childcare and play provider events

for

252 providers

News bulletins

We sent **21** news bulletins to childcare and play providers

with an average of

2400 people opening each bulletin

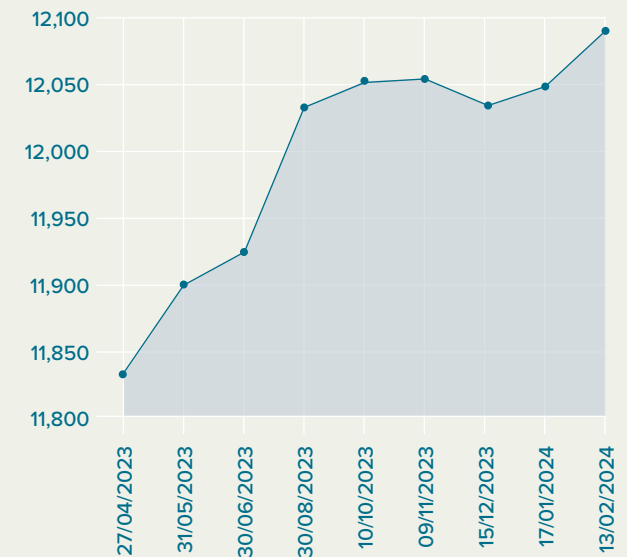
We sent **24** bulletins to adult and children's services

with an average of

860 people opening each bulletin

Subscriber bulletin

Our monthly subscriber bulletin is sent to **over 12,000 subscribers each month**. The number of subscribers showed a steady increase during this period:

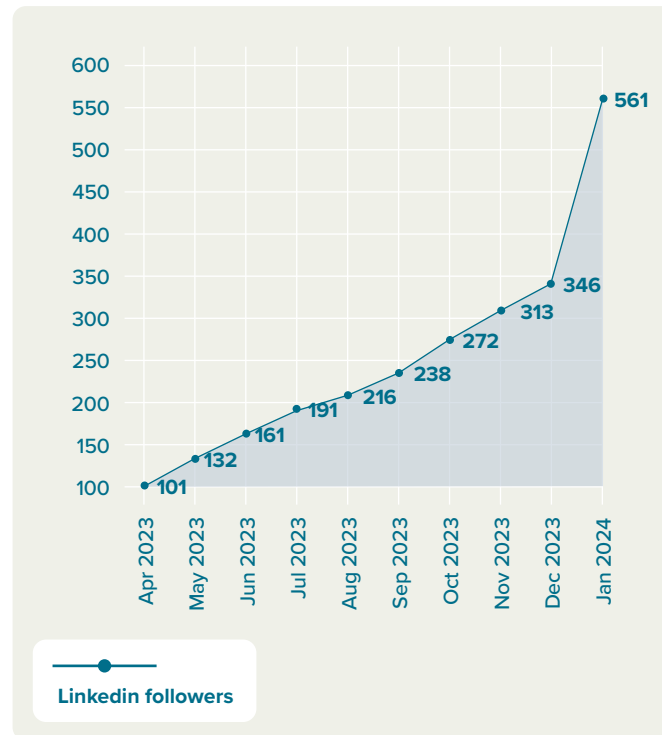


From February 2024 we moved to a quarterly subscriber bulletin.



The number of unique users who saw our posts or pages on Facebook during this time period was **140,447**.

We set up our LinkedIn account in early 2023 and we now have **561 followers**.



Making it easier for childcare and play providers to complete their self-assessment of service statement (SASS)

Childcare and play providers are legally required to complete a self-assessment of service statement (SASS) under the Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations 2010. Since 2021, providers have been required to complete their SASS via their CIW Online account.

The communications and engagement team were tasked with creating a range of impactful communications to all childcare and play providers which aimed to:

- Increase the number of providers completing their SASS on time.
- Reduce the number of providers phoning us for help and support and increase the use of self-help digital tools.

The team worked closely with the childcare and play and IT teams to look at a range of solutions. These included developing new [easy to follow instructions](#) and [video guidance](#) as well as ensuring the messaging was included in all our externally facing news bulletins and events.

We also created a range of targeted communications utilising behavioural change tools to maximise impact with providers who hadn't completed their SASS.

Social media activity

Our social media engagement is steadily increasing:

In March 2024 we had 3,302 Facebook followers. This is a **10% increase** year on year.

Total number of Facebook followers						
2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
261	724	1,571	2,332	2,705	3,003	3,302

Care Inspectorate Wales

Welsh Government Office
Sarn Mynach
Llandudno Junction
LL31 9RZ

0300 7900 126

CIW@gov.wales | careinspectorate.wales



What did you think of our Annual Report?
Please [click here](#) or scan the QR code
to fill out a short survey.

