

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Date Written	January 2021
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Service Area	Children's Services
Committee Date	2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2021

*To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen*

### **Children's Services Strategy**

#### **1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

1.1 This report provides Scrutiny Committee with information regarding the developments and progress made within the Children's Services Strategy.

#### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1 Scrutiny Committee is asked to receive this report and to raise questions and challenge leading to improvement.

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

3.1 In March 2020, Children's Services provided Scrutiny Committee with an overview and update of the service strategy for improving the well-being of children and young people. The strategy sets out our approach to delivering the Council's duties to vulnerable young people.

3.2 Children's Services 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**

3.3 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 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.

- 3.4 There are 5 elements that we need to consider and evidence in order to show that we have applied the sustainable development principle. The five things are:

**Long Term** - The importance of balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.

**Preventative** - How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

**Involvement** - The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

**Collaboration** - Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.

**Integrated** - with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.

- 3.5 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). Fundamental to The Act is enhancing the duty to collaborate in pursuit of early identification in order to prevent escalation of need.

- 3.6 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 In March 2020 we shared with Scrutiny Committee an update on Children's Service Strategy. The report was written in February prior to any Covid pandemic restrictions being imposed. Included below is a summary an update against each area of business under the Children's Services Strategy.

## 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 Within Children's Services Strategy there are six key building blocks for success:

**Earlier intervention (Right help at the right time)** making sure those Children and their families receive the right help at the right time to prevent unnecessary escalation of need.

**Supporting Change (Right decision at the right time)** - making sure intervention is evidence 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 (Right environment at the right time)** - making sure that looked after young people and care leavers achieve stable and successful lives as a basis from 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.

**Strategy for Sustainable Children's Services** - a 3-year plan setting out the services' approach to delivering short and long term efficiencies.

- 5.3 Each building block aims to prevent escalation of need, improve the wellbeing of vulnerable young people with care and support needs, and deliver 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.
- 5.4 Children's Services Staff have highlighted the following values and principles as important to their ways of working and how they identify 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 In October and December 2020 Children's Services held a Workshop style events with elected members to share operational details of how our building blocks to success support families and young people to achieve their outcomes.
- 5.6 Children's Services has reviewed its strategy in order to give clear consideration to overcoming the barriers that the current COVID pandemic places upon the building blocks that sit under the service strategy. It is important to note that whilst some of the barriers the pandemic presents can be mitigated against, it has created different

levels of challenge within different areas of our strategy. The ways in which we work have often needed to change considerably at short notice. The importance of both promoting the safety of the public and staff in line with COVID restrictions, in conjunction with high levels of complex cases, against a background of commitment to developing the service to achieve greater outcomes for the young people we work with has been complex and challenging. It is important that the pace and achievements in developing the service development is considered within this context.

5.7 Included below is a summary of progress against the Children’s Services’ developing strategy that forms our building blocks of success:

<b>Building Block for Success</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<p><b>Earlier intervention - Right Help at Right Time</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Early Help Hub</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Information, Advice and Assessment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Young Carers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Step-up Step-down and MIA Co-ordination</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Young Carers</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Where we were:</u></b></p> <p>The Early Help Hub went live in September 2019. This was the hubs first and only full reporting quarter that was not impacted by the global pandemic.</p> <p>Initial success was greater than projected, with early data indicating public awareness was higher than anticipated and the community’s experience of accessing the hub was positive.</p> <p>Measure: Q3 19/20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of referrals 253</li> <li>• No. of Proportionate Assessments undertaken 184</li> <li>• % step up from TAF to children services 5% (Previous Q2 7%)</li> <li>• % of EHH referrals that stepped up to children’s services &gt;1</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Where we are:</u></b></p> <p>The Early Help Hub has continued to provide a service throughout the pandemic, however the changes in ways of working for preventative services, due to COVID regulations has had implications for referrals and signposting.</p> <p>In March 2020, we shared that two new posts were being created within the Early Help Hub via partnership working with Health Services and the Police, unfortunately this did not come to fruition due to barriers created by the pandemic. These barriers have been overcome and both posts are projected to be aligned with the Early help Hub in 21/22. However, working relationships between the hub and these services has remained strong.</p> <p>Measure: Q3 20/21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of referrals 284</li> <li>• No of Proportionate Assessments 198</li> <li>• % step up from TAF to children services - 11% (6 out of 54 closures)</li> <li>• % of EHH referrals that stepped up to children’s services - 1% (4</li> </ul>

