

1. Introduction

Through the Understanding Our Communities project, public services are gaining a better understanding of the good things about communities, what matters to people and how their experiences and what they have to offer can help us to plan and provide services.

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act has been put in place to make sure that public services are doing all that they can to support people using care and support services to have their say and get involved in managing their own wellbeing. The Act means that public services will need to make sure that the right support is available for the people who need it at the right time and in the right way.

Under this Act, public services must carry out and publish a **Population Needs Assessment**, which looks at:

- the needs for care and support, and the support needs of carers;
- the extent to which those needs are not being met;
- the range and level of services needed to meet those needs; and
- how services are delivered through the medium of Welsh.

In Cwm Taf, we have been collecting lots of information for the Assessment, from the people making policy and commissioning decisions about services, the people delivering services and the people receiving services. In order to look at all of this information in an organised way, we used the seven 'client' groups of the Act;

- Carers;
- Children and young people;
- Learning disability;
- Mental Health;
- Older people;
- Physical disability and sensory impairment; and
- Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

We then spent some time, talking with these people about the headlines that emerged under and really thinking about **how** they affect people and **what** we public services can do to meet the needs of people using our services, in the best possible way, now and in the future.

A summary of the headlines relating to **children and young people in receipt of care and support** are contained in this document. The document shows how these headlines fit into the 'bigger picture' and the key messages which relate to *all* client groups and what we currently do and/or could do to deal with these headlines.

All of the information gathered throughout the project to inform these headlines will also be available in an online library. You can find the full Population Needs Assessment [\[here\]](#).

2. Children and young people in receipt of care and support

Definition: The children and young people chapter includes those aged 0 to 18 as well as those eligible for services until they are 25 including care leavers. Children with disabilities and young carers are discussed in other chapters.

Strategic Context

The Cwm Taf Social Services and Well-Being Partnership Board is developing a statement of commissioning for children and families to ensure clarity of focus on the priorities that will deliver the aims of the Social Services and Well-Being Act 2014 (Wales).

The purpose of the statement is to set the direction of travel for the provision of high quality, accessible and integrated services that will focus on improving the education, health and wellbeing of children, young people and families in the Cwm Taf partnership region.

It will align existing service plans and strengthen joint working arrangements between the NHS, local authorities and the voluntary and private sectors.

At the centre of this plan, partners will agree a set of shared objectives, and an agreed method of assessing progress travelled. It will ensure that multi-agency working is encouraged and that all professionals can see how their work contributes to the overall wellbeing of children, young people and families across Cwm Taf. The strategy will seek to reduce the dependence on intensive interventions in favour of early intervention, prevention and promoting resilient communities.

3. The current position in Cwm Taf

Cwm Taf comprises of two local authority areas of Rhonda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. The 2015 mid-population was estimated to be 296,735¹. Merthyr Tydfil is the smallest local authority in Wales with a population of 59,324 while RCT has the third largest population of 237,411.

The child population in Cwm Taf is estimated to have increased slightly between 2005 and 2015 - up 2.2 percent (6406 people). The growth in the population has been larger in Merthyr Tydfil than in RCT, up 5.3 percent and 1.4 percent respectively.

Cwm Taf has a relatively young age profile with its 62,210 children making up 21 percent of the population (i.e. 1 in every 5 people living in Cwm Taf is under 18). Young adults (aged 18 to 24) make up 9 percent of the population.

Across Cwm Taf the overall population aged 0 to 24 has been declining since 2011, down from 90,442 to 89,772. There has been a similar decline down 0.8 percent over the same period.

¹ Children and young people population 2015 mid-year pop estimates ([Office of National Statistics](#))

Children and young people population projections

The 2014 based population projections show the overall population of people aged 0-24 will decline by 1.6 percent between 2016 and 2025 across Cwm Taf². Nationally the decline is 1.1 percent. Within this age group the number of 16-24 year olds is projected to decrease the most. Children and young people as a proportion of the total population is likely to increase to 29 percent of all people living in Cwm Taf, this is in spite of the projected decrease in the number of children and young people.

Daffodil: Projecting the need for care services

- Both Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil are predicted to see small percentage increases in the number of children aged 0-17 who experience abuse and neglect.
- The long standing illness of mothers and their health behaviour lifestyles are predicted to slightly deteriorate across Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Teenage pregnancies are predicted to reduce by 18.5 percent in Merthyr and 9.5 percent in RCT up to 2019.
- Overall young carers are predicted to decline across both local authority areas.

4. Headlines**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have a tremendous impact on health and wellbeing later in life**

Public Health Wales has conducted research which has increased our understanding of the long term impacts that negative childhood experiences can have on individuals and the wider society³. The study into Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wales (ACEs) found that children who suffer abuse are more likely to be involved in violence and misuse drugs and alcohol. Many of the health problems we see today in adults can be rooted in childhood. Professor Mark Bells, Director of Policy, Research and International Development in Public Health Wales said "...providing safe and nurturing environments for every child in Wales is the best way to ensure we raise healthier and happier adults who contribute to their communities and the economy."

We know from the information presented in this chapter that too many children in Cwm Taf are in care and for the majority they will have experienced trauma associated with abuse, neglect, loss and separation from family and friends before entering care. Importantly, these experiences affect the way in which looked after children can feel about themselves and increase the risk of mental health problems.

According to the National Service for Adoption in Wales up to 25 percent of children placed for adoption have experiences in childhood that need specialist or targeted support. As corporate parents we must work to help children recover and repair any damage from adverse experiences such as abuse and neglect through building resilience and addressing mental health difficulties.

² Children and young people population projections 2014 based projections ([Office of National Statistics](#))

³ See Social Chapter for additional information

Timely access to the right mental health care is crucial. We know from stakeholder feedback that accessing specialist trauma counselling for looked after children looked is an issue across Cwm Taf. Nationally delays experienced by young people who need extra help with their mental health has been identified as one of priorities for the Children's Commissioner in Wales.

Adverse childhood experiences are not confined to just those children in receipt of care and support – unfortunately many children from the general population will also be exposed to abuse, neglect and harmful experiences. Prioritising the early years and focussing resources on early intervention and prevention to tackle the root causes of health harming behaviours is critical if we are to ensure every child in Cwm Taf has the best possible start to life.

Timely access to the right mental health care is crucial if we are to support better mental health among children and young people and reduce pressure on high level need services such as CAMHS.

Children and young people face many challenges but they warn us that we must not medicalise growing up⁴. The report [Making Sense](#) written by young people, advocates support from people they trust - friends, educational counselling services and teachers - as way to address the majority of children and young people's emotional needs and overall development. The young people highlight the importance of getting appropriate help at the earliest possible opportunity- rather than allowing problems to escalate to crisis point. This finding is very much in keeping with the spirit of early intervention as advocated by both the SSWB Act and WFG Act.

The report consulted 500 CAMHS users and had the following key findings:

- 75 percent of CAMHS users have a negative experience of CAMHS;
- Less than half of CAMHS users agree that the service helped them get better and move on;
- 75 percent of CAMHS users said that the service was friendly and approachable;
- 56 percent of CAMHS users would prefer to turn to friends, 44 percent would prefer to turn to education counselling services and 39 percent would prefer to turn to teachers; and
- 29 percent said the best part of CAMHS was getting to talk to someone.

Evidence from a consultation carried out by Eye to Eye, as part of the Create a Voice project in Rhondda Cynon Taf, adds further support to the findings of the Making Sense report. Being able to talk openly in school about why people self-harm or feel anxious and depressed, and having peer support, were echoed in the views of 250 young people aged 14-18 years who took part.

Key findings on the best ways to receive support for self-harm and mental health:

- Self-harm should be discussed in PSE lessons;
- Invite guest speakers into schools to talk about self-harm and mental health;
- Run workshops to help young people learn how to address issues such as self-harm, stress, anxiety and depression;

⁴ [A report by young people on their wellbeing and mental health](#) - Jan 2011

- Create an angry room for young people to go and express themselves;
- More training for anyone involved with young people about how to deal with someone who self-harms or is coping with stress, anxiety, depression; and
- Peer to peer training - so that friends can better support their friends in need.

Levels of subjective wellbeing are found to predict future health, mortality, productivity and income.

We know that the impact of adverse experiences of children looked after have been shown to have a lifelong effect, making it all the more important to address the wellbeing of children whilst in care. Good wellbeing underpins any chance of success in ensuring children in care flourish and move on from traumatic experiences. Levels of subjective wellbeing are found to predict future health, mortality, productivity and income⁵.

In Merthyr Tydfil we have started to build an evidence base of the subjective wellbeing⁶ of children known to social services. This work will continue into the New Year in order to generate a robust baseline. We can present some preliminary findings from the work carried out to date.

Children known to social services had a much lower wellbeing score than children from the general population. Out of a maximum score of 5, children known to social services had an overall wellbeing score of 2.87 compared to 3.9 for children in the general population. We measured three different components of wellbeing and Figure 1 shows how they scored.

