

Improving social care and childcare in Wales

CIW@gov.wales | careinspectorate.wales

Chief Inspector's Annual Report 2024-2025



Introduction from our Chief Inspector

In my annual report last year, I wrote how we often see social care and childcare transforming lives for the better, even in the face of pressures in the system. This year I write at a time of continued challenge in Wales. All sectors, to varying degrees, find it difficult to recruit and retain staff. Pressure on budgets remains a consistent theme for services whilst demand for help is rising. We see examples of not enough qualified staff in nurseries or care homes, a lack of children's homes or foster carers where they are most needed and an oversupply of domiciliary care in some urban areas with a deficit in parts of rural Wales.

The combination of these factors challenges leaders at all levels to continue to do their best for the people who access care. These sectors are fundamental to the future success of Wales. The influence they have on the lives of people is immense. For most, their outcome is a positive one; the care and support they receive is of a good standard and they thrive because of it. Usually, people's negative experiences arise from services they do not receive rather than the ones they do. I am repeatedly impressed by the fortitude of the workforce in the face of the challenges I have described.

This year saw the final preparation for the introduction of published ratings in our inspections of care homes and domiciliary support services. We built on our experience with the inspection of childcare and play services where ratings have featured since 2019. We did not work in isolation but closely with the sector to design a system with the best chance of success for the people who use those services, their carers and service providers. The result is a process built not just on regulatory expertise, but on the real-world insights of those who live and work in social care every day.

I am very grateful to those who worked in partnership with us on this important development. It's helped us build something that will genuinely improve outcomes for the people who depend on these vital services.

Ratings alone will not deliver the improvements we want to see. We will continue working collaboratively with all concerned with care in Wales, because partnerships and alliances often achieve the best results. In 2024-25, we completed our current programme of joint inspections of child protection arrangements. We worked in partnership with Estyn, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). We also continue our joint inspections of childcare settings with an element of funded education with Estyn. We want to model the partnership working we expect to see when we undertake our inspections and reviews.

Introduction from our Chief Inspector

We know there is a direct link between the value placed on those working in care and the quality of the experience of those receiving care. I am proud of our joint work with Social Care Wales in the promotion of positive cultures in social care.

We want to do all we can to share and promote the excellent practice we find in our work. The launch of our new practice worth sharing website marks significant progress. It currently features inspiring examples from the childcare and play sector, with similar examples from our adult and children's services inspections to be added soon. All of us involved with Welsh care services have a responsibility to learn from each other and continuously improve. This must become standard practice, not optional.

Where things go wrong in social care and childcare it is often because of issues related to leadership and management. This includes a lack of effective safeguarding and a diminished focus on the rights and value of the people they serve. As this report explains, we will take action when we find poor practice to protect people's safety. This includes closing regulated services and requiring local authorities to make significant improvements.

Conversely, the better performing services invariably have leaders motivated by strong values grounded in a respect for the people who need care and support alongside commitment to supporting and developing staff.

There is no doubt, the coming years will continue to challenge all of us committed to further improvement in social care and childcare in Wales. It will also be a period of opportunity – not least in realising the enormous potential of digital developments to improve efficiency and effectiveness. For our part, we have described our ambitions in our new [strategic plan for 2025-30](#), with a commitment to strengthen safety and quality, support improvement, and expand our influence to make a positive difference.

I am very grateful for the hard work and commitment of everyone in CIW who works tirelessly to support continuous improvement and provide assurance that standards of care are being met. I am confident the content of this report will reinforce the relevance and impact of our work.

Finally, I want to thank the thousands of motivated and skilled people working in the services we regulate and inspect. It is thanks to you that I continue to be positive about the future.



G. Baranski

Gillian Baranski

Chief Inspector, Care Inspectorate Wales

Overview of our organisation

Who we are and what we do

We are Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). We register, inspect and take action to improve the quality and safety of services for the well-being of the people of Wales. We contribute to the improvement of care at an individual, service and sector level.

Services registered 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
- Special schools residential

In addition, we inspect:

- Boarding schools
- Further education colleges which accommodate students under 18
- Local authority fostering and adoption services

We review how local authorities support and deliver their social services functions through a range of performance review activities including inspection. We aim to work in collaboration with local authorities to support learning and continuous improvement.



Overview of our organisation

Our values

Our core values ensure people remain at the heart of everything we do. We recognise the vital importance of ensuring these are demonstrated in our work every day.



Our guiding principles

The way we work, in line with our values, is guided by our [guiding principles](#).

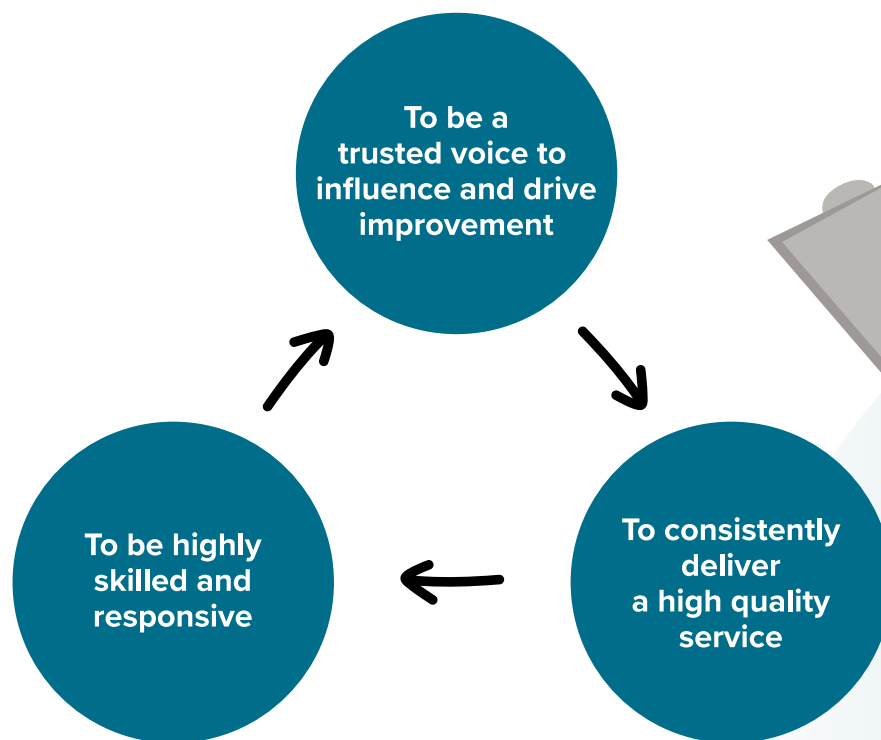


Reflecting on our Strategic Plan 2020-2025

This year marked the end of our [strategic plan for 2020-2025](#). We are working with our stakeholders on our next plan which will be published in April 2025. This will set out CIW's three ambitions to 'Assure, Improve and Influence'.

It is timely here to reflect on the progress we have made over the last five years.

Our three strategic priorities for 2020-2025 were:



Reflecting on our Strategic Plan 2020-2025

We identified actions to address each priority and are pleased to report we achieved 23 out of 26 of our actions. We've highlighted just a few of our achievements focusing on those areas of our work that are essential but can go unnoticed.

Promote the use of our online services (CIW Online) to make it easier for providers to work with us and review our digital plan and processes to provide prompt and effective services

We are particularly proud of our groundbreaking digital developments which have enabled both CIW and the services registered with us to work together as effectively and efficiently as possible.

We have expanded the features available in our CIW Online service used by registered providers and those applying to register with us, enabling key service information to be updated in real time by providers.

We have also published our [online data tools](#) so information is easily accessible for providers, policymakers and service commissioners to inform service planning and development.

We've built a [new service directory](#) making it easier for people to find information about social care and childcare services. People can now:

- Subscribe to updates about services they want to follow

- Download a copy of our register of services
- Give feedback about a service
- Share concerns with us quickly and easily
- See important information such as the latest ratings at a glance

Develop our first point of contact to improve the effectiveness of customer services

We redesigned our business support function to respond faster and deliver a better service. We strengthened our first point of contact, and this year our small but efficient team handled 10,447 calls and over 60,000 emails.

Promote positive approaches to equality, diversity and inclusion to make CIW a great place to work

In May 2024, we worked with Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) to launch our [joint equality, diversity, and inclusion strategy 2024-28](#). This strategy sets out the way in which the inspectorates will address inequality and unequal access to good quality health, social and childcare services across Wales.

Reflecting on our Strategic Plan 2020-2025

As inspectorates and regulators, we will:

Strengthen the focus on equality and diversity in our work and where we find inequalities we will challenge and report on this.

- We will embed equality, diversity, and inclusion in our work, to drive improvements in the delivery of healthcare, social care and childcare services for people who share one or more of the protected characteristics.

Improve our engagement with diverse communities, so they have a strong voice and influence in our work.

- We will increase our understanding of the experiences of people who share one or more of the protected characteristics to inform our decision making.

Build our organisations so they are inclusive and representative. We will build a more diverse workforce that reflects the communities we serve.

- We will support our workforce to flourish and thrive whatever their background in fair and inclusive workplaces.
- We will invest in developing the skills and knowledge of our staff and create learning cultures to enable us to evaluate and challenge our understanding of equality, diversity, and inclusion.

We are also keen to champion and share positive practice we find during our inspections. Here's just two examples:

Positive practice in a service for young people

We have seen excellent examples of services supporting equality, diversity and inclusion.

A young person came into care due to experiencing rejection from their family and community due to their gender identity and sexuality.

The service promoted equity by tailoring their approach to meet the young person's specific needs, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all method. They consistently reinforced the young person's right to make personal choices and express their identity. Staff encouraged inclusion by identifying and offering access to local LGBTQA+ clubs and inviting the organisation's LGBTQA+ Champion to visit the home, allowing the young person to openly explore and discuss experiences as part of the LGBTQA+ community. These actions demonstrated a clear commitment to inclusive practice and provided the young person with a safe space to explore their identity.

Reflecting on our Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Positive practice in supporting multilingual children in an inclusive environment

A Cardiff-based childminder has developed a specialist approach to supporting children from diverse linguistic backgrounds. After recognising the growing need, she invested in 'English as an Additional Language' training to enhance her practice.

She now offers personalised care that celebrates children's cultural heritage while developing their language skills. One parent noted: "We particularly like the way she is able to tailor the activities to our daughter's needs and interests while also educating her in worldwide cultural celebrations."

Her work demonstrates how early years practitioners can create inclusive environments where multilingual children flourish through individualised attention and culturally responsive care.

Further develop our approach to joint working and inspections to support improvement

We committed to a programme of joint inspections with HIW specifically reviewing community teams for people with learning disabilities and for people with mental health needs. We also have a long-standing programme of inspections with Estyn for our childcare and play services. In addition, we worked with Estyn, HIW and HMICFRS on a series of joint inspections of child protection arrangements over the last five years, producing an [overview report](#) of our findings in September 2024.



