

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	3 rd February 2020
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Service Area	Learning
Committee Date	25 th February 2020

To: *Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen*

Best Start to Life

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 We have set Wellbeing Objectives for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, and how we intend to achieve these objectives is set out in our plan 'Focus on the Future: Wellbeing in our Community'. The focus of this report is on the wellbeing theme **Best Start to Life**.
- 1.2 The Council is committed to ensuring excellent educational achievement by delivering key strategies that will focus robustly on improving standards and the quality of leadership.
- 1.3 Using the most recent performance information, this report establishes the current position for the wellbeing objective: **Children and young people get the best start to life and are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals**.
- 1.4 An annual review during 2018/19 highlighted the need to further refine and refresh the key outcomes. This ensures that the outcomes clearly describe what the Best Start to Life objective seeks to achieve. Therefore, for 2019/20 it was decided to refocus the outcomes to support a more integrated/collaborative approach being taken to meet these. The key long-term outcomes for Best Start to Life are:
- Children live in a nurturing and stimulating home environment
 - Children have access to high quality pre-school and school
 - Improve the educational outcomes for all children and young people
 - Children and young people have good health and wellbeing
- 1.5 The report also includes information requested by Committee Members with a specific focus on attainment levels across the County Borough. As part of this report, the Committee wish to receive information on different activities that are being delivered to support improvement in attainment levels (excluding targeting an improvement in attendance).

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 The content of this report to be discussed and performance information scrutinised.
- 2.2 Scrutiny Committee Members offer any appropriate feedback to enable officers to consider when undertaking future service planning and delivery discussions.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Legislative Context

- 3.1 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 maximising our contribution to the seven Wellbeing Goals.
- 3.2 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. There are five ways of working that we need to do adopt in order to show that we have applied the sustainable development principle. The five ways of working are:
 - Long Term
 - Prevention
 - Integrated
 - Collaboration
 - Involvement
- 3.3 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).

Strategic Context and Service Delivery

The Council is committed to delivering excellent services. It will do this by delivering its key strategies and through joint working with a range of partners. The key strategies that focus on delivering excellent services in Education are:

- DRAFT Raising Standards Raising Aspirations (RARS) Strategy
- Early Years Strategy
- Youth Services Strategy
- Central South Consortium (CSC) Business Plan)
- DRAFT Tackling Poverty Strategy
- Active Merthyr Plan

The Learning department works collaboratively with other departments within the Council. School improvement is delivered through a commissioning arrangement with the Central South Consortium (CSC). Alongside this, to support the wider areas of Best Start, the department works with external partners from the Public Service Board (PSB).

- 3.4 The Council's contribution to achieving the seven wellbeing goals is outlined in our plan [\[Focus on the Future: Wellbeing in our Community\]](#). On the 4th April 2018, Full Council approved a revised version of the Plan, which reduced the number of wellbeing objectives from 9 to 4. The updated objectives can be found in **Appendix 1**.

- 3.5 The Chief Officer for Education reports on the wellbeing theme *Best Start to Life*. The purpose of this report is to coordinate the performance information for this wellbeing objective and offer insights in the change of working practice linked to the wellbeing objective: ***Children and young people get the best start to life and are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals.***

4. WHERE WE WERE

- 4.1 At the end of 2017/18; the Council published its [Annual Performance Report](#), which evaluated performance across all nine wellbeing objectives at the end of year one of the corporate wellbeing plan *Focus on the Future*.

- 4.2 The Chief Officer for Education has the lead for Best Start to Life, which at that time had two wellbeing objectives; these were:

BS1: Children get the best start to life; and

BS2: Children and young people are equipped with the skills and attributes they need to be successful learners and confident individuals

- 4.3 Our evaluation of performance in 2017 was **Adequate** because, although overall attainment at the average level in Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 was good and adequate at Key Stage 3, performance at Key Stage 4 was unsatisfactory in nearly all key indicators and attendance remained an area for further improvement.

4.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 Following a review of year 1 of *Focus on the Future*, the nine wellbeing objectives were reduced to four. The re-focused themes and objective can be found in **Appendix 1**.

- 5.2 The Learning department continues to host learning away days to collaboratively plan how key tasks and activities will be tackled. This group is made up of officers across a number of service areas across the Council both within the Chief Officer's directorate and includes officers from other services areas including the Leisure, Culture and Sports Development Manager. This group also provides a platform for planning discussions, officer led constructive challenge around activities delivered, targets set whilst also opening the doorway to exploring new opportunities, joint working relationships and making more meaningful service connections. The Learning department also continues to work collaboratively with CSC with the aim to improve attainment levels across the County Borough.

- 5.3 The Best Start to Life Strategy on a Page (SOAP) contains performance data for the selected local performance indicators over time (where available) to offer an opportunity to identify trends. The Best Start to Life SOAP is attached as **Appendix 2**.