⁵ World Happiness Report, 2013 (Eds) Helliwell, J, Layard, R and Sachs, J.
<http://worldhappiness.report/>

⁶ Subjective wellbeing is about people's own assessments of how their lives are going. This includes overall evaluations of the quality of life and different aspects of life. Hadley Centre/Coram Voice (2015) Measuring Well-Being: A Literature Review Children's Society (2015) The Good Childhood Report 2015. London: The Children's Society.



Figure 1 Subjective wellbeing of children known to social services, Source: MTBCB Performance Team

Figure 1 above identifies the 'Good Feeling' component of wellbeing as having the lowest score. This component of wellbeing is measured by the following statements:

- I've been feeling optimistic
- I've been feeling relaxed
- I've been thinking clearly

Qualitative evidence from boys who are looked after in RCT presents a similar picture of low wellbeing. They were quite negative about their own experience of their lives and communities.

When asked about what would make things better, they boys talked the cleanliness of the environment - free of drug paraphernalia, litter, fly-tipping and dog mess. The links between positive wellbeing and the environment have long been established⁷ and these issues are further explored in the Environmental chapter as part of the Wellbeing Assessment.

When it comes to promoting looked after children's wellbeing, we know that positive stable and trusting relationships are of paramount importance. Research with looked after children also shows that other important factors include having a sense of control and influence over their lives, feeling emotionally and physically safe, and having a narrative about their life which contributes to a secure sense of self⁸. These themes have been reiterated locally by children who are looked after across Cwm Taf.

We also know from our own research in Cwm Taf that children and young people in the general population want to have people in their lives that they can trust; they want to have an influence over their own lives and they want to feel listened to.

⁷ <http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/254447/0075343.pdf>

⁸ Children and Young People's Views on Being in Care, [A Literature Review](#) (2015) Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies and Coram Voice. University of Bristol. London: Coram Voice.

As public bodies we need to have a clearer focus on helping children recover from abuse and neglect, and if we are to truly adopt a preventative agenda we must ensure that improving the wellbeing of all children and their families is prioritised in order to build a Cam Taf that is more equal, healthier, prosperous, resilient, cohesive, with a vibrant culture that makes a positive contribution globally (The Wales we Want as outlined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015).

We need to get better at involving children and young people, seeking their views and actively listen to what they say.

This headline reinforces that we need to get better at talking to children and young people, seeking their views and actively listening to what they say. One of the key findings in the Rhondda Cynon Taf Viewpoint survey was that pupils felt there were not asked their views, yet they have demonstrated to us during this population assessment that they want to contribute, they want to have a say, and they have ideas about how best to meet their needs. Some quotes from engagement with young people:

“Important to get young people’s views because that’s who you are trying to help.”

“Good to get thoughts out, happy to give ideas on how to improve services.”

“I have enjoyed being involved. I feel it’s important to involve the younger generation.”

“Good to have our voices heard.”

“I think it was good as it gives us a chance to make a change.”

It’s time we took notice and start to view children and young people as an incredible asset in the community, an untapped resource that could help us deliver the outcomes we are all working to achieve.

5. Links to other headlines and common themes

The things which affect people with **Children and young people in receipt of care and support** do not stand alone. The same things are likely to affect other people who use care and support services. Some of the common themes identified through this work include:

Prevention

Both the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act place a duty on public bodies to focus on prevention. There is an abundance of research evidence to demonstrate the benefits to people and the wider society of having the best possible start in life. Many of the issues identified in this chapter have their roots laid down before birth and in early childhood. It therefore makes sense that we make a commitment to focus resources on preventing problems from occurring or intervening early to prevent them from escalating.

Language

However research for this chapter has highlighted the importance of meaning and language. Although prevention and preventative services are terms that are widely

known they do not have a common understanding among the different organisations and services that are working with children and their families.

Establishing a definition of prevention that is commonly understood by all service providers and organisations across Cwm Taf would ensure that we can confidently refocus resources on activities that will deliver the benefits of working in a way that prevents rather than reacts to problems.

Data sharing

Public Health advocates that the first 1000 days of life, from conception to age two, as the most significant timeline to make a difference in a person's life. However doing the population assessment has highlighted that it is precisely during this timeline when data and information sharing is limited. Most of the data we use to profile vulnerable children occurs after the child has been exposed to adverse experiences - yet this profiling work is often described as preventative when in reality it's an early intervention.

Risk assessment

The lack of a consistent method for assessing risk across Cwm Taf was identified by stakeholders as a barrier to effectively working to prevent problems or being able to intervene early.

Parenting

Programmes that support effective parenting are evidenced based interventions, but we know from our research that take up of parenting classes in Cwm Taf can be poor, outcomes are unclear, and we are unsure which parenting programmes are the most impactful. Feedback from stakeholders suggests that certain preventative services, like parenting classes, are not palatable to families as they feel stigmatised because they have been targeted. Stakeholders suggest that parenting classes should be a universal service. If we are to raise the aspirations of vulnerable families and increase their resilience then they need to be exposed to different kinds of families- this will not happen in programme that only bring vulnerable families together.

6. Technical Information

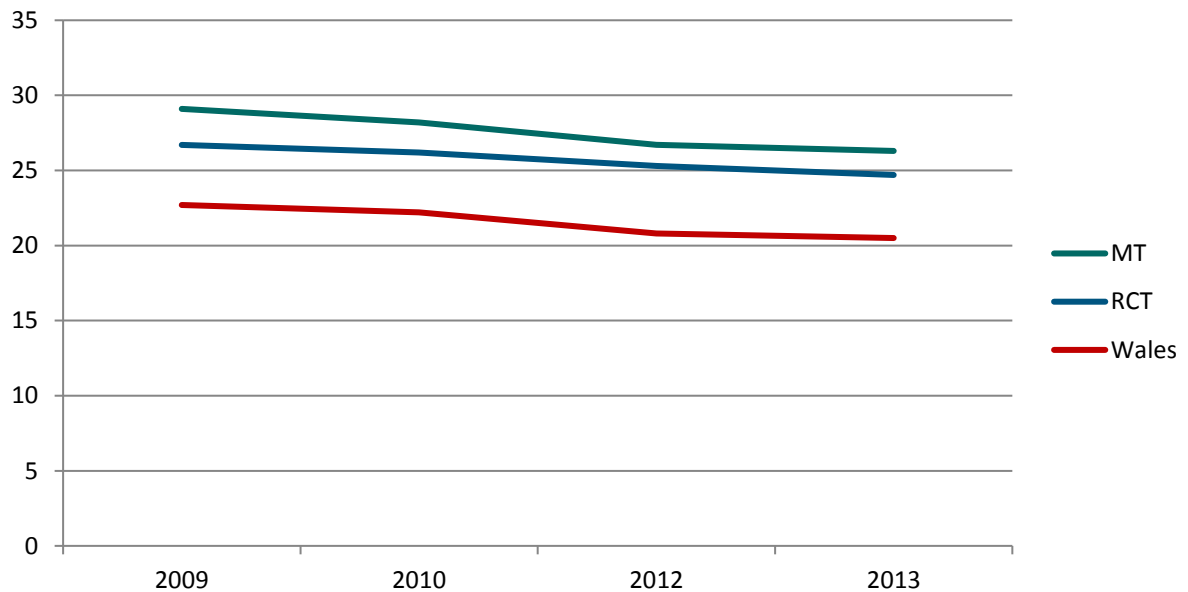
Child Poverty⁹ [HMRC Child Poverty](#)¹⁰

Analysis of official figures, by the independent Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2016, highlights how children's life chances vary depending on where they live and the income of their parents. The data shows that children born into poorer families are falling behind their richer peers from as young as age five (JRF, 2016)¹¹.

Merthyr Tydfil had the second highest (26.3 percent) level of child poverty in Wales. Latest figures show a decrease of 2.8 percent between 2009 and 2013.

RCT had the third highest (24.7 percent) level of child poverty in Wales. Latest figures show a decrease of 2 percent between 2009 and 2013.

Figure 1: Percentage of children in low income households



The varying levels of income deprivation at Lower Super Output Area level show the extent of income inequality in Cwm Taf. For example, in RCT 70.5 percent of children in Tylorstown1 are affected by income deprivation compared to just 1.1 percent of children living in Aberdare West/Llwydcoed6. In Merthyr Tydfil the gap in inequality is narrower-though still at unacceptable levels. 57.2 percent of children in Penydarren2 live in low income households compared to 6.4 percent in Cyfarthfa4.

While no child should live in poverty, the data shows there is a need to ensure that resilience is strengthened in those communities most adversely affected by the impact of

⁹ The Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (2015) offers a definition of poverty, which is to be in "a long-term state of not having sufficient resources to afford food, reasonable living conditions or amenities to participate in activities (such as access to attractive neighbourhoods and open spaces) which are taken for granted by others in society".