Engaging with people

Putting people first is one of our guiding principles, ensuring the voice and well-being of people are at the heart of our work underpinned by a rights-based approach.

Our National Advisory Board

Our National Advisory Board contributes immensely to shaping our work.

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



It is a real pleasure to be the Chair of the Advisory Board for Care Inspectorate Wales, a role I took up in January 2020.

Over the last five years many things have changed and the Advisory Board, alongside CIW, has adapted and responded to the challenges facing the sector.

Through what we hear and discuss at the Advisory Board, it is obvious that CIW's approach puts people at the heart of everything it does. Whether it's the voice of someone receiving care, a dedicated care worker, a service provider, a local authority or a charity all doing their best in difficult circumstances.

The emphasis is always on listening and learning from each other.

We have a section in the meeting called 'Voices from the sector' in which we discuss feedback on issues of concern or things that are going well!

There have been several moments at the Advisory Board where we have heard powerful contributions that have stopped us in our tracks to think about the implications for the care system - examples of lived experience that can have a significant impact on policy and practice.

Using that feedback, during the year the Advisory Board has been actively involved in developing CIW's next five-year strategy. We have had the privilege of seeing firsthand the level of thought and integrity that's gone into shaping this strategic direction.

It builds on CIW's core purpose as a regulator to keep people safe and to improve the quality and experience of care, but it does so with a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

I want to thank Gillian Baranski and her leadership team who have engaged with the Advisory Board in a constructive and meaningful way. Board members have contributed a wide range of views, experience and challenge which has been important to CIW, and I am very grateful to Board members for their time, knowledge and expertise.

In care services, what matters is how people feel – valued, respected, safe and heard. This is our experience as an Advisory Board.

Engaging with people

Engaging with providers and professionals

Here's a snapshot of some of the engagement activities we have led this year:

We held 15 online provider events during 2024/25 which were attended by over 1600 people from across the childcare and play and adult and children's services.



Feedback has been positive:

“

“Very well organised and lovely to get first hand from inspectors the things they look for and I like the idea of the quality meetings between inspection. I think regular events take the stigma away from the word inspector - our common ground is always having the children's best interests at heart, or we wouldn't do the jobs we do. Diolch.”

“From attending the first conference, I've got to say how informative this evening was. It was a great way to hear of different practices throughout Wales and what we can implement in our settings.”

“Loved every minute. Great to build relations with CIW as professional partners. Keep up the good work.”

”

Engaging with people

Co-producing our approach to ratings for care homes and domiciliary support services

Following an independent review of ‘silent’ ratings, the ratings team faced dual challenges: implementing public ratings for services across Wales while changing the mindset of those managing, working in and inspecting these services.

Effective engagement was essential for success. Care providers and inspectors needed genuine input in shaping the ratings system.

We set up three ‘themed’ multi-agency stakeholder task and finish groups that co-wrote the new ratings framework, supported the development of our communications and engagement plan and messaging, and the development of a comprehensive training plan.

“Thank you for taking us with you on this journey - it’s been really insightful and refreshing.”

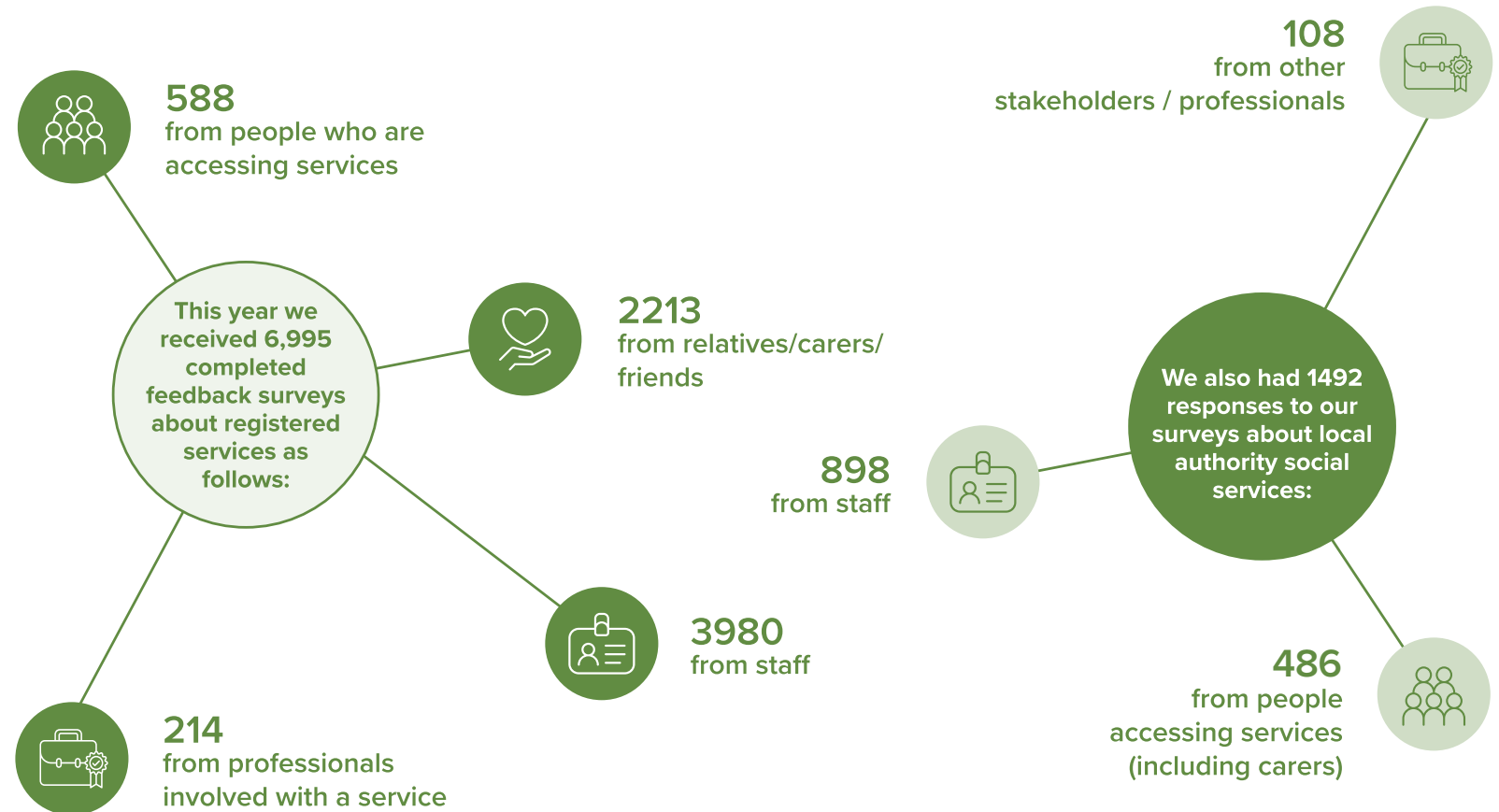
“CIW has been very proactive in relation to the review and implementation of the ratings and the updates in relation to the enquiry lines. The Inspection Framework Guidance is very helpful, and I feel the descriptors and enquiry lines are far easier to understand.”

Gathering feedback

We are striving to develop innovative ways of ensuring all aspects of our work are informed by people who access and work in social care and childcare services. We always speak with people during our inspection activity. This year we improved the survey on our website to make it easier for people to provide feedback about services, though we recognise this will not be suitable for everyone. You can view the [questions we ask here](#) and we encourage you to share any feedback about services with us.

Engaging with people

We really value feedback from people who access services, family members, staff and other professionals and we use this to inform our inspection planning.



Engaging with people

We asked staff if they would recommend the service they work in to a friend or family member and would they recommend working here.

Here is a flavour of the feedback we have received:

“

“I would be more than happy to recommend this service to a friend or relative because I feel like we care for service users who are not our family and friends exactly how we would want are family and friends to be cared for.”

“I feel that we have an amazing team of supervising social workers and team manager who every day ensure every foster carer and child have everything that they need. Our foster carers are inspiring, every day i feel that I learn so much.”

“There are several factors that influence my decision to recommend working in a residential home for young people. Firstly, the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of young individuals is a significant motivator alongside the sense of community within a residential home. Working in this field also allows for the development of valuable skills such as empathy, communication and problem-solving, which are applicable in many areas of life. Lastly, the diverse experiences and challenges faced in a residential home can lead to a deeper understanding of youth issues and the complexities of their lives. Overall, these factors combine to create a compelling case for recommending a career in a residential home for young people.”

”

Engaging with people

Feedback from people accessing services and their families:

“

“When I found out my grandson was going to a residential home I was devastated but this is the best thing that could have happened for him. He’s calm, he’s happy and he loves the staff. I feel they really understand him. I feel involved and know he’s getting the best care. I cannot thank them enough - phenomenal team.”

“Our social worker has always listened to our point of view and has been very understanding and empathetic to our situation.”

“All of the children are happy and safe at the nursery. My child has developed excellent relationships with the girls who care for her and really enjoys going to nursery.”

“My son loves coming to after school club. There’s a huge variety of activities for the children to participate in and the staff are friendly, knowledgeable and enthusiastic. It really is brilliant.”

“Individual care staff go the extra mile which is reassuring when your loved one is in care.”

”

Engaging with people

Exploring new ways to listen and learn

We continue to use a research-based tool, known as [SOFI](#), during our inspections to observe the quality of interactions between people who receive and work in services. This is especially important where people may not be able to share their views with us.

To improve our engagement, this year we piloted a new approach in ten local authority areas. Instead of only gathering feedback during formal inspections, we arranged sessions to speak directly with people who access care and support, as well as staff and stakeholders involved in delivering services, about specific issues in that county.

This pilot has enhanced our ability to hear from people across Wales. The insights we've gathered have helped us understand how well services are meeting and promoting people's wellbeing. Importantly, the local authorities involved have used these insights to improve and develop their services further.

Participants have told us they valued this collaborative approach with CIW, which feels different from traditional inspection processes.

We strengthened our collaborative approach with local authorities through our Peer Inspector Programme with four peer inspectors participating in inspection activities to date. Their expertise and real-world examples of best practice have improved the quality and depth of our inspections.

Peer inspectors described the experience as immersive and professionally enriching. This collaborative approach has transformed inspections from oversight alone into genuine partnerships, creating a culture of shared learning and continuous improvement.

Promoting Welsh language and culture

We're committed to promoting Welsh in everything we do – it's part of our strategic plan. To guide this work, we've set up a Welsh language champions group that steers our efforts both within CIW and during inspections.

When we inspect, we now look at how organisations promote Welsh culture alongside their active offer of Welsh language services. We make sure our own inspections can be conducted in Welsh when needed. We also support our staff to learn Welsh, practise the language, and embrace Welsh culture.

The profile of Welsh language services across Wales on a county by county basis can be viewed in [our online data tools](#).