- 5.4 The summary of current performance at Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and 3 is attached as Appendix 3, and the summary of current performance at Key Stage 4 is included in Appendix 4 of the report.

- 5.5 The Annual Performance Report (APR) 2018/19 was recently presented at Full Council; this provided an overview of the key corporate performance indicators. The overall judgement allocated for Best Start for 2018/19 was **Unsatisfactory**. This is because although overall attainment at Foundation Phase was good, attainment in Key Stages 2 and 3 was adequate and unsatisfactory in Key Stage 4.

5.0 RESPONSE TO INFORMATION REQUEST OUTLINED BY THE COMMITTEE

- 6.1 The Committee outlined in its Work Programme a requirement for officers to provide specific information on “*attainment levels across the County Borough*”.

As part of this report, the Committee wish to receive information on different activities being delivered to support an improvement in attainment levels (excluding targeting an improvement in attendance).

- 6.2 Raising standards of attainment is a priority for the Council. Well-being is strongly linked to attainment. Pupils with better health and well-being are more likely to be ready to learn and achieve better academically.

The early years are fundamental to a child's potential for learning and their future life chances. We want all children to be equipped with the skills they need to reach their academic potential, and contribute as responsible citizens to their own development and that of the wider community.

In schools, our priorities are to drive improvement in standards of literacy and numeracy, through improving the quality of teaching and leadership, and to reduce the impact of socio-economic deprivation on educational attainment.

- 6.3 **Raising Standards Raising Aspirations (RARS):** The Learning department in conjunction with the CSC are in the process of developing a strategy around Raising Standards Raising Aspirations. The strategy is currently in development stage and is subject to further consultation from a number of key stakeholders including:

- Learning Department staff
- Wider Council staff
- Elected Members
- All Head teachers
- All Teaching staff
- Parents
- Schools Councils
- Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum
- Governing Bodies
- The College
- Local Employers
- CSC

The strategy sets out the key outcomes, activities and behaviours that the Council will pursue in support of our corporate priorities and a culture of continuous improvement. In support of the Council's, Corporate Wellbeing Plan (Focus on the Future 2017-2022), the Raising Aspirations Raising Standards Strategy (RARS) will directly influence and impact on one of the Council's priorities of improving attainment. It aims to ensure that children and young people are well placed to move into adult life and employment or further/higher education. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council aims for effective learning and teaching throughout each young person's school experience to enable them to maximise their potential.

- 6.4 **21st Century Schools:** As part of our commitment to provide future generations of children and young people with the best start to life, we are working to promote attractive and stimulating learning environments based on low carbon, energy efficient and sustainable design principles through the delivery of our 21st Century Schools and capital investment programmes.

Working collaboratively with stakeholders including Planning, Property Services and with Blaenau Gwent's Architectural Services, our ambition is to provide the very best sustainable low maintenance and cost-effective learning environments.

As part of the capital investment proposals, we aim to deliver collocation of early year's education and childcare on school sites and to promoting the Welsh language by increasing the provision of school and childcare places through the medium of Welsh.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

7.1 It is the ambition of the local authority to be closer to or above the Welsh averages in all performance measures by 2022 and at or above the modelled outcomes in 2021.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

8.1 Finalise and publish the RARS Strategy following the consultation process in accordance with the targeted completion date of September 2020.

8.2 Ensure Flying Start providers continue to strive for excellent outcomes for all children. This will be achieved through clear action planning, training and support for all providers.

8.3 Ensure schools focus on improving outcomes for all children in all age phases. This will be achieved through focussing on improving teaching and learning. The Local Authority in partnership with the Central South Consortium has continued to provide effective monitoring, challenge, support and intervention for all schools across the borough, which is bespoke to the needs of the school.

8.4 Continue to work with schools and Corporate Communications to promote the importance of attendance. Develop closer links with Families First to ensure parents are supported to focus on good attendance at school.

8.5 Continue to develop the School Support Service (incorporating Behaviour Support and Greenfield Outreach Service) in order to enhance the strategies used by schools to manage behaviour issues which could lead to exclusion.

9.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES/WELLBEING GOALS

9.1 The improvement activities identified in this report directly contribute to our wellbeing objective:

Best Start to Life: Children and young people get the best start to life and are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals.

9.2 The planned next steps for the Corporate Wellbeing Plan (Focus on the Future 2017-2022) and Tackling Poverty will ensure that the activities of the Learning Department will more robustly impact on the wellbeing objective:

Working Life: People feel supported to develop skills required to meet the needs of businesses, with a developing, safe infrastructure that establishes Merthyr Tydfil as an attractive destination.

Living Well: People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they are safe and enjoy good physical and mental health.

9.3 With regards to the Council's contribution to the national wellbeing goals; this has been captured via a series of case studies, which can be found in the Annual Performance Report 2018-19 that was recently published in line with the statutory deadline.

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COUNCILLOR LISA MYTTON
CABINET MEMBER FOR LEARNING

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No