¹⁰ Defined as the proportion of children living in families in receipt of out of work benefits or in receipt of tax credits where their income is less than 60% of the UK median

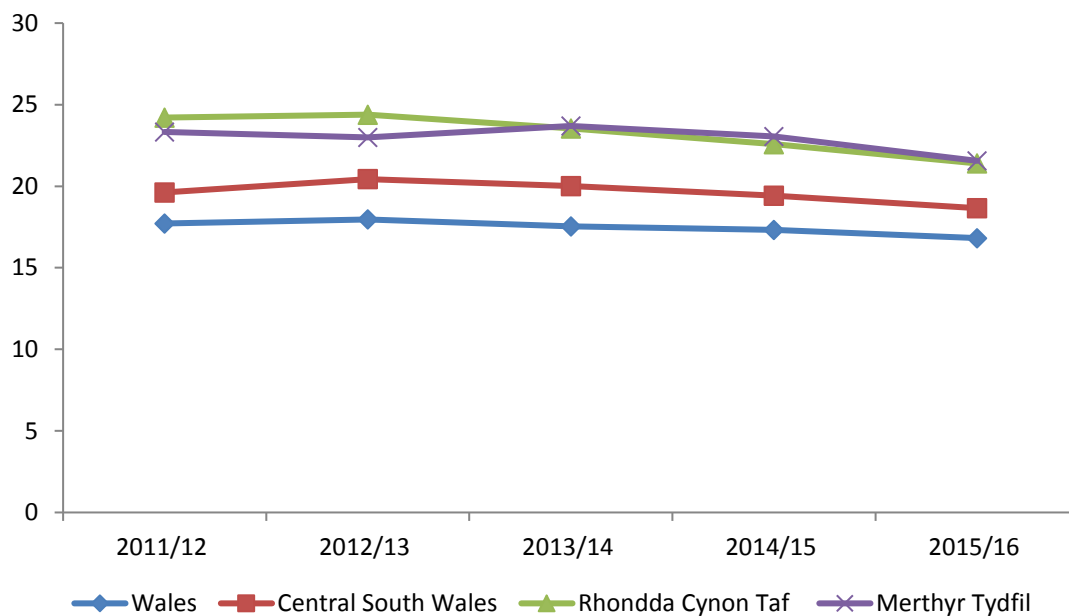
¹¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/life-chances-postcode-lottery>

poverty- which we know is a strong predictor of poor outcomes across the lifespan of children and their families.

Free school meals [StatsWales free school meal](#)

The number of school pupils eligible for free school meals is also a good indicator of relative deprivation and is one of the indicators used to predict demand for social care including children in care services. Figure 2 shows both local authorities are above the average for both central south Wales and all Wales. The trend data shows this has consistently been the case.

Figure 2: Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals



Lone parent households [Labour Market Statistics for Households, 2014](#)

Children living in lone parent families are at greater risk of income poverty according to Households Below Average Income data. Furthermore, analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study data suggests that moves into poverty tend to be associated with relationship breakdown and becoming a lone parent.

The overall percentage of lone parent families was higher in Wales than in the UK, 9.2 percent in Wales compared to 8.6 percent in the UK.

The highest percentages of lone parent families were found in the Valleys local authorities: Merthyr Tydfil (12.8 percent), Neath Port Talbot (11.7 percent) and RCT (11.4 percent). While more rural areas had the lowest percentages: Ceredigion (5 percent), Gwynedd (6.3 percent) and Powys (6.3 percent).

Impacts of poverty

Poverty takes its toll on family life through a lack of material resources, which contributes to stress and pressure that damage relationships and affect children's social and emotional progress and potentially reducing expectations and aspirations for the future. Whilst income remains the biggest single cause of child poverty it is important to recognise that for many children in Wales, poverty of experience can also be harmful to their development and sense of wellbeing.

Education

Low income is a strong predictor of low educational performance. Findings from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's *Education and Poverty programme* show that:

- White children in poverty have on average lower educational achievement and are more likely to continue to under-achieve.
- Just 14 percent of variation in individual's performance is accounted for by school quality.
- Less advantaged children are more likely to feel a lack of control over their learning, and to become reluctant recipients of the taught curriculum.
- Deprived children are more likely to feel anxious and unconfident about school.
- Out-of-school activities can help build self-confidence. Children from advantaged backgrounds experience more structured and supervised out-of-school activities.

There is a wide body of research on the social and economic outcomes associated with educational attainment. A review of these studies¹² reveals that individuals who fail to gain qualifications are clearly disadvantaged in many aspects of life - from the jobs they obtain and the wages they earn to their physical and emotional well-being. Society is also disadvantaged when students drop out as studies show that dropouts are less likely than graduates to contribute to the social and economic well-being of a country.

In Wales eligibility for Free School Meals is the proxy measure for poverty. The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals is discussed in the *Economic Wellbeing* chapter.

Speech and language

In the early years of a child's life, the amount and quality of 'talk' that children experience has a significant influence on their speech, language and communication skills. A landmark research study uncovered the widely cited "word gap" between children from low-income homes and their more economically advantaged peers¹³.

By age 3, the recorded spoken vocabularies of the children from the professional families were larger than those of the parents in the welfare families (*families on benefits*). Between professional and welfare parents, there was a difference of almost 300 words spoken per hour. Extrapolating this verbal interaction to four years, a child in a professional family would accumulate experience with almost 45 million words, while an average child in a welfare family would hear just 13 million - coining the phrase *the 30*

¹² [The Impact of Dropping Out: Summary of Research Findings and References](#)

¹³ Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children, Hart, B & Risley, T. (1995)

million word gap. Hart and Risley's follow-up studies at age 9 shows that the large differences in children's language experience were tightly linked to large differences in child outcomes.

Wellbeing of Adults

Numerous qualitative studies of poverty (including Ridge's (2002) child-specific study) show that living in poverty strongly impacts people's life experiences and their happiness.

As part of the *Wealth in Great Britain* series, the ONS published an article analysing data from the Wealth and Assets survey (WAS) covering the period July 2011 to June 2012¹⁴. For the first time questions on an individual's personal well-being were included. The aim of the analysis was to consider how wealth and income are related to the different measures of personal wellbeing. The results show that overall wealth has a positive effect on individuals increasing levels of life satisfaction, sense of worth and happiness, while at the same time decreasing levels of anxiety.

Stevenson and Wolfers (2013¹⁵) argue that the relationship between income and subjective wellbeing is not linear and increases in income make more of a difference to the subjective well-being of the poor than the rich.

Wellbeing of Children

The importance of studying subjective wellbeing is increasingly acknowledged. However, where children are concerned, whilst there is no shortage of research into objective facets of child well-being such as educational attainment and child health, Casas (2011) points out that subjective well-being has often been neglected. A recent review of the literature by Cooper and Stewart (2013) around links between money and outcomes for children - increases in money were found to positively influence outcomes for all children, but effects were stronger in poorer households.

Health

There is a strong correlation between areas of high deprivation and health inequalities. Across Cwm Taf communities living in areas of high deprivation experience poorer health outcomes than communities living in areas of less deprivation. The term 'health inequities' relates to perceived unfair differences in health outcomes between groups that are potentially avoidable.

Reducing inequities in health is a key theme and priority for Cwm Taf University Health Board and in recent years the inequality gap between the most and least deprived has narrowed¹⁶. However many challenges remain. Cwm Taf has lower life expectancy, reduced years in good health and higher levels of chronic disease when compared to other areas in Wales.

Rates of low birth weight babies, teenage pregnancies, childhood obesity, and maternal obesity are higher in Cwm Taf than for the rest of Wales. Health related lifestyles are generally poor in Cwm Taf with [the Welsh Health Survey \(2008-13\)](#) identifying a number

¹⁴ [Relationship between Wealth, Income and Personal Wellbeing](#)

¹⁵ Stevenson, B. and Wolfers, J. (2013) *Subjective well-being and income: Is there any evidence of satiation?*

¹⁶ [Public Health Wales: Measuring inequalities 2016](#)

of areas within Cwm Taf as having statistically significantly higher proportions of people who smoke, are overweight or obese and/or a sedentary lifestyle.

The early intervention and prevention focus of the Future Generations of Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 provides us with the platform to shift resources to intervene and support children from the youngest age in order to secure better outcomes for the future. For a more in depth look at health outcomes for children and a discussion about Adverse Childhood Experiences see the Social Chapter.

Cost of child poverty

A report by JRF estimated a total cost of child poverty to UK public expenditure of between £11.6 billion and £20.7 billion¹⁷. Of the public services¹⁸ reviewed the association between expenditure levels and poverty and deprivation was strongest for social services. A key client group for social services are 'Looked After Children' whose care and upbringing is the statutory responsibility of the local authority. The knock on effects of living in poverty such as stress, not being able to afford a healthy diet and increased social isolation through lack of income- all have a negative impact on parenting and may lead to more children being taken into local authority care¹⁹.

Mental health and wellbeing of children and young people

While the majority of children and young people in Wales enjoy good levels of mental wellbeing there is a significant proportion, around 1 in 5 who report low life satisfaction. Self-rated life satisfaction as measured by the Health Behaviour in School aged Children Survey (HBSC) has remained at the same level over time (between 2002 and 2014)²⁰.

- Around a third of young people feel they cannot rely on family or their peers when things go wrong
- Significant relationship between reported low levels of mental wellbeing and family affluence; and
- Children in Wales on the whole appear to experience bullying to a greater extent.