We have seen positive examples of services promoting Welsh language and culture. In our local authority inspections, we have seen people who access care receiving an 'Active Offer' of speaking with people in Welsh and this being extended to staff too.

Positive practice in care homes

A care home identified 75% of the residents are first-language Welsh speakers. In response, care and nursing staff from ten different countries began learning Welsh. The service provides daily Welsh language recreational activities and a Welsh language Sunday chapel service for the residents is held every week. The service also makes sure cultural events such as the National Eisteddfod and Eisteddfod yr Urdd are available for residents to watch / listen to.

We found another service carried out a full Welsh language skills analysis for staff and identified all Welsh speaking residents and visitors. In response, resources are now made available to help staff learn Welsh. Information is placed around the home with useful phrases and interesting facts about Wales and the Welsh language whilst staff are encouraged to complete a Welsh language awareness course. The service also has a bilingual website.

There is still more for us to do to ensure we capture and share learning from our inspection activity. We will continue to raise the vital importance of all services taking active steps to promote and support Welsh language and culture, highlighting where we see positive practice or find room for improvement.

Providing assurance and supporting improvement

This chapter outlines our core activities in providing assurance and supporting improvement across three sectors:

- Social care for adults
- Social care for children and young people
- Childcare and play



Social care for adults

Profile of services registered with us as of 31 March 2025

Number of adult services on 31/3/2025	
Adult & children's care home service	18
Adult care home service	1,018
Adult placement service	8
Domiciliary support service	750
Total	1,794

The number of adult care homes registered in Wales has fallen over time. This reflects Wales' approach of enabling people to live in their own homes for as long as possible. Two key developments have supported this shift; the expansion of domiciliary support services and the growth of housing with support (also known as extra care).

Extra care housing schemes in Wales grew from 37 in 2014 to 57 in 2024. As of March 2024, these schemes provided 2,510 apartments across Wales (source: National Commissioning Board survey).

Domiciliary support services

There continues to be a general trend in the number of domiciliary support services increasing over time. This year there has been a 7.9% increase, adding 55 new services across Wales. We are aware there is potentially a saturation of domiciliary support in some

local authority areas, which may adversely impact the financial sustainability of some providers. Though only two of the 32 services that cancelled their registration this year cited finance as the reason for the cancellation.

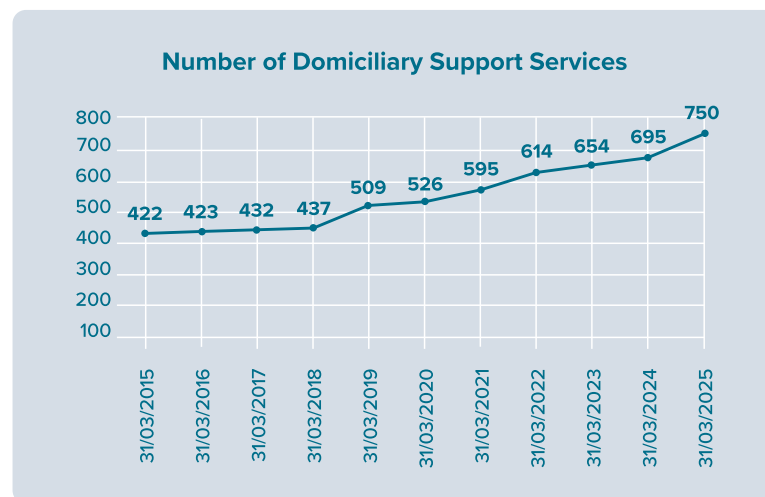
Conversely, in some rural counties, commissioners have reported a shortage of provision. This has an impact on the length of time some people have to wait to receive a service. To counter this and provide people with more choice, several local authorities are supporting the development of micro care initiatives where individual people or small (micro) businesses provide care, support or well-being services for fewer than five people. This can include personal care, respite, domestic tasks and companionship.

The development of micro care reflects the ambitions of the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) to promote voice and control, and support the development of social enterprise. However, the growth of these services was not envisioned when the [Regulation and Inspection of Social Care \(Wales\) Act 2016](#) was introduced in 2016 and a [recent Micro-care services: engagement report](#) published by Welsh Government highlights the complexities of having a degree of flexibility for very small and informal types of care provision, balanced with the need to ensure a robust regulatory framework. We are working with Welsh Government to consider this further.

Social care for adults

We have also observed an increase in the submission of low-quality applications for the registration of domiciliary support services.

These applications mainly demonstrate a lack of knowledge and understanding about operating a domiciliary support service in Wales.



Care homes

Care home places have decreased by 1,027 over the last decade, while the population of older people has increased by an estimated 11.5% from 2013 to 2023. This trend differs between care homes that provide nursing care and those that provide personal care only.

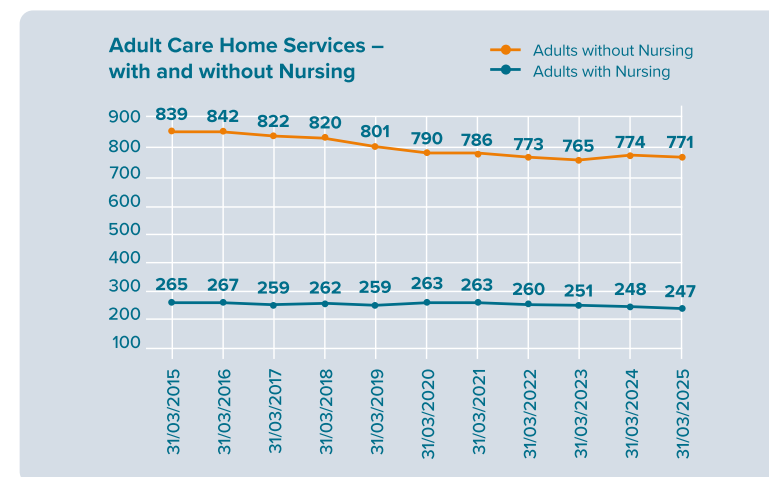
As the graphs below show, care homes without nursing have declined significantly. There are 68 fewer of these homes, providing 1,475 fewer places than in 2015.

In contrast, while there are 18 fewer care homes with nursing, they now provide 448 more places overall.

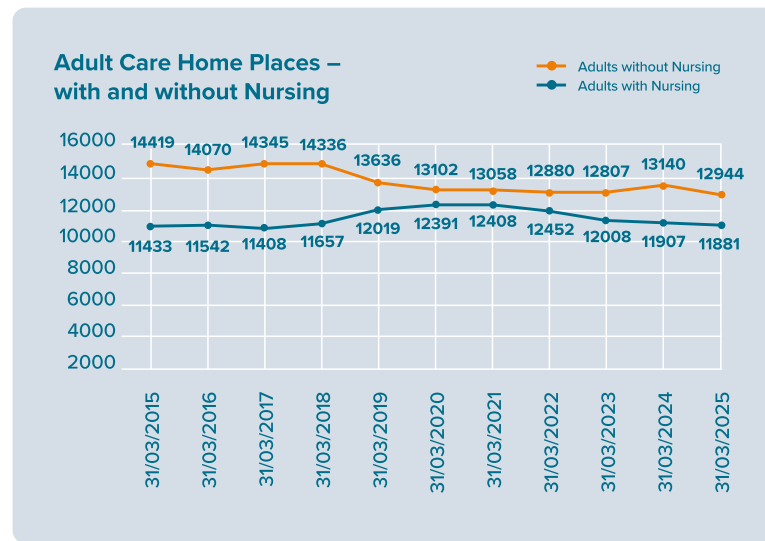
This pattern may reflect the policy of supporting people to live at home for as long as possible. When people do need residential care, they often require nursing care due to increased frailty.

Care home places with nursing gradually increased between 2015 and 2022, but have since fallen by 5% (571 places). During this period, seven care homes stopped providing nursing care but continued operating as care homes.

Commissioners across Wales report an average occupancy rate of 90% in care homes. However, local variation exists, including differences in how long people wait to move into care homes. This complex issue depends on factors such as people's preferences, costs, and the availability of specialist services.



Social care for adults



This year 63 care home services cancelled their registration, 42 of which transferred to another provider.

What we did

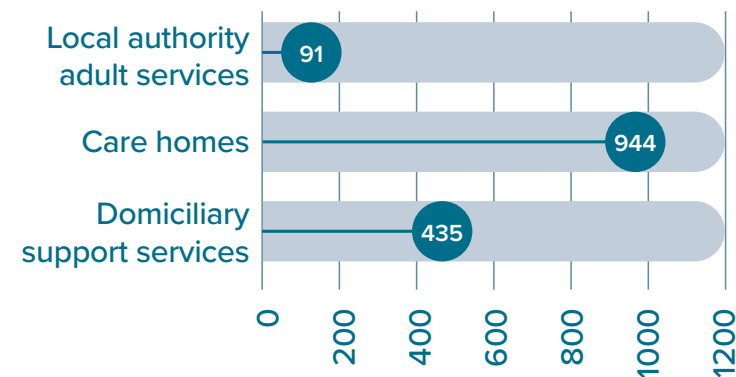
Number of inspections performed	2024/25
Adult & children's care home service	9
Adult care home service	716
Adult placement service	3
Domiciliary support service	359
Total	1,087

We carried out 10% fewer inspections compared to the previous year, due mainly to pausing routine inspections during March 2025 to prepare inspectors for the implementation of a published ratings system. We are currently filling several inspector vacancies which has also affected levels of inspection.

Responding to concerns

We value people sharing their concerns with us as it helps us understand whether people using social care services are being supported to achieve the best possible outcomes or where they may be at risk of experiencing harm.

1587 concerns including:



Social care for adults

The main concerns about registered services related to leadership and management, which mirrors what we find in our inspections.

Staff are speaking up about problems with 23% of concerns (367) coming from staff working in care homes. We see it as positive that staff are raising concerns. However, we expect providers to create a culture of openness, honesty and transparency at all levels. Staff should feel safe to share concerns and confident that they will be listened to.

We received 26 concerns about discrimination this year, compared with 20 last year. While this is a small increase, these concerns came mainly from staff who felt they were being treated unfairly. Although we cannot get involved in employment disputes, discrimination concerns may indicate broader problems with a service's culture. When staff work in an inclusive, supportive environment where they feel valued and respected, they can do their best work. This supportive culture is essential for delivering good care.

We consider every concern shared with us and this year we responded to concerns about registered services as shown on the right:

40% (595)

referred to provider for them to investigate

28% (416)

shared with partner agencies including safeguarding teams

8% (115)

resulted in inspection being brought forward

7% (111)

signposted person raising concern to other agencies

33% (501)

required no immediate action

To note, some concerns result in more than one action.

90 care homes and 26 domiciliary support services have been inspected this year as a direct result of concerns raised with us.

Where we assess concerns require 'no immediate action' we have carried out enquiries and determined there is no further action for CIW to take at this time.

