

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

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| Date Written   | 27 <sup>th</sup> September 2019 |
| Report Author  | Annabel Lloyd                   |
| Service Area   | Children's Services             |
| Committee Date | 8 <sup>th</sup> October 2019    |

To: Chair, Ladies and  
Gentlemen

# Children's Services Strategy

## 1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report provides Scrutiny Committee with information about development and progress with Children's Services Strategy.

## 2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That Scrutiny Committee receive this report and raise questions and challenge that will lead to improvement.

## 3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In September 2018, Children's Services provided Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the service strategy for improving the well-being of children and young people. The strategy sets out our approach to the work linked to the Council's Statement of Wellbeing, and its Plan "Focus on the Future". The same strategy also responds to children's services' role in contributing to outcomes under the Cwm Taf Statement of Strategic Intent for Children, Young People and Families, and the Public Services Board Cwm Taf Well-Being Objectives.

### Legislative Context

3.1 <sup>1</sup>The [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) specifies that we must work to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales by

<sup>1</sup> Read the [essential guide](#) to the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

maximising our contribution to the Wellbeing Goals. We must do this in accordance with the sustainable development principle, which means that we act in a manner that seeks to ensure the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

3.2 There are 5 things that we need to do in order to show that we have applied the sustainable development principle. The five things are:

- Long Term
- Preventative
- Involvement
- Collaboration
- Integrated

3.3 <sup>2</sup>The [Social Services and Wellbeing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) specifies that we must seek to improve the wellbeing of people who need care and support, carers who need support and for transforming social services in Wales. The focus of this Act is on what matters to the person and how they can use their own strengths and resources to do those things, which is determined by an assessment that involves the person and the professional(s). The Act enhances the duty to collaborate in pursuit of early identification in order to prevent escalation of need.

3.4 In order to improve wellbeing, local authorities, health boards and NHS trusts must work closely to ensure better integration of health and social care. Local authorities and health boards must work together to assess care and support needs (and carer support needs) of the population in their area. As a result, they will identify what services are needed.

## 4.0 WHERE WE WERE

4.1 Included below is a summary and update against each area of business under children's services strategy. The Strategy on a Page itself is included at Appendix 1.

## 5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

5.1 The service strategy is directly related to the corporate vision statement included in Focus on the Future that is included on our Strategy on a Page:

- *Children and young people are safe and healthy;*
- *have the right help at the right time;*
- *are supported to live with their family or close to home;*
- *and have stable and successful lives.*

5.2 Further progress has been made in relation to Children's Services' strategy has developed considerably since the last update to Scrutiny Committee in March 2019. Each area of development is aimed at preventing escalation of need, improving the

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<sup>2</sup> Read the [essential guide](#) to the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014

wellbeing of vulnerable young people with care and support needs, and delivering budget efficiencies. Children's services management team, relevant partners, service users and staff have been engaged in the development of the strategy and its related action plans.

5.3 Children's Services Strategy itself included the following components:

- **Earlier intervention to prevent escalation of need** – making sure that Children and their families receive the right help at the right time to prevent unnecessary escalation of need.
- **Enhancing services at the edge of care** – (Previously known as the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy) making sure intervention is evidenced based to prevent further escalation of need and risk; that where we need to look after young people we do so at the right time, ensuring every safe opportunity for care within the family network is fully explored.
- **Success, Stability and Transition** –making sure that looked after young people and care leavers achieve stable and successful lives as a basis form where to transition into adulthood.
- **Strategy for Improving Performance:** –making sure that we continually improve the services we deliver and our outcomes.
- **Workforce Strategy:** ensuring that we can successfully recruit qualified social workers; and that the service is staffed by colleagues who are well supported with the right values, qualifications and skills.

5.4 Children's Services Staff have highlighted the following **values and principles** as important to their **ways of working** and identity as a staff group:

- We listen to young people, their families and colleagues
- We step up and step down service but avoid stepping away too soon
- We are positive and have a 'can do' attitude
- We embrace change
- Continuous improvement lies at the heart of our work – we welcome challenge
- We want to innovate and be leaders in practice
- We are passionate about making a difference for future generations of Merthyr Tydfil families