The latest results from the HBSC survey shows that 81 percent of young people in Cwm Taf report high levels of life satisfaction. The all Wales average was 83 percent. Understanding Society Survey²¹ found a number of factors were associated with mental ill health among young people:

- being bullied (4 times more likely to report mental ill health),
- quarrelling with their mother more than three time a week,

¹⁷ The public service costs of child poverty Glen Bramley and David Watkins-Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2008

¹⁸ Social services, health, education, housing, police and criminal justice, fire and rescue, environmental services

¹⁹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/relationship-between-poverty-child-abuse-and-neglect-evidence-review>

²⁰ [2013-14 Health Behaviour in School aged Children Wales: Key findings](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444444/2013-14_Health_Behaviour_in_School_aged_Children_Wales_Key_findings.pdf)

²¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/measuringnationalwellbeing/2015-10-20>

- being unhappy with their appearance,
- children who spent more than three hours on social website.

Research evidence shows that school bullying not only affects how people feel at the time, but also their school exam results and later job prospects²². Bullying has been identified by the [Children's Commission in Wales](#) as one of her priorities to improve the lives of children and young people.

Local information from Eye to Eye counselling identifies the top 5 reasons why young people access counselling.

Table 2: Top 5 Predominant issues in counselling 2015/16

Rank	RCT	Merthyr
1	Family	Family
2	Stress/Anxiety	Stress/Anxiety
3	Relationships	Bereavement
4	Self Worth	Relationships
5	Anger (joint 4 th)	Self Worth

Over the last five years there has been a significant increase in referrals due to Stress/Anxiety, which reflects the rise reported nationally. Figures from The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children revealed a 35 percent increase between 2014/15 and 2015/16 in young people calling ChildLine who reported anxious feelings.

Mental health of children in care

It is estimated that 49 percent of children in care (aged 5-17) have significant emotional ill health, much of which is shown in conduct disorder. Many of these children have experienced abuse, neglect, loss and separation from family and friends. There were no significant differences in prevalence of mental disorders among young people in care between Wales (49 percent), Scotland (45 percent) and England (45 percent)²³.

Though children looked after or in need are known to be at greater risk of mental health problems the recorded rates of mental health issues in the Children in Need Census are very low [Health of children in need](#).

Data from Eye to Eye shows that children in care accounted for 4 percent of their client base in RCT and Merthyr Tydfil- which equates to 55 children in RCT and 9 in Merthyr. The data does not allow for separate reporting so it is not possible to identify the reasons why these children were receiving counselling. Intelligence gathered from the stakeholder event held on the 29th of September in the Orbit Centre Merthyr, highlighted the lack of suitable trauma counselling for children in care in Cwm Taf.

Self-Harm

Following a freedom of information request by the NSPCC to all health boards in Wales with Accident and Emergency departments, figures published²⁴ show that around 1200

²² [Impact of Bullying Report](#)

²³ [The mental health of young people looked after by local authorities in Wales ng-people-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-Wales](#)

²⁴ <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/around-1200-children-young-people-12294932>

children and young people in Wales were taken to hospital after they self-harmed- an increase of almost 41 percent in the past three years within the health boards which provided the information. The new figures are backed by ChildLine which delivered 18,471 counselling sessions about self-harm – making it one of the most common reasons for children and young people to reach out to the NSPCC service. A consultation with 250 young people in RCT, carried out by Eye to Eye, looked at the reasons why young people self-harm. The main reasons given were

- Bullying- including cyber bullying
- Abuse
- Familial problems

Intervening early and providing appropriate support to improve young people's wellbeing is critical if we are to reduce the number of children self-harming and needing specialist mental health or emergency services. Findings from the consultation in RCT show that young people find it difficult to openly discuss self-harm as it is seen as a taboo issue, with little understanding in wider society leaving young people feeling stigmatised. For a more in depth look at health outcomes for children see the Social Chapter.

Domestic abuse

There are no official statistics on the number of children who live with domestic abuse. But there are a lot of research studies that tell us about children's experience of living with violence.

- Around 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse²⁵
- Domestic abuse is a factor in over half of serious case reviews²⁶
- A third of children witnessing domestic violence also experienced another form of abuse²⁷
- 1 in five teenagers have been physically abused by their boyfriends or girlfriends²⁸

The definition of domestic violence in England and Wales was expanded in March 2013 to include victims aged 16 and 17 years old. It now includes controlling behaviour and coercive behaviour.

Play

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child recognises the importance of play for the child... *the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts* (Article 31).

Encouraging positive play environments and opportunities in our communities will pay dividends both in improving the health of the future adult as well as upholding our children's right to play in the here and now. Children say they want more time and good places to play outside with their friends²⁹.

²⁵ [Child abuse and neglect in the UK today:](#)

²⁶ [Pathways to harm, pathways to protection: a triennial analysis of serious case reviews 2011 to 2014](#)

²⁷ [Meeting the needs of children living with domestic violence in London](#)

²⁸ [Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships](#)

²⁹ [Play for Wales Issue 47 Autumn 2016](#)

Children and young people who have a need for care and support

Under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 there is a change to the definition and concept of a 'child in need'. The data for the new definition is not yet available, therefore for the purposes of this assessment the data to understand children and young people who have a need for care and support is based on the 'children in need' concept.

Referrals to children services [Statswales Referrals to children services](#)

Although there has not been much change in the overall number of children in Cwm Taf, the number of referrals to children's services has mainly followed an upward trend over the last five years and peaked in 2015-16 with 4567 referral (Table 3).

Table 3: Number of referrals to children's services received during the year

Merthyr Tydfil	741	928	825	698	802
RCT	2767	3017	3441	3102	3765
Cwm Taf	3508	3945	4266	3800	4567

Numbers have been rounded so may not sum

Children in Need [CIN Census 2015](#)

In 2015 there were 2625 children in need across Cwm Taf the equivalent of 422 children per 10,000 of the population under 18 which is above the rate for Wales as whole of 308 children in need for each 10,000 children in the population.

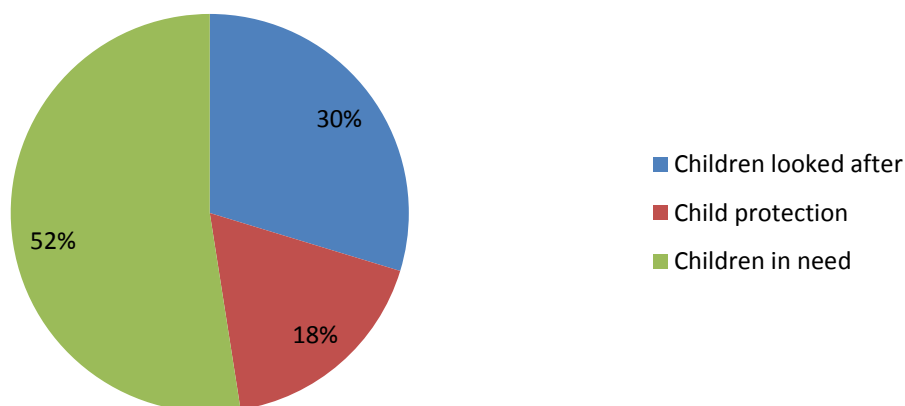
Table 4: Children in need and rate per 10,000

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Rate per 10,000 2015
Merthyr Tydfil	530	555	575	615	530	425
RCT	1690	1880	1865	2115	2095	420
Cwm Taf	2220	2435	2440	2730	2625	422
Wales						310

Numbers have been rounded so may not sum

Figure 3 shows the proportion of children in need that were looked after, under child protection and other children in need, which includes disabled children.

Figure 3: Proportion of children in need by looked after status, Cwm Taf 2015



Primary reason for referral Children in need and category of need

Children in Need data provides us with a snapshot of what life is like for children before they are referred to social services. The data paints a very negative picture of childhood. The trauma, abuse and neglect experienced by children is referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs have a tremendous impact on future violence victimisation and perpetration and lifelong health and opportunity. As such early experiences are an important public health issue ^{30 31}

Abuse and neglect was the primary need (60 percent) for why a child in Cwm Taf was in receipt of social services- the all Wales equivalent was 51 percent. A child’s disability or illness accounted for 23 percent of the primary reason for referrals, the all Wales average was under a fifth. The next most common reasons for a referral were Family in acute stress (9 percent), Parental disability or illness (3 percent), Family dysfunction (3 percent), and Socially unacceptable behaviour (1 percent).

Primary need in Cwm Taf masks local variation for referral reasons:

- In MT, abuse or neglect accounted for 71%
- In RCT, abuse and neglect accounted for 57%
- In MT, a child’s disability accounted for 15%
- In RCT, a child’s disability accounted for 25%

Domestic abuse, parental substance or alcohol misuse and parental mental ill health were the most frequently recorded parenting capacity factors in Cwm Taf. Table 5 shows that the data for Cwm Taf masks local variation.