The main concern people share with us about local authority adult services relates to the quality of service being provided. We reviewed each concern and took appropriate action. This included providing written advice and guidance, having follow-up conversations to gather more information, or sharing concerns with relevant senior managers in the local authority (with consent).

Social care for adults

Reviewing notifications

Each year we receive a high volume of notifications which we review and analyse to inform our inspection planning.

26107 notifications including:



We carefully consider each notification of an allegation of abuse carefully to determine our next steps. This may include making a safeguarding referral to the relevant local authority, liaison and discussion with those who commission care, or direct discussion with the provider. Many of the notifications about allegations of abuse involve incidents between people living in the same care home. While we take these seriously, we can often resolve them by discussing with the provider what steps they are taking to reduce risks to residents.

What we found

As we reported last year, in June 2023 we commenced a pilot of silent ratings for care homes and domiciliary support services. This year we commissioned an [independent evaluation of the pilot](#) which enabled us to build on what was working well and to make some changes in preparation for publishing ratings from April 2025. We are grateful for the engagement of the many stakeholders in our implementation project. This enabled us to develop detailed descriptors for each of the four ratings we award (we do not award a single rating for the service as a whole). These are set out in our [inspection framework and supporting guidance](#) for providers and the public. It is important to stress it will take us two to three of years to inspect and award ratings for all care homes and domiciliary support services in Wales.



Social care for adults

Across Wales there has been an increase in the number of well-performing services. The majority (84%) of the silent ratings we awarded this year were 'good' or 'excellent' and 16% were 'needs improvement' or 'poor'. 'Care and support' is the inspection theme awarded the most 'good' and 'excellent' ratings. Last year 23% of ratings were 'needs improvement' or 'poor'.

Ratings awarded:

	Excellent	Good	Need improvement	Poor	Total
Domiciliary support services	196	624	173	42	1035
Care home for adults with nursing	70	491	131	39	731
Care home for adults	247	1420	117	93	1877
Total	513	2535	421	174	3643

We have seen evidence of providers supporting and empowering people to achieve positive outcomes, reflecting a shift in ethos of services towards a more outcome- focussed approach. This is in line with the expectations of the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#).

Positive practice: Putting people at the centre of the service

A service provider has worked hard to ensure the well-being and engagement of people are at the heart of the service. Examples include sensitively decorated dementia communities which support people to orientate themselves and engaging sensory decorations for people to interact with. Having had positive outcomes in previous inspections, the service provider was keen to enhance their already good practice. Intergenerational activities are particularly well-received and enjoyed by people at the service. Kindness and praise are shared on a kindness board where anyone can share a thank you or a positive experience. Managers at the service make sure to speak to people to understand their wishes and issues. A 'You said.... We did' board shares what managers have done after people's comments and suggestions. People's achievements and goals are celebrated and shared.

Social care for adults

We have also seen improvements in domiciliary support services which are becoming more innovative in addressing loneliness and isolation of people accessing support.

Positive practice in domiciliary support services

One provider has an exceptionally knowledgeable coordinator who conducts reviews with people in the community. They signpost and guide people towards services, and make practical suggestions to families of people living with dementia to enhance their well-being. For example, they recommended activity books for a bedridden person who was restless and wanted to keep their hands busy.

Another provider is really focused on staff well-being, especially female health. They run a menopause café where women can come together informally and chat, and consideration is given to how this impacts their well-being and work life. They also run a regular meeting specifically for lone workers so they can socialise and discuss any concerns or issues they have.

Supporting overseas workers

Overseas workers are becoming increasingly important to the workforce. In Cardiff, 50% of the care home staff are from overseas, and for one it is 100%. Overall, we are seeing a lot of positive work to ensure

inclusivity of overseas workers and people. For example, staff from Nigeria sharing with service users who were once farmers in Wales how farming is undertaken in Nigeria. We have also seen people teaching the Welsh language to their care workers and overseas care workers using conversational Welsh in their interactions with people. These efforts are creating culturally diverse environments and positive experiences for people and workers. We continue to be alert to, and report, any signs of modern slavery or exploitation.

Positive practice in supporting overseas workers

A domiciliary support service developed a support group to assist their overseas workers with accessing help for housing, their children's education and health, filling in forms, signposting and providing information about local facilities and amenities. One care worker told our inspector that upon arrival in the UK, her confidence and well-being were 'a 2,' but now her self-esteem and contentment are 'a 9'.

During 2024-2025 our local authority inspection team undertook inspections of adult services in Swansea and Newport. Follow-up improvement checks were also conducted in Pembrokeshire, Anglesey, and Gwynedd and an assurance check was conducted in Neath Port Talbot. [All our reports can be viewed here.](#)

Social care for adults

Across the majority of local authorities we visited, adult services were typically supported by strong, visible leadership. Clear strategic direction fostered a culture of continuous learning, professional development, and collaborative practice. Inspections highlighted a consistent commitment to person-centred, strengths-based approaches, with assessments and care plans tailored to reflect individual needs and preferences.

Demand and complexity of people's needs continues to be a theme across adult services.

We saw widespread innovative practice, such as micro and social enterprises in Pembrokeshire providing people with more choice and reducing waiting times for domiciliary support. Effective partnerships with health services and third-sector organisations were also evident. In Neath Port Talbot virtual ward rounds ensure resources align with people's needs, promoting innovation and organisational adaptability.

Several local authorities have enhanced preventative and early help services by implementing creative initiatives such as 'community connectors' in Newport, collaborative conversation models in Swansea, and integrated well-being networks in Caerphilly.

We continue to work in partnership with Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) to strengthen our oversight of community-based mental health and learning disability teams. This collaboration aims to provide a comprehensive view of the quality and co-ordination of care provided by health and social services. These inspections focus on person-centred practice, safeguarding, access to services, and the effectiveness of multi-agency working. This joint approach ensures coherent and aligned messages to service providers, driving change centred on the needs and experiences of people receiving support.

Practice example: Joint inspection of community mental health teams

Our inspections in Powys and Cardiff focused on the effectiveness of integrated working between health and social care services in supporting people's mental health and well-being. We found, while staff demonstrated a strong commitment to person-centred care and effective multi-agency collaboration, challenges remained in consistently capturing people's voices in care planning, recognising carers, and providing advocacy support. Workforce instability, lack of integrated training strategies, and inconsistent documentation of mental capacity assessments further impact the quality and continuity of care.

Social care for adults

Areas for improvement in adult social care

Areas identified for improvement in registered adult services:

	2024/25		2023/24	
	Number of times	Number of services	Number of times	Number of services
Highlighted as areas for improvement	550	246	881	337
Priority action needed and a PAN issued	195	54	352	76

This year we found improvement was needed in 300 registered services. We issued 195 Priority Action Notices (PANs) to 40 care homes and 14 domiciliary support services. We highlighted 550 'areas for improvement' in 246 services (some of which may also have been issued a PAN). This compares positively with last year where we identified improvement was needed in 413 services.

Most services made the necessary improvements, ending our enforcement action. We inspected 67 services more than once to check improvements had been made. Only ten domiciliary support services and 24 care homes were referred to our enforcement panel because of lack of improvement as the next step on our enforcement pathway.

Strong leadership and management directly affect the quality and safety of care, as well as the experience and well-being of service users and staff. We issued

92 PANs under this theme, mainly because of poor staff supervision and development. This remains the area where we found most room for improvement. However, we issued 198 PANs around leadership in 2023-24, so we're pleased to report progress.



Social care for adults

Practice example of major improvements following serious concerns

A care home has significantly reduced the risk of harm and abuse after addressing serious problems we identified during inspection.

What we found

People were not experiencing good outcomes. We found that safeguarding concerns and complaints were justified. We issued priority action notices for leadership and management and care and support. The environment also needed improvement.

How the provider responded

The responsible individual and care director took immediate action by providing additional staff and reviewing systems to ensure effective oversight of care. Although they understood the root causes and supported managers, improvements took time and the service's performance varied during this period.

Current situation

The service now has an effective and supportive manager whose passion for high-quality care has quickly improved outcomes for people.

This year we issued nine statutory enforcement notices. These ranged from restricting admissions to the enforced cancellation of four care homes and one domiciliary support service. These low numbers indicate inspection and enforcement action is driving improvements and securing the future of services for the people who depend on them for care and support.

Local authority adult services need to improve in several key areas. First, they must assess and provide care and support more quickly, so people get services when they need them. They also need to better identify and meet advocacy needs, especially for people who struggle to express their wishes. Finally,

they must offer carers' assessments more consistently and reduce delays to give carers prompt support.

There continues to be significant delays in relation to Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS). This is leaving many people unlawfully deprived of their liberty without legal protection or recourse. Persistent challenges in managing application volumes, inconsistent use of conditions, and gaps in recording key data such as ethnicity further undermine the effectiveness of the safeguards. These issues need to be addressed to ensure that individuals' rights are protected.

Social care for adults

Safeguarding training and coordination across adult services continue to be challenging, particularly with increasing referral volumes. Ongoing attention to development in this area is necessary to ensure staff are adequately trained and safeguarding processes are effectively co-ordinated.

Many adult social care providers have told us of ongoing challenges recruiting and retaining care staff leading to the extensive use of agency nurses and staff, including consistent increases in using overseas staff. Overseas staff, in most services, are a valued and integral part of ensuring delivery of social care services. During the last year, providers are reporting the appointment of responsible individuals and managers as becoming more challenging.

We found the same challenges experienced by local authorities. Staff reported feeling supported by managers but challenges such as delays in assessments, reviews, and access to domiciliary care were common, often linked to workforce shortages, sickness absence, and financial pressures.

Financial pressures in local authorities are still affecting the availability and quality of services, creating a gap between strategic planning and frontline delivery. Providers also face financial pressures from rising living costs and low fee levels. As a result, some providers have made environmental updates and refurbishment a low priority and cannot release staff for training and development because of rising costs.

Practice example of our work with local authorities: 'Services Requiring Significant Improvement'

This year we introduced a new approach for local authorities that mirrors our enforcement pathway for registered services. We call this 'Services Requiring Significant Improvement'.

We use this process when we identify:

- Significant service failures
- Cumulative concerns about social services
- Systemic problems with social services

These issues may affect a specific function, service area, or multiple functions. The approach clarifies how CIW ensures improvements are made within appropriate timescales.

The process ensures focused and timely improvements are made so people receive safe and effective care and support. We aim to support improvement and learning both for the specific service and across all local authorities in Wales. Working with key partners, we help direct local authorities to sources of support and examples of good practice.

It is positive to note, no local authority is currently a service requiring significant improvement.

Social care for children and young people

Profile of services registered with us

Number of services and places as of 31/03/2025	
Adoption service	5
Advocacy service	2
Boarding school	12
Children's care home service	350
Fostering service	22
Further education college	3
LA adoption agency	20
LA fostering service	22
Residential family centre	4
Residential special school	3
Secure accommodation service	1
Special school residential service	2
Total	446

The number of registered children's services increased by 8.8% (36 additional services) this year, while places increased by 3.2% (86 additional places).