	<p>out of 284)</p> <p>It is important to note that the level of referrals have increased and now replicate what we saw in the previous year. The step-up rate to Children’s Services from TAF has increased; it is hypothesised that this is linked with current societal circumstances and reduced levels of face to face delivery within preventative and universal services.</p> <p><b><u>In line with this building block of success:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Families First has transitioned into Children’s Services Directorate.</li> <li>- Increased level of awareness sessions held for the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and Early Help Hub.</li> <li>- Explored how the Early Help Hub can support and develop links with other relevant Local Authority departments and preventative services.</li> <li>- Worked closely with Business Systems to collate reliable information via the WCCIS System.</li> <li>- Developed a pilot that will commence in Q4 of TAF cases accessing Family Group Conference support for families, where appropriate.</li> </ul> <p>The work undertaken within this building block of success has supported the Local Authority’s ability to marry but not merge preventative and statutory responsibilities to best meet the needs of our community. The Early Help Hub and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub has continued to provide a service throughout a very difficult and uncertain period of time and staff have adapted quickly to new ways of working that has also brought some learning we want to take forward, led to creative solutions and links to new partners.</p> <p><b><u>Next Steps</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to support our community to access the right service at the right time.</li> <li>- Support the maximisation of preventative services being utilised.</li> <li>- Look for every opportunity to increase the capacity and reach of preventative services.</li> <li>- Evaluate and adjust based upon evidence of need and effectiveness.</li> <li>- ICF funded Health post to commence their presence in the Early Help Hub.</li> <li>- Early Action Together engagement to continue to explore a Police presence within the Early Help Hub to support information sharing and families accessing the right help at the right time.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Supporting Change - Right Decision at Right Time</b> (Previously Children Looked After Prevention Strategy)</p>	<p><b><u>Where we were:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appointments had been made to the Supporting Change (SC) Team.</li> <li>- Further work was required to support families accessing Family Group Conferences.</li> <li>- Following changes in regional arrangements for the Local Authority’s delivery under Part 9 of the Social Services and Well-Being Act to provide an Integrated Family Support Service were</li> </ul>

- Supporting Change Team
- Multi-agency Risk Assessment Framework (MARAF)

commencing via the Supporting Change Team.

**Where we are now:**

- The Supporting change team is now fully functional.
- There is one current vacancy that is in the process of being recruited to.
- The work of the Supporting Change Team supports Children's Services making the right decision at the right time. Working with families to maximise 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 that we know achieves better outcomes for children looked after.
- Family Group Conference provision is now in place and consistently accessed by families.
- In 18/19 the average monthly rate of young people becoming looked after was 7.7. For 19/20 this reduced to 4.5. Over the first three quarters of 20/21 this figure currently sits at 4.5 children per month on average. This figure includes children who are made subject to PWP arrangements and kinship care.
- At 31.03.20 there were 208 children looked after, during the first quarter of the year this rose to as high as 224 due to case complexity and the pandemic presenting barriers to the safe exit of care for our looked after children. As of 31.12.20 there were 200 children looked after within the local authority.

The three teams based within the Supporting Change Service have adapted to new ways of working due to the global pandemic. Out of hours support has continued to be in place for families, along with crisis support when required.

During Q1, 2 and 3 2020/2021 80 families have been referred to the Supporting Change Intervention and Assessment Team whose delivery includes the Local Authority's duties under part 9. Despite the pandemic this is a considerable increase in intensive services being provided to families compared with 2018/2019 arrangements.

Families who have accessed support under this building block of our overall strategy have shared comments such as:

- The worker was someone I could open up to and not be judged.
- They helped me to see things differently and made me feel at ease.
- The worker helped me understand the impact of my choices, she really opened my eyes.
- Things were broken down and made it easier to understand, it helped me to think about how I approach situations and take on-board everyone's views. This service user also felt that the Supporting Change Team should work with families earlier (before court) and would recommend the service to others as he found the support beneficial.