Table 5: Parenting capacity in Cwm Taf masks local variation

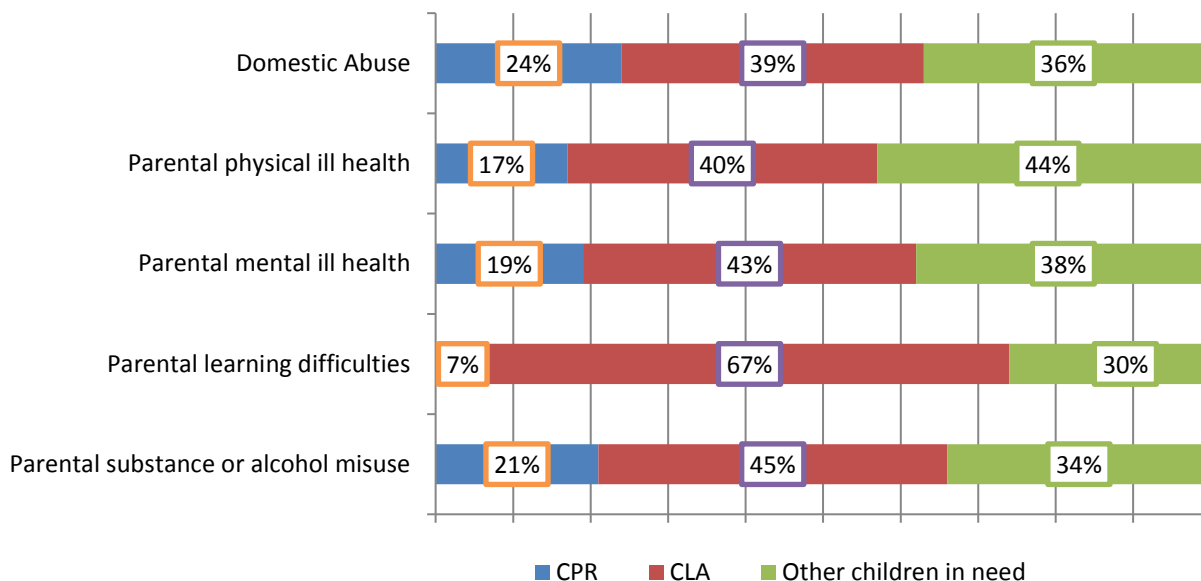
Parenting Capacity	Merthyr Tydfil	RCT
Domestic abuse	45%	20%
Parental substance or alcohol misuse	37%	21%
Parental mental ill health	29%	21%

³⁰ http://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/phl/resource_center_infographic.html

³¹ <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/news/43126>

For 5 percent (135) of children in need, for whom information was available, parental learning disability was recorded. This group had the highest proportion (67 percent) of children looked after, followed by 45 percent of the children for whom parental substance or alcohol misuse had been recorded.

Figure 4: Proportion of children in need by parenting capacity, and whether they were on the Child Protection register or looked after, 31 March 2015 Cwm Taf



Health of children in need

Children looked after or in need are known to be at greater risk of mental health problems but the recorded rates of mental health problems in this group are very low. Amongst the 2,615 children in need, just 3 percent (75) had a mental health problem recorded in the Children in Need. The Wales average was 8 percent. The overall Cwm Taff level masks variation at the local authority level.

In RCT the proportion of children in need with a mental health problem has consistently remained below the all Wales level, averaging about 3 percent each year. Conversely in Merthyr Tydfil, the rate had steadily increased from 4 percent (20) in 2010 to 14 percent (85) in 2014, before reducing to current levels of 10 percent.

It must be said that given what we know about the adverse reasons why children are known to social services the data for mental health cannot be considered an accurate predictor of the need for mental health services.

The Census data shows higher levels of disability among Children in Need in Merthyr Tydfil (25 percent) and RCT (26.7 percent) compared to the Wales average (21 percent).

Education of children in need

The average proportion of children in need with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) was 24 percent (for all ages) compared to 2 percent for all pupils in Cwm

Taf (for all ages). Across Wales the proportion of children in need with a statement of SEN was 27 percent.

The CIN data shows us that the educational attainment of children in need is lower than the average for all pupils, at all stages in their education.

Children in care

Children and young people are placed outside their parents' care for many reasons. These include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse and various types of neglect. These children and young people will have been exposed to multiple risks associated with poor long-term outcomes before entering care including poverty and deprivation, parental unemployment and relationship breakdown ([Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008](#)).

Children and young people looked after are also more likely to experience educational, behavioural, physical and psychological problems ([Meltzer et al. 2003](#)). Using data from a 1970 British birth cohort, one study reported on a cohort of children that had been in care ([Viner & Taylor 2005](#)). The report found that being in care during childhood is associated with adverse adult socio-economic, educational, legal and health outcomes in excess of that associated with coexisting childhood or adult disadvantage.

Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014: Children Looked After

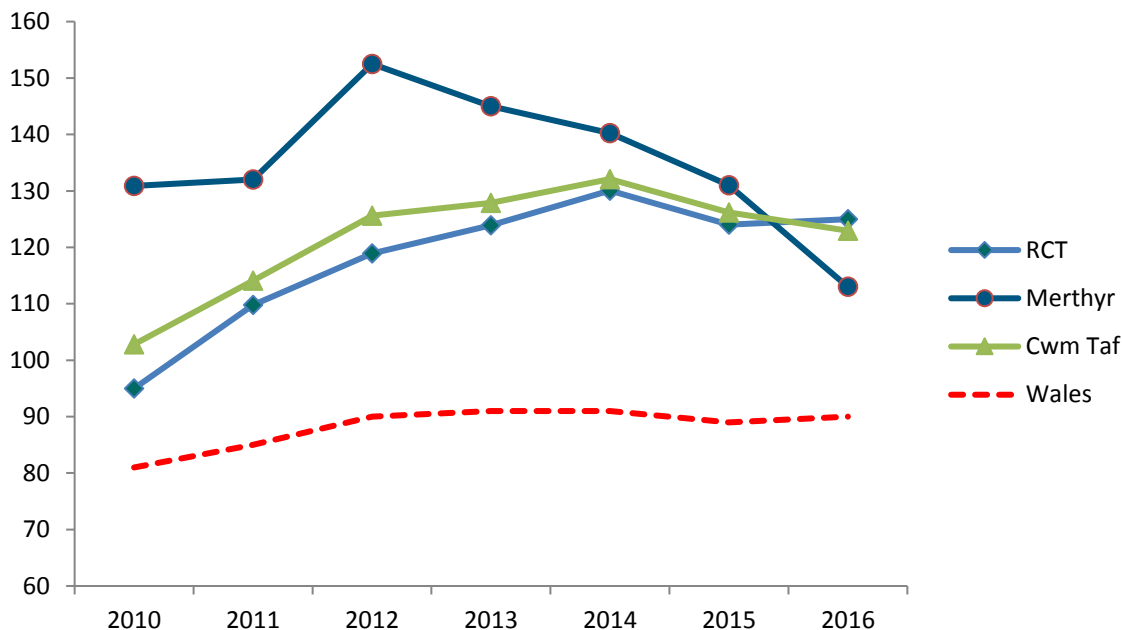
Part 6 of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act aims to de-escalate the need for formal intervention in the lives of children and young people and strengthen the capacity of families to care for their children where it is safe to do so. Strengthening family resilience as means of reducing the need for formal intervention requires a greater understanding of the wellbeing of the wider community. Getting better at understanding what matters to communities, what they value and what is important to them is key to delivering long term sustainable positive outcomes for children and their families.

Under the new legislation, when it is necessary to look after a child the principal duty is to safeguard and promote the child's well-being. Actively listening to children, young people and their families and involving them in the co-production of services to meet their needs is crucial to achieving the aims of the Act.

Profile of children in care: [Rate of Children looked after 2016](#)

The number of children entering care remains too high. In 2016 the rate in Cwm Taf was 33 children per 10,000 higher than the Wales average (123 per 10,000 child population compared to 90).

Figure 5: Children looked after at 31 March per 10,000 population under 18



Across Cwm Taf the number of children looked after decreased by 2.5 percent between 2015 and 2016. The overall trend for Cwm Taf masks variation at the local authority level.

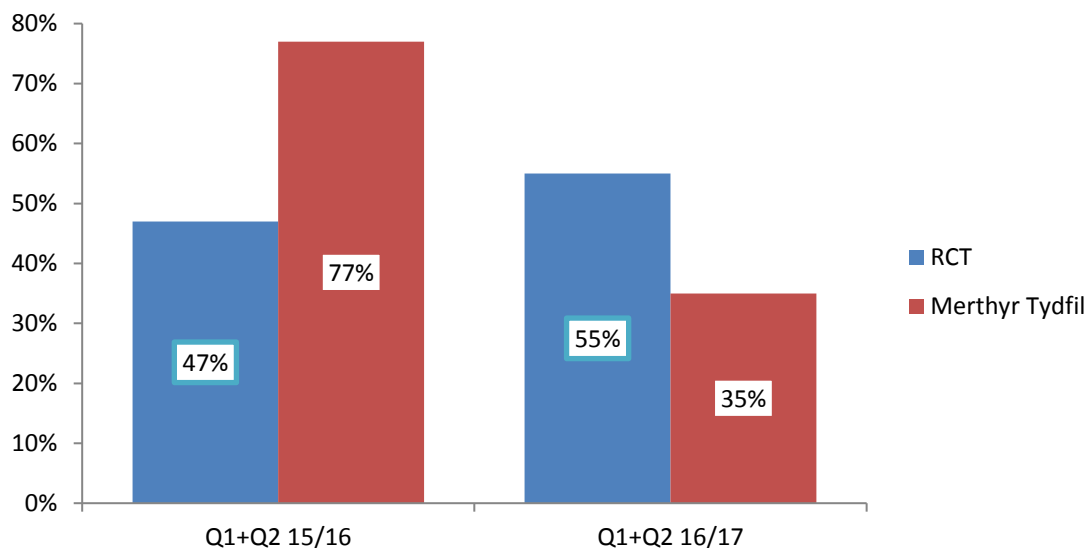
- In MT, there has been a decrease of 15.2 percent between 2015 and 2016
- In RCT, there has been an increase of 0.8 percent between 2015 and 2016

Changes in the profile of new Children looked after admissions

Analysis of quarter 1 and 2 data for the year 2016/17 shows both local authorities have had an increase (67 percent) in the number of **new** children looked after admissions compared to the same period last year. However the overall numbers of children looked after continue to reduce in Merthyr Tydfil (down 7.2 percent) and continue to increase in RCT (up 10 percent).