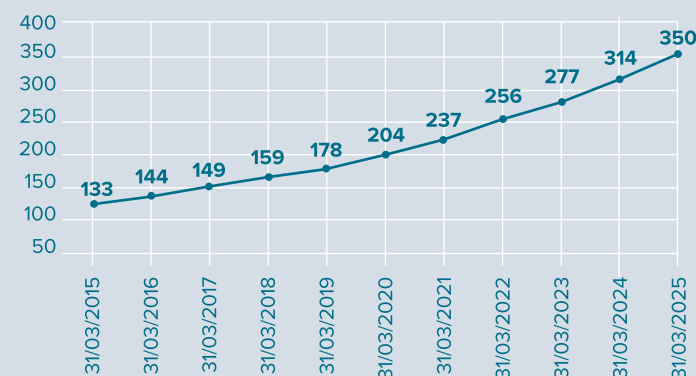
These figures include residential special schools, which had to register with CIW for the first time in 2024. By the end of the year, two of the four residential special schools in Wales had registered, providing 27 places between them.

Care homes for children

Over the last 10 years there has been a 163% increase in the number of care homes for children registered in Wales. This year 48 new care homes services have been registered (11.5% increase since March 2024) in 16 of the 22 counties in Wales, leading to an additional 75 places. Seven of these are operated by a local authority.

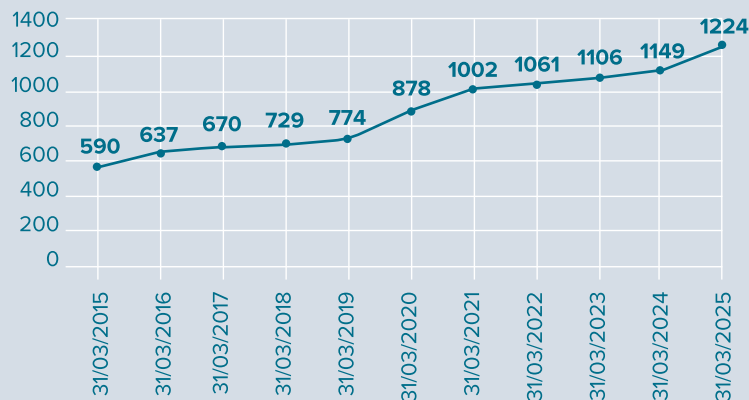
This year, eight care home services cancelled their registration and ceased operating.

Number of Care Homes for Children – Services



Social care for children and young people

Number of Care Homes for Children – Places



Our data appears to show the size of care homes is getting smaller. This is positive and in line with [Guidance for registering a care home for children](#) published by Welsh Government in October 2024. The number of care homes in each region (health board footprint) varies, with north Wales having the most places. The distribution of care home places across Wales does not align with demand in terms of children who are looked after.

The [Health and Social Care \(Wales\) Act 2025](#) received royal assent on 24 March 2025. This Act seeks to make further improvements to social care in Wales, by amending the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 to restrict the extraction of profit from the care of looked after children, with a phased approach to implementation from 1 April

2026. It is important for us to prepare for these changes, and we will be working with providers and other stakeholders to ensure they understand the implications and are supported should they wish to re-establish as a not-for-profit provider.

As of 31 March 2025, 76% of the 265 care homes for children are operated by 'for profit' providers, providing 944 places, with 280 places in 85 not-for-profit care homes. Of the current 'not for profit' care homes for children, 76% are operated by local authorities. We are not currently seeing any significant shift in registration trends towards 'not-for-profit' provision.

What we did

Inspections carried out 2024/2025

Advocacy service	2
Boarding school	1
Children's care home service	201
Fostering service	1
LA fostering service	12
Residential family centre	2
Total	219

This year we carried out 31 more inspections of children's services than in 2023/2024. This included a focus on local authority fostering services.

Social care for children and young people

Responding to concerns

We received fewer concerns about regulated services this year (103 compared with 175 last year). We attribute this to improvements in services, including how they handle complaints and staff concerns. We received 32 concerns from whistle-blowers this year compared to 41 last year.



205 concerns about children's services

103 about regulated services

Including:

43% about leadership and management

33% about care and support

102 local authority children's services

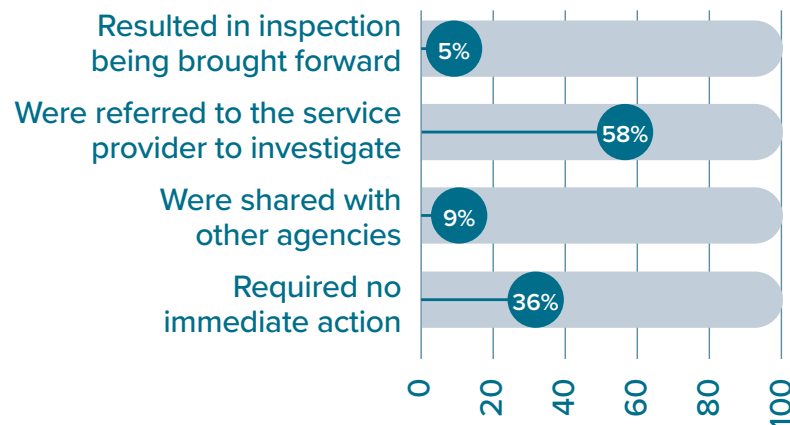
Including:

33% about service quality

17.6% about safeguarding

Social care for children and young people

We responded to concerns about regulated services as shown:



To note, some concerns result in more than one action.

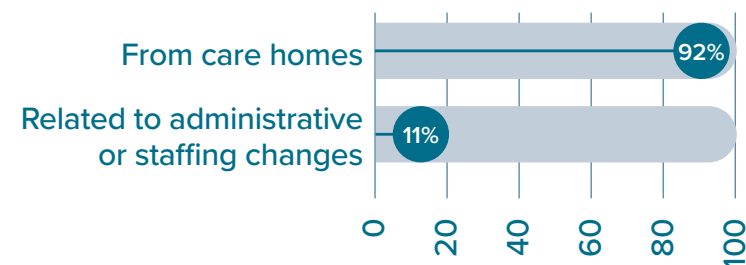
Where we assess concerns require 'no immediate action' we have carried out enquiries and determined there is no further action for CIW to take at this time.

We inspected five care homes because of concerns shared with us and found ongoing or new areas requiring improvement. In one instance the inspection led to enforcement action, highlighting the value of people sharing their concerns with us.

Our local authority team reviewed each concern received. Actions included providing written response with advice and guidance, or a further conversation to collect more information. With consent, concerns may also be shared with the relevant local authority senior manager when needed for them to investigate or take action.

Reviewing notifications

7320 notifications including:



Social care for children and young people

The table below shows notifications directly related to children:

	No. of Online Notifications	
	2024-25	2023-24
Abuse / allegation of abuse	598	501
Child protection enquiry	854	674
Incident or suspected incident of child sexual or criminal exploitation	142	100
Incident reported to the police	1,480	1,479
Missing / unexplained absence of a child at the service	2,902	2,655

Notifications relating to missing children and incidents reported to the police often relate to children whose behaviour is a cause for concern. We see high proportions of these notifications when the young person has returned home in the same day, sometimes within the hour, after missing their agreed curfew. We continue to work with providers, local authorities and the police to ensure children are appropriately protected and arrangements are in line with the [‘All Wales Practice Guidance: safeguarding children who go missing from home or care’](#). We are contributing to an update of the guidance to ensure clarity on what constitutes ‘missing’ to ensure more accurate and appropriate reporting.

Notifications about allegations of abuse sometimes relate to children disclosing abuse prior to becoming looked after. Services mainly notify us about child protection enquiries to tell us they’ve reported a potential safeguarding issue about a child or young

person to the local authority. On occasion, these reports don’t meet the threshold for formal local authority safeguarding processes, but our inspectors always consider them and gather more information, if needed, for inspection planning. We received a low number of notifications (1.9%) about suspected exploitation, a similar percentage to last year (1.4%).

We also received more notifications about children living in care homes with a Deprivation of Liberty Order from the High Court (50 notifications compared to 16 in 2023/24). We believe this increase happened because we issued guidance to providers in February 2024. This guidance reminded them how important it is to let CIW know when a child in a care home gets a deprivation of liberty order. The increase reflects better reporting, not more Court orders.

Social care for children and young people

What we found

The overall picture is positive with most services delivering good outcomes for children and young people. We conducted 201 inspections of 188 care homes for children and 78% of the silent ratings we awarded were ‘good’ or ‘excellent’.

Ratings awarded:

	Excellent	Good	Need improvement	Poor
Care homes for children	105	501	117	56

Practice example of improving outcomes

A young person had been living in an unregistered service requiring a high staffing ratio to support them and was subject to a deprivation of liberty court order.

They moved to live at a registered care home where the provider ensured consistent individualised support and as a result the young person settled and within eight months the deprivation of liberty order was revoked.

The young person embraced new opportunities to raise their aspirations and promote their wellbeing, including joining cadets, paddle boarding and cold-water dipping.

On inspection, the service was awarded positive silent ratings reflecting the quality and commitment that has led to the transformation to the service and young person.

Social care for children and young people

During 2024-2025, we inspected children's services in Carmarthenshire local authority. We also carried out a follow-up improvement check in Denbighshire, which included inspecting their fostering service.

Across the local authorities inspected, we found strong leadership and a commitment to child centred and strength-based approaches underpinning children's services. Staff were skilled, supported, and worked collaboratively across departments.

Despite national challenges in recruitment and retention, our inspections have found improvements in workforce stability in children's services. This progress enhances communication with families and caregivers. However, services continue to face significant challenges in managing high demand for support and the increasing complexity of children's needs.

Our joint inspections of child protection arrangements found safeguarding processes to be most effective where there was a shared understanding of safeguarding practice and processes by all partners.

We spoke with many highly committed and motivated professionals who demonstrate a good understanding of the nature of work in relation to children and families who are at risk of experiencing abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Across Wales there is a wide range of services available to support children and to meet individual needs. In the best examples, despite the challenge of working in increasingly complex circumstances, agencies are resilient in identifying interventions,

offering services and working to achieve positive outcomes.

Our inspection of local authority fostering services found positive practice including children being offered advocacy, discounted or free leisure activities including gym / swimming to children and fostering families. We heard positive comments from children about feeling part of foster carers' families and being well cared for. We saw good examples of children receiving 'life journey' work and being supported to maintain relationships with people who are important to them. There is significant effort put into recruitment and retention of foster carers with most carers reporting they felt well supported.



Social care for children and young people

Areas for improvement in social care for children

The table below summarises the areas for improvement and priority action we identified in registered children's services over the last two years.