5.5 Included below is a summary of progress against the Children's Services' developing strategy:

| Key Project and business areas  | Progress   |
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| <p><b>Earlier intervention to prevent escalation of need - Right Help at Right Time</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IAA</li> <li>• Young Carers</li> <li>• Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub</li> <li>• Step up Step down and MIA Co-ordination</li> <li>• Young Carers</li> </ul> | <p>The Early Help Hub is now live with a formal launch planned for November.</p> <p>The EHH multi-disciplinary Steering group will oversee and track progress with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing partner engagement in IAA</li> <li>• Improving the digital information that is available</li> <li>• Implementation of regional Carers strategy in relation to young carers</li> <li>• Develop the pathway to support services for families with Children with Disabilities</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Next Steps</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Settle in the Early Help Hub and track improvement plan, making improvements as data and feedback from family experiences</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Enhancing Services at the Edge of Care – Right Decision at Right Time</b></p> <p>(Previously Children Looked After Prevention Strategy)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting Change Team</li> <li>• Multi-agency Risk Assessment Framework (MARAF)</li> </ul>          | <p>Appointments have been made to the Supporting Change (SC) Team which is now taking cases identified at the SC Panel. The tender for family group conference has been finalised. The team will deliver the authority’s duty under part 9 of the Social Services and Well-Being Act to provide and Integrated Family Support Service. The evidence base to the re-design has been reviewed and we will meet later in the month to commence planning for an evaluation one year on.</p> <p>The work of the team will support the service in making the right decision at the right time and notable look for opportunities to make lasting changes that prevent entry into the looked after system. Where a child needs to become looked after, this team will support the service in making that decision earlier in childhood when there are better outcomes for children looked after. Building on the learning from 18-19, we are keen to improve how we use the Public Law Outline.</p> |

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|  | <p><b><u>Next Steps</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Settle in the New Edge of Care Team and track improvement plan and outcomes</li><li>• Increase our use of the MARAF</li><li>• Continue the work of the QA Framework</li></ul> |
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- Settle in the New Edge of Care Team and track improvement plan and outcomes
- Increase our use of the MARAF
- Continue the work of the QA Framework

**Strategy for Stability, Success and Transition**

- National Fostering Framework: Foster Carer recruitment and retention; Fostering Well-being
- Regional Adoption Collaboration
- Corporate Parenting
- Education for Looked after young people
- Pathway to Work
- Care Leavers' Strategy
- Therapy (Multi-agency Permanence Support Service MAPSS)
- Placement Commissioning Strategy

The work of the regional front door for fostering has led to a small number of new assessments for foster carers. Chief Officers across the Council have agreed to work together in pursuit of a revised offer for foster carers which we hope will build on the positive changes we are seeing.

It is early days, but our Fostering Well-being champions are working well supporting other carers and our recruitment ambition.

The new service for Care Leavers is in place and we will sign off our Care Leaver's strategy at Corporate Parenting Board in December. We are preparing our annual report for CPB and can bring that to this Committee for scrutiny.

We are working on improved arrangements for transition planning and will finalise the Protocol in November.

New grant funding (ICF) has been identified to support care experienced to work as outline in the Pathway to work. This will be presented to Chief Officers in October with a view to identifying traineeships and work experiences within the Council.

We are aware that a high number of our looked after young people require support with education and we are preparing for the significant impact of the ALN reforms. We are very proud indeed of young people's achievements and a celebration event is planned for November.

The service is working through the action plan for our Placement Commissioning Strategy and tangible progress is being made on developing suitable housing options for care leavers. We have done less well on increasing the numbers of foster carers in county and in establishing an emergency residential provision, however plans are in