There are also differences in the age profile of the **new** children looked after admissions. Figure 6 shows that proportionately young children aged 0-3 are an increasing cohort of children becoming looked after in RCT- up 8 percent to 55 percent at the end of Q2. In Merthyr Tydfil this age group represent 35 percent of new admissions, down 42 percent compared to the same time last year.

Figure 6: Percentage of new Children Looked After admissions aged 0-3



Source: Children Services operational data, RCT and MT

The implications of a young CLA population

- Additional demands placed on the service from kinship care or connected persons - to ensure these arrangements are sustained requires effective support for the extended family members.
- The 0-3 age group are particularly vulnerable and are likely to have become looked after due to abuse and/or neglect- which is likely to have an impact on the need for mental health services.
- More family support services will be required to enable families to make the necessary changes to care for their children safely; this includes current and future children.
- A good range and quality of foster carers is needed to care for children whilst plans are made for their future,
- Additional specialist support and training for foster carers
- Due to the need to establish permanency for the young age group an increase in court proceedings are anticipated putting demands on the judiciary as well as other services

Placement stability

Stability is one of the most significant factors associated with the wellbeing of children in care and their outcomes³². In the most recent year 6.5 percent of looked after children in Cwm Taf have had 3 or more placements in the previous 12 months, below the all Wales average of 9.8 percent. The data presented in Table 6 years shows the variation in stability of placement between the two local authorities over the last three years.

Table 6: Percentage of Children looked after with 3 or more placements during the year

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Merthyr Tydfil	3.4%	6.1%	9.2%
RCT	6.6%	5.8%	5.9%

³² [Promoting looked after children's emotional wellbeing and recovery.](#)

Cwm Taf	5.9%	5.8%	6.5%
Wales	8.3%	9.0%	9.8%

Table 7 overleaf, shows that the stability of educational settings improved in Cwm Taf between 2014-15 and 2015-16. However the Cwm Taf figure masks variation between the two local authorities.

In Merthyr Tydfil moves in educational settings (changes not due to transitional arrangements) have been increasing although the numbers involved are small. The pattern in RCT has been more zig zag, with a steep increase between 2013 and 2014 before reducing again in 2015.

Stability will have an impact on educational achievement. The data shows the educational performance of children looked after was mixed- standards were above and below the Welsh average on different indicators. At Key stage 4 there was a significant decline in performance of children looked after in Merthyr Tydfil. Stability, however, is not the only predictor of educational achievement. There is a strong link between wellbeing and health and attainment³³. As public bodies we must use the powers under both Acts to ensure we effectively improve the wellbeing of children and young people to ensure we realise the gains needed to improve the educational standards of our children that are in care.

Table 7: Percentage of Children looked after with one or more changes of school, which are were not due to transitional arrangements

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Merthyr Tydfil	11.2%	14.7%	15.6%
RCT	13.5%	18.3%	13.9%
Cwm Taf	12.9%	17.4%	14.2%
Wales	13.8%	13.5%	11.9%

Education of children looked after [CIN Census 2015 Education data](#)

For each key stage the percentage of looked after children achieving the expected level is lower than that achieved by their peers. Improving the educational outcomes of children looked after is a key commitment by Welsh Government as outlined in the strategy [Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after](#)

Attainment: Merthyr Tydfil

- At the Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator the percentage of children achieving the expected level was above the Wales average (82 percent compared to 64 percent)
- At Key Stage 2, 55 percent achieved the expected level or above in English or Welsh, Mathematics and Science in combination compared with 45 percent in 2014. The all Wales average was 64 percent.
- At Key Stage 3, 80 percent achieved the expected level or above in English or Welsh, Mathematics and Science in combination. Performance was significantly above the Wales average of 48 percent

³³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/301112/Link-between-pupil-health-and-wellbeing-and-attainment-Public-Health-England-2014.pdf

- At Key Stage 4 there was a significant decline in standards of children looked after between 2014 and 2015. The average wider points score was 261, down from 516 the previous year, and below the Wales average of 319.

Attainment: RCT

- At the Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator the percentage of children looked after achieving the expected level increased compared to last year but decreased compared to the year before. In 2015 standards remained below the Wales average (57 percent compared to 64 percent).
- At Key Stage 2, 71 percent achieved the expected level or above in English or Welsh, Mathematics and Science in combination compared with 53 percent in 2014. The all Wales average was 64 percent.
- At Key Stage 3, performance dropped by 2 percentage points between 2014 and 2015 and was below the Welsh average (32 percent compared to 48 percent).
- At Key Stage 4 the average wider points score increased between 2014 and 2015 from 282 to 327 and was above the Wales average of 319

Achievement gap between looked after children and all pupils [All pupils education data](#)

All children, whatever their backgrounds must be given every possible opportunity to reach their full potential. Therefore the attainment of children looked after should be understood in the context of the 'achievement gap' between children looked after and all pupils.

Merthyr Tydfil³⁴

Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator

In 2015 the attainment gap between looked after children and all pupils at the Foundation Phase was much narrower for Merthyr Tydfil (7 percentage points) compared to the all Wales average (23 percentage points).

Table 6: Percentage achieving the Foundation phase outcome indicator

Year	CLA	All pupils	Attainment gap (percentage points)	Welsh average attainment gap (percentage points)
2015	82	89	7	23
2014	*	81	*	28
2013	*	78	*	29

*data item not available

Key Stage 2 Teacher Assessments

The attainment gap for Key Stage 2 has narrowed between 2014 and 2015 and is due to standards of children looked after improving at a faster rate compared to all pupils (see Table 7 overleaf). However the attainment gap remains wider than the all Wales average (34 percentage points compared to 24).

Table 7: Percentage achieving Key Stage 2 Core Subject Indicator

³⁴ Due to small numbers historical data is not available on StatsWales for all indicators preventing a comparison.

Year	CLA	All pupils	Attainment gap (percentage points)	Welsh average attainment gap (percentage points)
2015	55	89	34	24
2014	45	84	39	29
2013	*	81	*	30

*data item not available

Key Stage 3 Teacher Assessments

In 2015 standards for children looked after at Key Stage 3 were very close to those achieved by all pupils- just a 4 point percentage gap considerably narrower than the all Wales average of 36 percentage points.

Table 8: Percentage achieving Key Stage 3 Core Subject Indicator

Year	CLA	All pupils	Attainment gap (percentage points)	Welsh average attainment gap (percentage points)
2015	80	84	4	36
2014	*	75	*	35
2013	*	69	*	41

*data item not available

Key Stage 4

Research shows there are strong links between successfully attaining GCSEs (five or more A*-C) and higher levels of life satisfaction among young people³⁵. There is also a strong association between quality GCSEs and positive health and labour market outcomes. Therefore performance at Key Stage 4 is an important impact indicator to show we are appropriately supporting children looked after.

The performance of children looked after at Key Stage 4 on the level 2 threshold inclusive is not available on StatsWales due to disclosure. However we do know that the overall average wider points score has declined between 2014 and 2015 and is below the Welsh average. Performance on this important indicator requires significant improvement in Merthyr Tydfil.

What are we doing about standards?

In Merthyr Tydfil the 'Strategy for Success' and action plan to improve the educational attainment of children and young people who are looked after in Merthyr Tydfil has been developed in co-production with young people who have been looked after.

This strategy and action plan is underpinned by the new legislative framework and national strategy in Wales and focuses on:

- All stakeholders knowing their roles, responsibilities and best practice
- Building good partnerships with foster carers, schools and providers
- Implementing evidence based interventions for attainment

³⁵ Dept. of Education (2011). Youth Cohort study and longitudinal study of young people in England: The activities and experiences of 19 year olds: England 2010. London: DfE

- Tracking achievement termly and implementing actions to address under performance
- Reviewing funding so that it is targeted at identified need
- Out of school activities to enable children and young people who are looked after to meet and share experiences in a supportive environment

Rhondda Cynon Taf

Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator

The attainment gap between looked after children and all pupils at the Foundation Phase has narrowed when comparing data for the last two years (Table 9).