	2024/25		2023/24	
	Number of times	Number of services	Number of times	Number of services
Highlighted as areas for improvement	177	52	173	48
Priority action needed and a PAN issued	52	14	120	19

Three care homes were referred to our enforcement panel because of lack of improvement, as the next step on our enforcement pathway.

Where we highlighted areas for improvement or issued priority action notices, 46% (106) of these related to leadership and management and 43% related to care and support. This demonstrates the importance of good leadership in ensuring the governance, quality assurance, training and support are in place to enable children to receive good care and support to achieve their outcomes.

We inspected 12 care homes more than once to check improvements had been made. We issued three statutory notices including one Improvement Notice to cancel the registration of a care home.



Social care for children and young people

Practice example: Improving outcomes through enforcement activity

During an inspection of a children's care home, we found significant areas where improvement was required due to unsafe staffing levels and poor leadership and management. As a result, 15 Priority Action Notices were issued, and the provider voluntarily closed the service on the second day of the inspection.

The service began working closely with CIW to implement improvements and reopened on a limited basis, initially caring for one child, before increasing capacity. A follow up inspection confirmed all areas for priority action had been addressed.

Children now receive high-quality care from dedicated and skilled staff. Families now feel confident in the service, which had significantly reduced risk through comprehensive operational and management reforms. Leaders remain focused on maintaining high standards and striving for excellence.

Regulated children's services providers are reporting social care staff are facing challenges in accessing the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) in Health and Social Care due to the availability of the course.

If this trend continues there is a risk of reducing the levels of qualified staff.

We have identified key areas for improvement in local authority children's services, many of which will require partnership working to address. To keep children safe, local authorities must apply safeguarding timescales and thresholds consistently, following the Wales Safeguarding Procedures. This will improve how they analyse risk and make decisions. They must also give consistent feedback on safeguarding referrals. Greater focus on reflective practice and contextual safeguarding expertise will strengthen how agencies work together to protect children. Better IT systems will also help agencies share information and work together more effectively.

It is essential to ensure all children and families have a voice, choice and control in their care and support, promoting achievable, sustainable, and high-quality outcomes. We found a continued need for the development of clearer early intervention pathways to provide timely support to those in need.

For many local authorities, there is a challenge to establish a permanent workforce whilst planning to reduce dependency on temporary staff. Rural areas and areas where people work across boundaries, including English neighbouring authorities, were particularly challenged. Local discretion over pay means some local authorities offer more competitive salaries than others, creating competition between councils.

Social care for children and young people

An unstable workforce inhibits opportunities for children to form stable, trusting and significant relationships with a consistent worker. Children, parents and carers tell us how persistent changes to staff make it extra challenging to move on in their lives. In some areas, partner agencies such as police forces and health boards, are struggling to resource the increase in levels of child protection activity.

Our inspection of local authority fostering services found several areas that need improvement. Children's voices are not consistently recorded, and foster carers gave mixed feedback about the services they receive. There are not enough foster carers available, and staff are concerned about their ability to recruit more when they are already managing competing priorities.

The processes for matching children with foster carers need to be strengthened. Some children experience multiple placement breakdowns because there are not robust enough procedures for assessing whether long-term matches will be suitable.

We have previously reported on our rolling programme of Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangements (JICPA), in place since 2019 and in September 2024 we published an [overview report of our findings](#).

Services operating without registration (OWR)

This is the fourth year we've reported on this issue. Despite more places in care homes for children

across Wales, some children and young people still lack appropriate provision. We received 74 notifications of care homes for children operating without registration (OWR) in 2024/25 - a significant drop from 117 the previous year. This means fewer children are living in unregistered settings. On average, 25 care homes for children operated without registration every week, with a high of 32 and a low of 18.

This problem continues because some children need services that are able to meet their complex emotional and behavioural needs. Local authorities have commissioning plans to address this, but developing and building new services takes time and resources. We're working with local authorities to give registration advice as soon as they start developing new services with the aim of making the registration process as straightforward as possible.

We're pleased to report more services operating without registration applied to register; 35 in 2024/25 compared with 19 in 2023/24.

Joint review of mental health support

In collaboration with Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and Estyn, we undertook a joint review to examine how healthcare, education, and children's services are supporting the mental health needs of children and young people in Wales. This included joint inspections in Torfaen, Ceredigion, and Merthyr Tydfil.

Social care for children and young people

Through health board self-assessments and the focused fieldwork across three local authorities, we found, while there have been encouraging improvements in early help and preventative support, significant challenges remain.

Access to timely and appropriate care is inconsistent, especially for those with complex or neurodiverse needs. Barriers include limited service capacity, delays in follow-up care, and fragmented coordination between Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and local authority services. Inconsistent eligibility criteria and poor communication further hinder access and transparency. Schools play a growing role in mental health support, with positive developments like school-based counselling and trauma-informed practices. However, rising demand and reduced funding strain resources.

Our findings suggest there is an urgent need for a more responsive, equitable, and integrated mental health support system for children and young people. Outcomes can be improved by enhanced multi-agency collaboration through unified referral pathways, better communication, and shared care planning. The Single Point of Access for Children's Emotional Well-being panels in Gwent demonstrate a child-centred, multidisciplinary approach. There is also a need to strengthen early intervention and preventative services, ensuring timely and consistent access to CAMHS, and addressing the needs of those who fall between service thresholds, particularly care-experienced and neurodivergent children.

Childcare and play services

Profile of registered services 31/03/2025

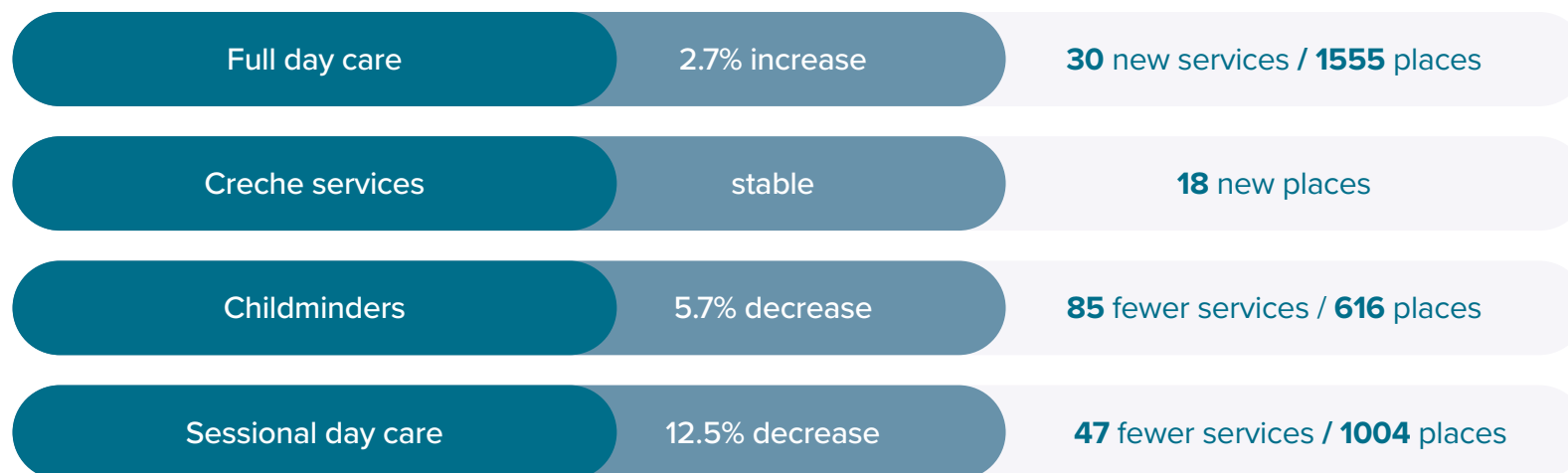
	Number of services	Number of places
Childminder	1,417	11,651
Creche	13	456
Full day care	1,121	44,184
Open access play provision	34	2,589
Out of school care	313	13,076
Sessional day care	330	7,485
Total	3,228	79,441

This year saw an overall decline of 3% in childcare services. Whilst this equates to 108 fewer services, it resulted in only 82 fewer places (0.1% less).

There is a continued trend for economies of scale in childcare services with a decline in numbers of childminders and more full day care places. It is not clear if the growth in full day care is demand led or is a result of additional investment by Welsh Government.



Childcare and play services



During the year, 102 full day care services cancelled their registration (35 more than last year). However, the most common reason for this was the service transferred to another provider and so the provision continued to operate. The next most common reason for cancellation was the service no longer being viable, highlighting the fragile nature of funding in the sector.

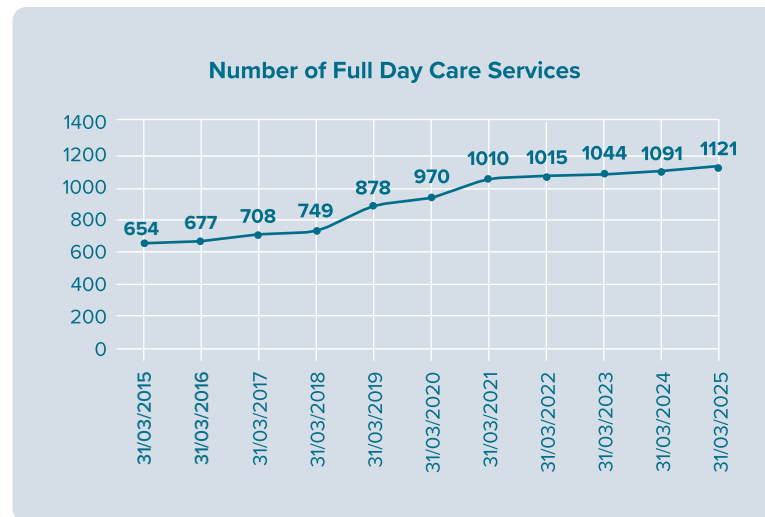
While ten more child minders registered this year than in 2023/2024, 147 cancelled, continuing the decline in childminders in Wales. There are 999 less childminders now than ten years ago.