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|  | <p>place.</p> <p>A market engagement meeting with potential providers for a therapeutic service for looked after young people is planned for September. This will assist in improving the specification for the service which we plan to go to tender on shortly afterwards.</p> <p>The annual report for the Regional Adoption Collaboration will be brought to this Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p><b><u>Next Steps</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue the work of the regional fostering front door</li> <li>• Implement the action plan for the Care Leavers' Strategy</li> <li>• Finalised revised transition arrangements</li> <li>• Implement the Placement Commissioning Strategy action plan</li> <li>• Implement the action plan for the Pathway to work</li> <li>• Complete Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report and bring it to Scrutiny Committee</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Strategy for Improving Performance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation and the Young Person's Voice</li> <li>• Partnership Working</li> <li>• Policies and Procedures</li> <li>• Performance Review</li> <li>• Quality Assurance Framework</li> <li>• Outcome Focused Work</li> </ul> | <p>Performance for 18-19 was good with all but 2 areas reporting improvement on the year before. Areas for focus relate to minimising unplanned school moves and improving the employment, education and training take up for care leavers.</p> <p>Care experienced young people have continued to work with Voices from Care at the Merthyr Forum and have opportunities to link into other participation events. We have also supported some looked after young people in keeping in touch after their positive experience of Jamie's Farm.</p>   |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent Reviewing Service</li> <li>• Self- Evaluation and annual council report</li> </ul> | <p>The quality assurance framework has produced considerable focus for both recognition of good work and improvement. The service reported on positive outcomes and service user voice in the Self Evaluation Report brought to the last Scrutiny Committee. A headline summary of key learning themes during the past year include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to continue to work with staff to achieve consistent adherence to national, regional and local protocols and procedures</li> <li>• Need to make changes to prevent delay in transferring cases between teams</li> <li>• Need to improve the escalation and resolution process</li> <li>• Need to continue work that supports sound judgement and avoidance of the rule of optimism</li> </ul> <p>Prior reports have been provided to Scrutiny Committee in relation to the post Care Inspectorate Wales Action Plan. Whilst we recognise that there are areas of practice requiring continuing improvement to achieve a consistently good standard, that plan has been signed off. We have revised the Quality Assurance Framework for 19/20 to increase the involvement of practitioners in peer review and, ensuring that families' voices are afforded substantial importance in driving changes.</p> <p>An area of work that has continued into 2019/20 is a plan in relation to one area of the service where we most need to provide support. Resources have increased in that part of the service, new staff have been recruited, and training has been provided. Staff have been involved in a culture- change journey that has included both team and individual work. The improvement plan is tracking the changes that are required to achieve consistently good standards in doing the basic things well, and progress has been made with further assessment of that progress taking place in the winter ahead of</p> |
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|   | <p>a proposed step down from the action plan subject to the objectives being achieved .</p> <p>In addition to our work on regional partnership fora including Safeguarding Board, Region Partnership Board, Violence against Women and Sexual Violence Steering Group we are engaging with South Wales Police on their early action programme, and Local Health Board in relation to adoption medicals, CHC for children looked after and emergency responses for young people in distress.</p> <p>The Quality Assurance Framework is delivering important work in highlighting learning themes which are being translated into improvement. This has included identifying the need for improved use of the MARAF.</p> <p>Scrutiny Committee recently received our self-evaluation assessment of 'adequate', and acknowledging the challenges we will work towards a future assessment of 'good'.</p> <p><b><u>Next steps</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that young people's voices inform service improvements</li> <li>• Continue the work of the Quality Assurance Framework and corporate self-evaluation</li> <li>• Continue to monitor and improve performance</li> <li>• Implement the national protection procedures</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Workforce Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment</li> <li>• Retention</li> </ul> | <p>The service has recently been able to recruit successfully and during 19-20 we are able to focus more on staff retention and skills.</p> <p><b><u>Next steps:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training needs analysis</li> </ul>   |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caseload management</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Strategy for Sustainable Children's Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long Term efficiencies</li> <li>• Short Term efficiencies</li> </ul> | <p>There is a strong relationship between effective improvement of outcomes for people with care and support needs and effective use of resources. During 18-19 we finalised this piece of work that documents how our service strategy and the re-configuration was designed to deliver sustainability in the context of reducing resources; some examples of those long term efficiencies are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Help Hub – reduce avoidable escalations to statutory children's services</li> <li>• Supporting Change – reduce numbers of children looked after and age at which child becomes looked after</li> <li>• Placement Commissioning Strategy Regional Front Door Fostering – increase supply of LA foster carers and local lower cost provision</li> <li>• Therapy – meet need in looked after system and reduce avoidable escalations</li> <li>• Workforce – reduce reliance on agency staff</li> </ul> <p>The service has also delivered the following in year efficiencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closer to Home project – looking for opportunities to step down young people in high cots provisions to lower cost ones in ways that is in line with their well-being</li> <li>• Supporting Change – efficiency linked to providing local rather than regional services</li> <li>• Continuing Health Care - examples of shared costs with LHB for some young people with CHC needs</li> <li>• Vacancy management</li> <li>• Escalation avoidance at Placement Panel</li> <li>• Family First - placement with safe relatives as opposed to foster care wherever possible</li> </ul> |

## 6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

6.1 Merthyr Tydfil Children's Services plans to be a high performing service, working in co-production with partners and families, providing services within budget that are preventative, reduce risk, and increase resilience.

## 7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

7.1 Each project has a prioritised action plan which is updated quarterly with an annual review at year end. Action plan are linked to our performance management framework and the Council's policy Focus on Performance.

## 8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

8.1 This area of business is located in the following wellbeing objective:

- People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they are safe and enjoy good physical and mental health

*Lisa Curtis Jones*  
**CHIEF OFFICER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**EXECUTIVE'S NAME**  
**TITLE**

**PORTFOLIO COUNCILLOR'S NAME**  
**PORTFOLIO TITLE**

| <b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>   |                         |                           |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Title of Document(s)</b>  | <b>Document(s) Date</b> | <b>Document Location</b>  |
| Children's Services<br>Strategy Scrutiny<br>Committee Report                         | September 2018          | Civic and Council website |
| <b>Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?</b> |                         | <b>No</b>                 |