In 2015 the attainment gap in RCT (29 percentage points) was wider than the all Wales average (23 percentage points).

Table 9: Percentage achieving the Foundation phase outcome indicator

Year	CLA	All pupils	Attainment gap (percentage points)	Welsh average attainment gap (percentage points)
2015	57	86	29	23
2014	56	82	26	28
2013	58	81	23	29

Key Stage 2 Teacher Assessments

Table 10 shows the attainment gap between children looked after and all pupils at Key Stage 2 has narrowed considerably between 2013 and 2015 but remains wider than the all Wales average (15 percentage points compared to 24).

Table 10: Percentage achieving Key Stage 2 Core Subject Indicator

Year	CLA	All pupils	Attainment gap (percentage points)	Welsh average attainment gap (percentage points)
2015	71	86	15	24
2014	53	84	31	29
2013	44	83	39	30

Key Stage 3 Teacher Assessments

As can be seen from Table 11 overleaf, the attainment gap for Key Stage 3 widened between 2014 and 2015 and is larger than in 2013.

In 2015 the gap between children looked after and all pupils in RCT was wider than the Welsh average (50 percentage points compared to 36).

Table 11: Percentage achieving Key Stage 2 Core Subject Indicator

Year	CLA	All pupils	Attainment gap (percentage points)	Welsh average attainment gap (percentage points)
2015	32	82	50	36
2014	34	78	44	35
2013	24	73	49	41

Key Stage 4

The attainment gap between children looked after and all pupils for the Level 2 threshold inclusive was 36 percentage points, smaller than the all Wales average. Comparisons cannot be made between 2014 and 2015 as the data has not been published on StatsWales. However as can be seen from Table 12, the attainment gap in 2015 was larger than in 2013.

Table 12: Percentage achieving Key Stage 4 Core Subject Indicator

Year	CLA	All pupils	Attainment gap (percentage points)	Welsh average attainment gap (percentage points)
2015	19	55	36	40
2014	N/A	51	n/a	38
2013	11	46	35	40

What are we doing about standards?

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council has identified the following priorities (subject to budgetary approval being secured) to improve the attainment of children looked after:

- Providing specialist support for KS4 learners preparing for GCSEs;
- Provision of intensive training and support for social workers and foster carers in relation to improving educational outcomes;
- Support and training for designated teachers.
- Development of a CLA-Friendly School resource files
- LAC Co-ordinators to develop innovative approaches/interventions by ensuring the voice of children and young people in care is captured and appropriate interventions put in place to address issues identified.

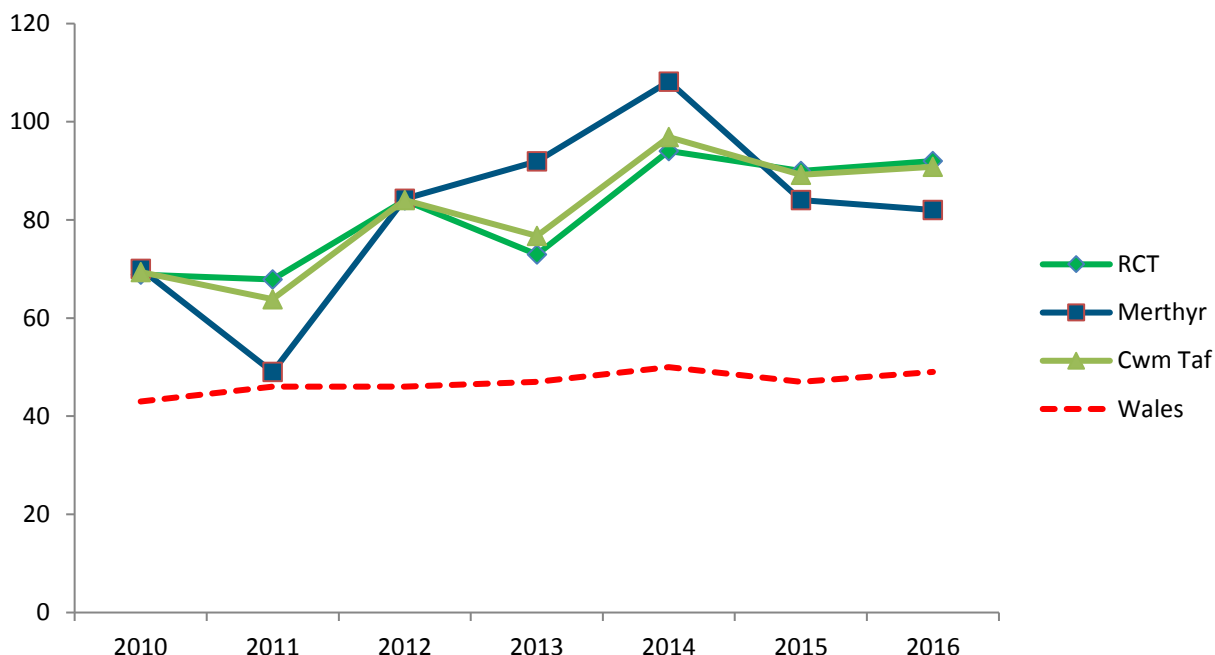
Child Protection Register [Rate of children on the Child Protection Register 2016](#)

In 2015/16, there were 565 children on the Child Protection Register across Cwm Taf an increase of 1.8 percent over the previous year, and a rate of 91 per 10,000 children under 18 (Wales 49 per 10,000 children).

In Merthyr Tydfil the number of children on the child protection register remained unchanged from the previous year at 105, which is a rate of 82 per 10,000 population aged under 18. Over the last 5 years Merthyr Tydfil has had a significant proportion of children on the child protection register, well above the rates nationally.

In RCT there was an increase in the number of children on the CPR, up 10 to 460 and the joint highest rate in Wales of 92 per 10,000 population aged under 18. Similar to Merthyr Tydfil, rates in RCT have remained well above the Wales average for the last 5 years.

Figure 7: Children on the child protection register at 31 March per 10,000 population aged under 18



Age of children under protection

Table 13 overleaf shows the number of children on the child protection register by age group across Cwm Taf. The age groupings are helpful for showing the amount of age-appropriate services needed.

Table 13: Number of children under child protection, by age, Cwm Taf, 2015

	Under 1	Age 1 to 4	Age 5 to 9	Age 10 to 15	Age 16 to 17
Merthyr Tydfil	10	30	30	25	*
RCT	50	150	135	100	10
Cwm Taf	60	180	165	125	10

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5 to avoid disclosure

How safe are our children?³⁶

The NSPCC overview of child protection in the UK complies and analyses the most robust and up-to-date child protection data that exists across the 4 nations in the UK for 2016.

Key findings

There has been an increase in the reporting and recording of child abuse and neglect. All 4 countries in the UK have seen the number of recorded sexual offences against children increase over the last year.

England and Wales have seen an increase in the number of recorded cruelty and neglect offences in the last year.

³⁶ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/research-and-resources/2016/how-safe-are-our-children-2016/>

Reports of online abuse have increased, including:

- a rise in the number of ChildLine counselling sessions about sexting and cyberbullying
- an increase in the number of URLs containing child abuse images being identified and removed from the internet
- an increase in the number of recorded obscene publication offences.

Gap in the evidence

Analysis of the information gathered has highlighted a gap in the evidence based for this chapter around emerging local safeguarding issues. We have identified that we need to include more information about this area when the population assessment is reviewed. Link to chapter on sexual violence provide info on sex exploitation.

Care Leavers: [National Strategic Indicators](#)

In 2015/16 there was a total of 69 Care Leavers in Cwm Taf who were looked after. Of those young people 89.8 percent (62) were still in contact with the local authority(s). The number of Care Leavers who are not in contact with the local authority was 2 in Merthyr Tydfil and 5 in RCT.