Common reasons given for childminders cancelling registration were change of career and retirement. We have continued to engage with childminders who voluntarily suspended their service for some time,

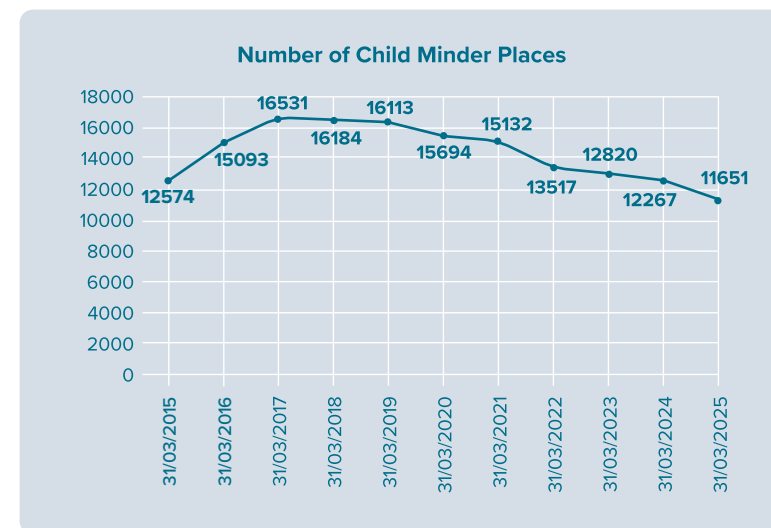
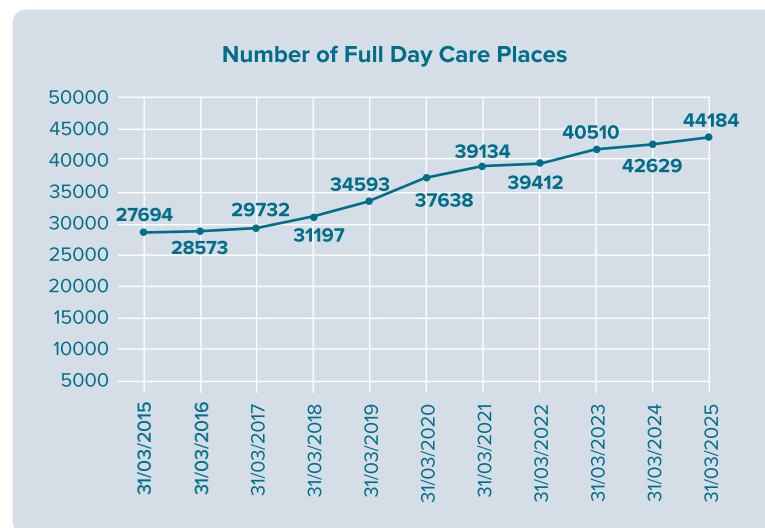
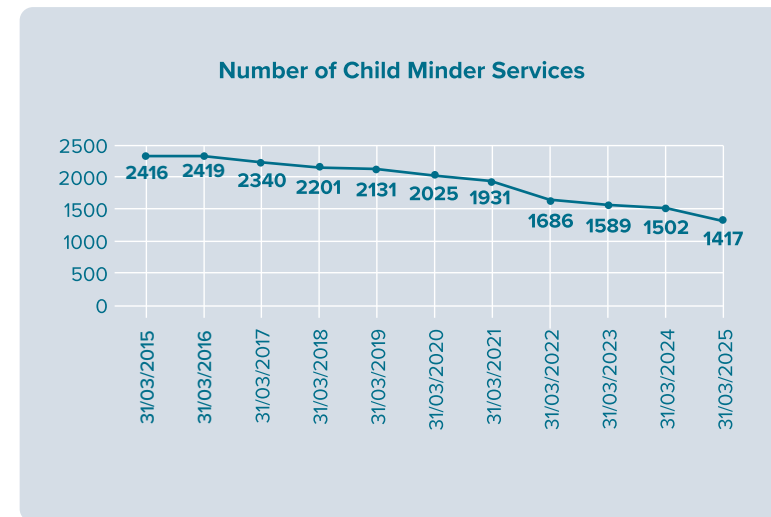
including those who indicated they have other employment. In many cases this has led them to cancel their registration altogether. Whilst this will have contributed to the fall in the number of childminders, it also provides a more accurate picture of the available childminding places across Wales. There are some positive signs as childminders have more optimism about their financial sustainability than in recent years.

Childcare and play services

The graph below provides a 10-year overview of full day care:



The following graphs provide a 10-year overview for child minders.



Childcare and play services

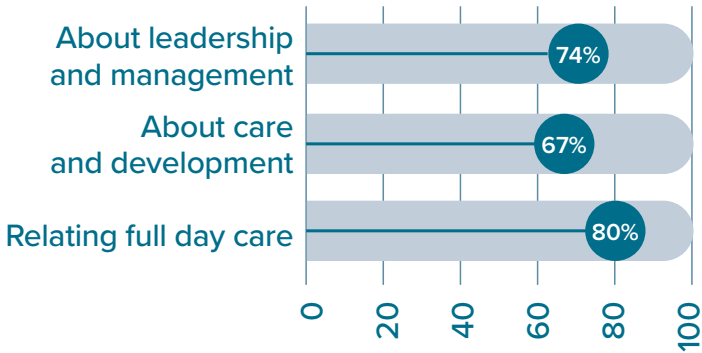
What we did

The number of inspections we completed increased for the second year running, from 725 to 792. In addition, we held 154 quality meetings with providers to discuss improvements they had made since the last inspection and their future improvement plans.

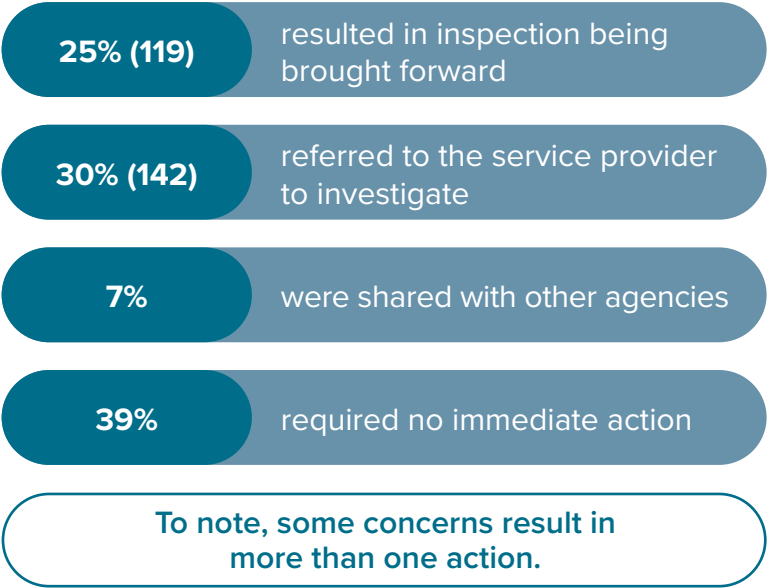
Inspections and quality meetings	2024/25
Childminder	377
Creche	1
Full day care	412
Open access play provision	2
Out of school care	77
Sessional day care	77
Total	946

Responding to concerns

481 concerns (compared with 552 last year) including:



We responded to concerns in the following ways:



Childcare and play services

We assessed 4% of concerns to have a potential major impact on children, leading us to carry out an urgent inspection to check children were appropriately safeguarded or convening an enforcement panel to decide if urgent action, such as suspension, was needed.

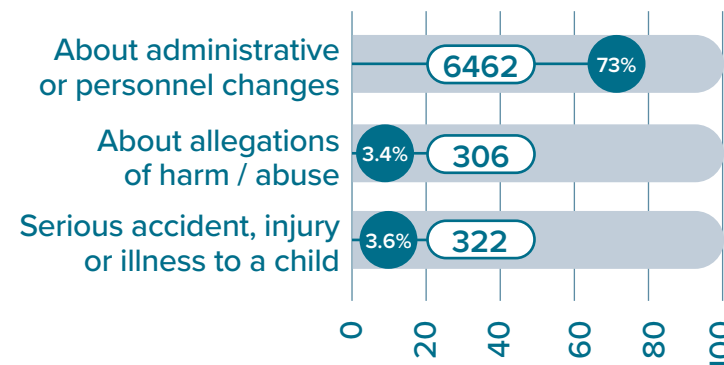
In 98 instances the concern was raised by a whistle blower. We continue to be encouraged care workers know they can raise concerns with us.

When a concern relates to a potential safeguarding issue, we work closely with local authority safeguarding teams and, in some cases the police, to ensure the safety of children. This year we referred 21 concerns to safeguarding teams across Wales.

Where we assess concerns require ‘no immediate action’ we have carried out enquiries and determined there is no further action for CIW to take at this time.

Reviewing notifications

8859 notifications including:



There was a reduction in the number of notifications relating to ‘changes to people at the service’ and ‘general staff changes, suggesting a slight improvement in the ability of settings to retain staff.

Notifications about child harm allegations increased by 20.5% compared to the previous year. This includes cases where the alleged harm happened outside the childcare setting.

Despite these increases, our inspections show no evidence that more children are actually being harmed in childcare settings. The numbers involved remain small. We believe the rise in notifications reflects providers’ improved understanding of their reporting requirements, following our ongoing discussions with childcare providers, local authority officers, and sector partners.

Childcare and play services

What we found

Number of ratings awarded:

Theme	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor
Well-being	108	295	40	0
Leadership and Management	56	247	114	27
Care and Development	76	283	75	9
Environment	51	298	87	7
Total	291	1,123	316	43

Most services continue to provide a good level of care for children, with 80% of ratings awarded being excellent or good. Good was the most awarded rating in each of the four themes. This is encouraging to see. Our ambition is to support and challenge providers to continually improve and strive for excellence, offering the very best outcomes for children.

It is positive to see fewer poor ratings being awarded compared with last year (when 56 were given). We continue to see providers making significant efforts to provide the best possible care in a challenging economic climate.

Quality meetings, which are virtual meetings between an inspector and a provider, are a key part of our work to support continuous improvement. Quality meetings take place between inspection visits and offer an opportunity for providers to talk to us about

what they have done to improve their service since the last inspection, and what they intend to do to further improve ahead of the next one. The meetings have been positive, with 150 resulting in CIW gaining assurance that providers were appropriately focusing on improving outcomes for children and proactively planning improvement. In four instances, we did not feel the provider was making appropriate progress and we brought forward an inspection visit.

In addition, as part of our ongoing commitment to support improvement within the sector, we now identify and publish examples of positive practice. These are settings where we see practice that warrants sharing widely, to inspire others to learn and improve their own practice. These are published on [our practice worth sharing webpage](#).

Childcare and play services

Positive practice in connecting generations: Tiny Robins meet Wise Owls

A nursery in Caldicot has transformed weekly visits to a nearby dementia group into a meaningful learning experience. The nursery team recognised that community connection should include all ages. Their simple approach brings together two- to four-year-olds with elderly neighbours, creating regular opportunities for interaction that benefit both groups. What began as occasional visits has now become an integral part of nursery life, showing that learning extends far beyond setting walls.

“

*“This is the highlight of my week seeing the children, I didn’t have any of my own”
(Dementia group participant).*

“I like giving them flowers, because it makes them happy” (child from nursery).

”



Childcare and play services

Joint Inspections with Estyn

We have been working with Estyn since 2019 to jointly inspect the care and education of children in non-maintained settings which are funded to provide part- time education to three and four year olds. This year we inspected 89 services together. We found most services provide good or excellent care for their children. There has been an upward trend in services being awarded ‘excellent’ across all themes. The themes of ‘Environment’ and ‘Leadership and Management’ have seen the largest proportionate rise in ‘Excellent’ judgements.