Figure 8: Care Leavers in RCT

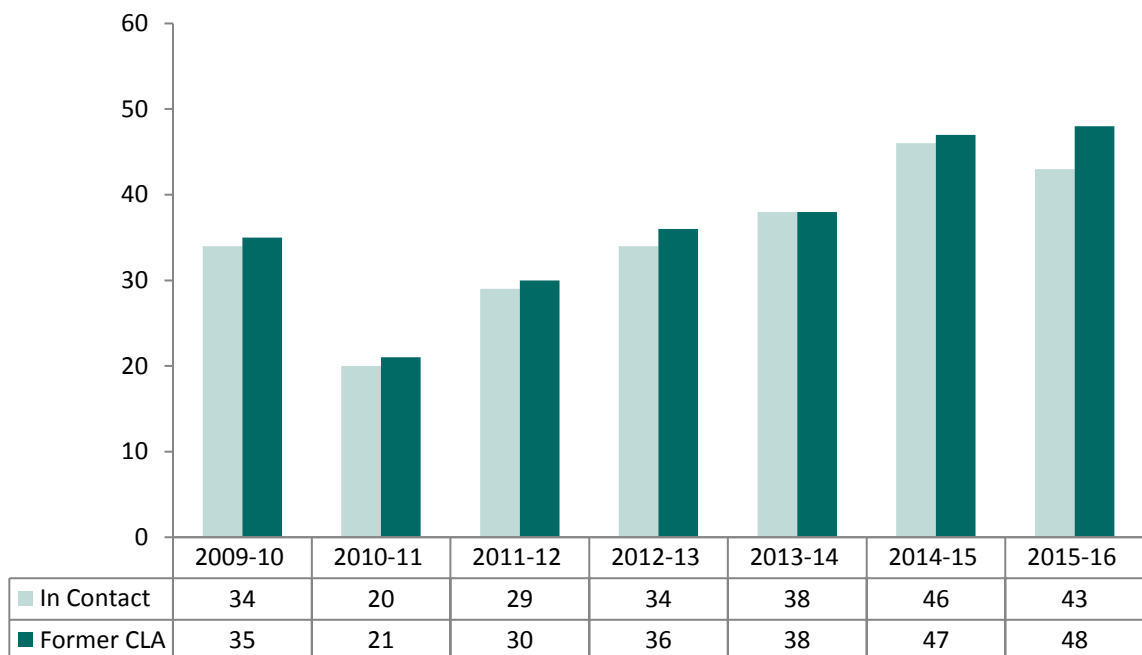
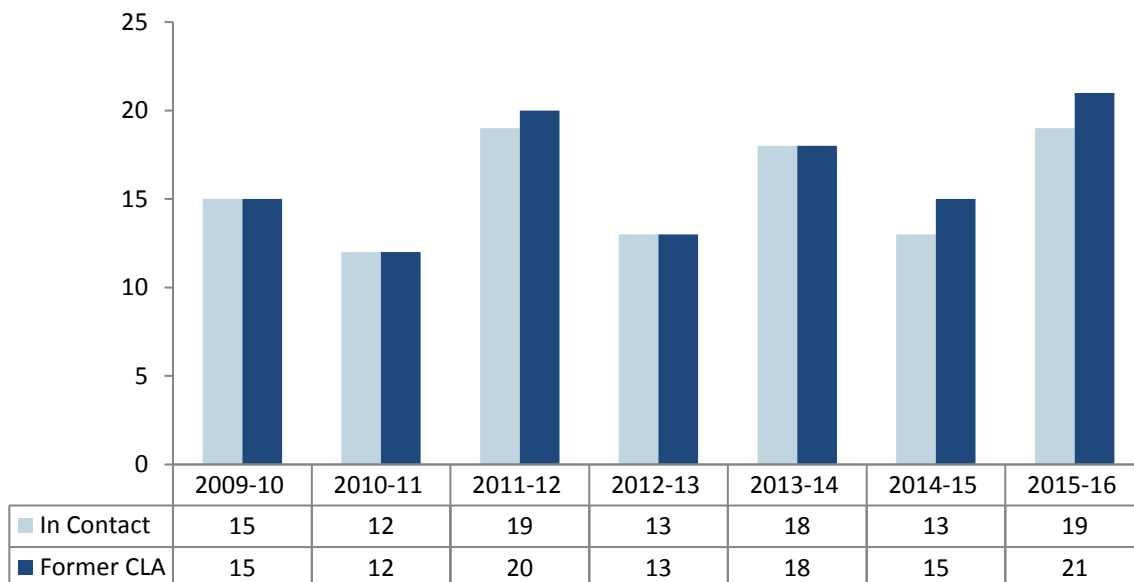
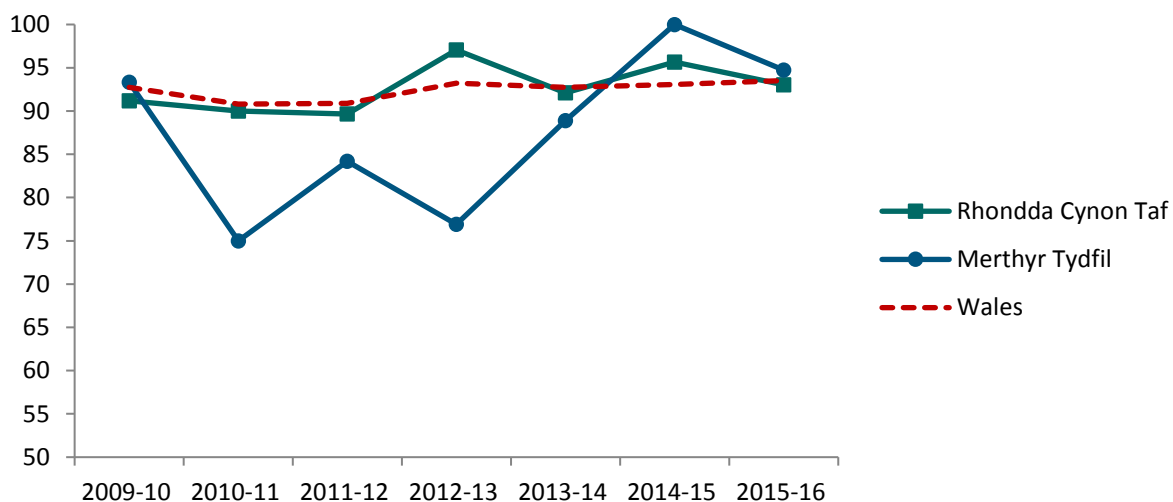


Figure 9: Care Leavers in MT



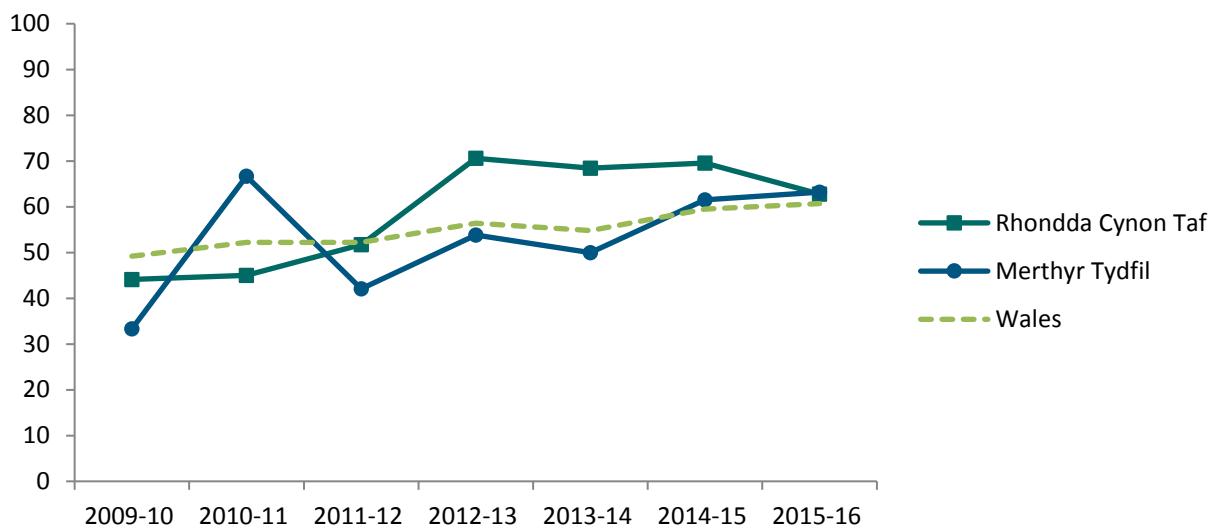
93.5 percent of Care Leavers in contact with the local authority(s) in Cwm Taf were in suitable non-emergency accommodation.

Figure 10 Percentage of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation at age of 19



37.1 percent (62) of Care Leavers in contact with the local authority(s) in Cwm Taf were NEET. The corresponding NEETs level for all young people in Wales aged 19-24 was 19 percent at the end of 2015. The number of Care Leavers who were NEET was 7 in Merthyr Tydfil and 16 in RCT.

Figure 11: Percentage of Care Leavers in education, employment or training at age of 19



Education

Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, 95 children aged 16 or over ceased being looked after in Cwm Taf and 79 percent of these children had at least one qualification, similar to the all Wales average.

The proportion of care leavers aged 16 or over with 5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to G increased slightly from 27 percent in 2013-14, to 29 percent in 2014-15 in RCT. In Merthyr Tydfil performance declined by decreased from 45 percent in 2013/14 to 27 percent in 2014-15.

In 2014/15 9 percent (5) of care leavers in RCT achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to C, the Wales average was 11 percent (80). There was not data published for Merthyr Tydfil and no data for either LA in 2013/14.

Gap in evidence

The issues facing care leavers have been well documented – poor housing, risk of homelessness, unemployment, health problems, social isolation or ending up in custody³⁷. In Wales the Children’s Commissioner³⁸ has picked Transition – better support and planning to improve the transition to adulthood as one of her priorities to improve the lives of young people.

A gap in our knowledge for this assessment is the voice of the care leavers themselves. Their experience of the support they have received, the challenges they have experienced and what would have made life easier for them is a crucial piece of evidence that we recognise we need to gather.

³⁷ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmpublic/411/411.pdf>

³⁸ <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Strategic-Plan-English.compressed.pdf>