Along with Estyn, we have begun the process of responding to a [review of the joint inspection programme](#), which concluded in May 2024. The review gathered the views of stakeholders and

provided us with recommendations for consideration. Together, we are reviewing our inspection framework to ensure it remains current and fit for purpose, encompassing the many developments led and implemented by Welsh Government since the original framework was devised.

These include [Curriculum for Wales](#) and [the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care \(ECPLC\)](#) approach, along with the [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan \(ArWAP\)](#), the updated [Code of Practice on Additional Learning Needs](#) and the recommendations from the [Ministerial Review of Play](#).

Areas for improvement

	2024/25		2023/24	
	Number of times	Number of services	Number of times	Number of services
Highlighted as areas for improvement	402	175	360	147
Priority action needed and a PAN issued	126	30	155	46

Childcare and play services

When services don't provide appropriate care and put children's well-being or safety at risk, we take action. This year we found 528 areas needing improvement or priority action.

It is positive to see a reduction in the number of Priority Action Notices issued to providers as these are issued where impact, or risk of impact, on outcomes for children is greatest. The most common issues leading to the issue of a Priority Action Notice relate to safeguarding, the safety of the environment and safe recruitment of staff. The most common issues we highlighted as areas for improvement concerned employment of staff, keeping of records and suitability of workers.

This year 44 childcare settings were referred to our enforcement panel under our Securing Improvement and Enforcement Pathway. The panel decides what action to take when settings fail to meet required standards, prioritising children's safety and driving improvements. 21 settings successfully completed the enforcement process and returned to standard inspections after making substantial improvements to their care standards. Seven settings had their registration cancelled, three providers chose to cancel voluntarily, while we cancelled registration for the four others.

We continue to monitor all settings in the enforcement pathway to track their progress and ensure sustained improvements.

This year, more emergency enforcement panels were held in response to urgent issues than last year.

We enforced suspension of 11 services, mainly due to police and safeguarding investigations taking place. We enforced cancellation of seven childminders and one out of school provision because they were no longer operating nor engaging with CIW.

We inspected 43 services more than once to ensure appropriate improvements had been made. Spending time at settings allows us to gain a better understanding of the sector, identifying areas of positive practice and areas where further support and development is required.

Feedback from the sector is that recruitment and retention of staff is an ongoing challenge. We continue to receive queries about how providers can ensure they meet the staff: child ratios and qualifications required by the National Minimum Standards, whilst ensuring staff are given appropriate breaks and can attend mandatory training including safeguarding and first aid. Facilitating appropriate support for children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) also continues to be challenging for some providers.

Quality of our work

Feedback about the quality of our work

It is important we know how well we are doing, in the same way we expect the services we regulate and inspect to quality assure their provision and to continuously improve.

We continue to develop our approach to quality assurance and there are several things that help us to reflect and learn including:

- Post-inspection and post-registration feedback questionnaires
- Complaints
- Responding to inspection reports
- Representations
- Care standards tribunals.

The information below provides a snapshot of the quality of our work. We think it reflects positively on the work we do to build positive relationships with providers and wherever possible to 'get it right first time'.

Feedback: After each registration and inspection, we share a survey seeking feedback from providers. Over the last year 704 post-inspection feedback surveys have been completed (30.5% return rate). The majority of responses reported we conducted inspection in line with our values.

“

“I feel that CIW wish to encourage a culture of continuous improvement. Spotting the things that we do well whilst also giving constructive feedback on areas / aspects that can be improved. I feel that the inspection team work ‘with’ as opposed to ‘against’ us, getting the difficult balance right between raising issues, concerns and suggestions whilst also seeing the good and appreciating the efforts and motivation of the entire team.”

“My inspector was fantastic: made me feel very comfortable therefore able to carry on with my day as normal. She gave great feedback and made me feel really valued as a childminder.”

“The feedback I had from nursery staff on the day of the inspection, and my personal interaction via phone and Teams meeting was very positive. I believe the experience to have been very useful in validating our existing plans, and considering new / additional recommendations going forward. I believe the inspector showed great attention to detail but with positive purpose. Overall, the experience I would regard as very constructive and informative. Good job.”

”

Quality of our work

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“Our inspector is very approachable and always makes herself available to answer any questions. Despite the difficulties the service experienced and consequently PANs given, I maintained a good working relationship with our inspector throughout the process. This evidences the inspector’s expertise to fully understand the situation and work effectively with relevant managers to best promote timely changes in service provision for the best interest of the children and families utilising the service. Following a recent re-inspection we have satisfied all the PANs and due to the inspector’s professionalism, she has played an integral role in making this happen.”

”



We also ask, ‘what do you think can be improved?’ and value the suggestions we receive:

“

“We believe it would have been helpful for the inspector to visit us for face-to-face feedback after our inspection, as opposed to doing this by telephone.”

“Although the inspector made every effort to communicate with individuals at the service, the inspector asked to visit some people being supported in Welsh but was not able to communicate in the individual’s first language. While we understand not all inspectors will be Welsh speaking, in an area with a stronger population of Welsh speakers we would welcome a translator or second inspector who can gather feedback in people’s preferred language.”

”

Providers have given positive feedback about our registration and variation application processes. They particularly praised the support, clear communication and helpful information provided by registration inspectors, which helped them improve their services and demonstrated CIW’s values in action. *“Throughout the application process, I was fully supported and with recommendations made, this allowed us to improve continuously.”*

Quality of our work

Did the feedback we provided on your application help to improve your service?



"Yes, the service we provide has been improved. We have introduced better processes and structures. Having a better knowledge of Social Care Wales, the Care Inspectorate Wales and various enhancements have been made."

"I write to thank you for the quality of support I received during the domiciliary care service provider registration process. You exceeded my expectations by highlighting the core regulatory obligations of the provider in relation to Care Inspectorate Wales as the regulator."



Challenge to inspection reports

If providers are unhappy with our work, they can request a review of an inspection report or raise a complaint.

We only received 145 challenges to our reports, representing 6% of all reports issued. Our process has two stages. We successfully resolved the majority of issues at stage one, with only 14.5% (21) of these proceeding to stage two, where an independent CIW manager reviews our original decision.

Complaints: This year we received 27 complaints (the same number as last year), 20 of which were concluded at the 'early resolution' stage and only three were escalated to formal investigation. One complaint was made to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales who issued an early resolution response with actions for CIW to address.

All complaints are considered by our senior leadership team to ensure all actions and any learning is taken forward.

Representations: Where we have taken enforcement action such as suspending or cancelling a service or we refuse registration of a service, providers can make representations to CIW about this. Representations are reviewed by a CIW manager with no line management responsibility for the decision maker.

This year, seven providers made representations (two children's services, one adult service and four childcare services). It is positive to note that five of the eight were not upheld by an independent decision maker, indicating the evidence for the notice issued was valid at the time and our decision-making is in line with our values.

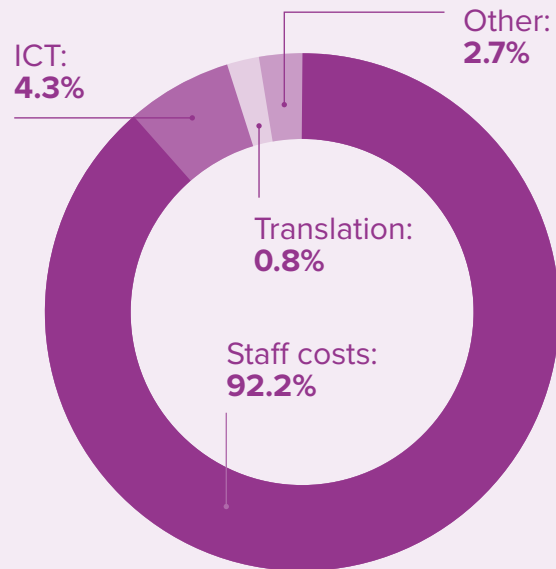
A provider may also decide to apply to the Care Standards Tribunal. This year only one provider appealed to the Care Standards Tribunal. The Tribunal dismissed the appeal and upheld CIW's decision to cancel registration.

Financial budget and breakdown of spending

Our allocated budget for 2024-25	£15,908,000
We also received additional Welsh Government funding for:	
Introducing ratings for care homes and domiciliary support services, and introducing special school residential services as a new regulated service	£662,370
Joint Inspections of Child Protection arrangements (JICPA)	£174,755
Total funding	£16,745,125
Costs	
Staff costs including fee paid inspectors	£14,806,556
Non-staff costs (ICT, translation, telephony, travel and subsistence etc)	£1,245,674
Total costs	£16,052,230
<p>By the end of the financial year, £14,806,556 was spent on staff costs and £1,245,674 was spent on non-staff costs, with 76% of the staff costs representing inspection and regulation activity.</p> <p>We reported a £692,895 underspend for 2024-25 financial year. This was due to carrying a high number of unfilled vacancies. As priority roles were filled later in the year, related staff costs will be realised in the 2025-26 financial year.</p>	

Financial budget and breakdown of spending

CIW expenditure split



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

Glossary

Below is a brief explanation of the terms we use. More detail is available on our website.

Registration – the process of a service becoming legally registered with us to operate in Wales. We also manage changes to services already registered.

Inspection – We plan and prioritise our inspections using the information we hold about services. The inspection visit is a key part of our work. Our primary focus is people’s experiences and whether they are being safely supported to achieve the best outcomes possible. We use key lines of enquiry from our [inspection frameworks](#), informed by our analysis of the information we hold about individual services including notifications and concerns. Where positive or poor outcomes for people are identified, we always explore the root causes of this.

Concerns – Anyone can [provide feedback or raise a concern about care services](#) either online, by e-mail, phone or letter. Every concern we receive is considered by an inspector before deciding what we will do. When concerns are shared with us by staff working at a service this is referred to as ‘whistleblowing’ as this then provides the member of staff with legal protections. We do not investigate individual concerns, but information from concerns gives us an insight into how well a service may be operating and we use this to inform our inspections of the service.

Notifications – Providers are legally required to notify us of events which may impact people using their service. The list of notifiable events is extensive and includes safeguarding, changes in management, environmental issues and serious injuries that occur within the service. We review notifications and decide on the most appropriate course of action. We consider any themes when planning our next inspection.

Enforcement – Where we find services are not providing appropriate care and people’s well-being or safety is compromised, including services operating without registration, we take action. We have a clear, graduated, and proportionate enforcement pathway. We may identify areas for improvement for the provider to address or where significant improvement is required, we will issue a Priority Action Notice requiring the provider to improve. We can also urgently suspend childcare services. In our work with local authorities, we identify areas for improvement, but we do not have enforcement powers. Our approach is set out in our [securing improvement and enforcement policy](#).

Let us know what you think

We welcome feedback on the usefulness of our annual report. We would be grateful if you could complete [this short survey](#).



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