	<p><b><u>Next Steps:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a clear pathway over the coming months to expand our use of Family Group Conferencing.</li> <li>- Review pilot of enhanced pre-birth planning.</li> <li>- Continue to embed service user feedback into the development of the service.</li> <li>- Recovery planning for service delivery, including family time post-covid.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategy for Stability, Success and Transition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> National Fostering Framework: Foster Carer recruitment and retention; Fostering Well-being</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Regional Adoption Collaboration</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Parenting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Education for Looked after young people</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pathway to Work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Care Leavers' Strategy</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Therapy (Multi-agency Permanence Support Service MAPSS)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Placement Commissioning Strategy</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Where we were:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council Tax reduction for foster carers had been approved by the Local Authority.</li> <li>- The Care Leaver's Strategy - Make Your Own Decision had been developed.</li> <li>- The Placement Commissioning Strategy Action Plan had been developed.</li> <li>- Achieved Council Support to the Pathway to Work for care experienced young people.</li> <li>- Regional agreement to the ICF funded Multi-Agency Placement Support Services (therapy for looked after young people is on track to commence in April 2020).</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Where we are:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council Tax reduction for foster carers has been implemented.</li> <li>- We continue to work closely with our carer leavers in line with The Care Leaver's Strategy - Make Your Own Decision.</li> <li>- There have been delays in the regional ICF funded Multi-Agency Placement Support Services going to tender, however, it is on track for delivery to commence in April 2021.</li> <li>- We have worked closely with Adults Services and other partners to develop a Transition Policy that will be presented to Scrutiny in February 2021.</li> <li>- We continue to work closely with Housing and relevant partners to develop the models of housing support available to our care experienced young people. This includes our care experienced young people co-producing housing projects.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Next Steps:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to involve young people in our work via our contract with Voices From Care.</li> <li>- Continue the work of the regional fostering front door.</li> <li>- Embed the developed Transition Policy.</li> <li>- Continue to implement the Placement Commissioning Strategy action plan.</li> <li>- Continue implement the action plan for the Pathway to work and build further opportunities for our children looked after.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategy for Improving Performance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participation and</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Where we were:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive performance in relationship to timeliness of response to new safeguarding concerns and assessment.</li> <li>- Increase in the number of care leavers in work 24 months after</li> </ul>

<p>the Young Person's Voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Partnership Working</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Policies and Procedures</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Performance Review</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Quality Assurance Framework</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Outcome Focused Work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Independent Reviewing Service</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Self- Evaluation and annual council report</li> </ul>	<p>leaving care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality Assurance Framework in place.</li> <li>- Passion 4 Practice had commenced but was within its infancy.</li> <li>- Challenges were linked to recording of GP and Dentist for looked after young people, Care Leavers being in work at 12 months following leaving care and Care Leavers experiencing homelessness. (Changes in WG reporting means these are no longer measures for 20/21).</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Where we are now:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continued positive performance in the timeliness of response to new safeguarding concerns and assessments.</li> <li>- Increased levels of care leavers in education or employment 12 and 24 months after leaving care.</li> <li>- Quality Assurance framework has developed from managerial led and audit based to a model of embedded quality assurance that is everyone's business.</li> <li>- Practice 4 Practice has flourished and led to pilot programmes for reducing levels of practitioner paperwork, technological developments to support family engagement and an embedded programme of outcomes-based practice development across Children's Services.</li> <li>- There is a systemic therapist currently working for the service to support reflective sessions to support staff reflection and wellbeing.</li> </ul> <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>- In line with the Quality Assurance action plan further embed the voice of families in service and practice development.</li> <li>- Continue the work of the Quality Assurance Framework and incorporate self-evaluation.</li> <li>- Continue to monitor and improve performance.</li> <li>- Roll out the Passion 4 Practice Programme to all Children's Services practitioners.</li> <li>- Continue to embed changes in relevant policy and legislation into service ways of working.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Workforce Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recruitment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Retention</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Where we were:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Against a backdrop of significant change in recruitment to social work posts, there had been a period of successful recruitments.</li> <li>- Council had supported the proposal that we employ 2 FTE social workers to address capacity issues in looked after cases, especially linked to cases of Placement with Parents.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Where are we now:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We have continued to see stable recruitment into Social Work posts within the service and high application rates for non-social work posts.</li> <li>- There is an increase in retention rates and skills development of staff within the service.</li> <li>- The 2 FTE Social Work posts that had been agreed by council we</li> </ul>



	<p>were unable to recruit into due to their peripatetic and fixed term contract nature. We presented a business case to council to covert these into three support worker posts, this was agreed and the posts have been filled.</p> <p><b><u>Next steps:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complete the current update of the workforce strategy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategy for Sustainable Children's Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Long Term efficiencies</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Short Term efficiencies</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Where we were:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demand was high and there were pressures in the system.</li> <li>- Concerns were highlighted that the Council needed to think in a long-term way in its investment in preventative services whilst being aware that there is no indication that complexity and level of demand for statutory services will change in the short term.</li> <li>- Closer 2 Home phase one had been completed.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Where we are:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demand continues to be high within the system, there are currently additional practice and financial demands due to the pandemic. It is important to consider than the longer-term implications of the pandemic on demand for social services is as yet unknown.</li> <li>- The movement of Families First into the Social Services directorate will support the marrying but not merging of preventative and statutory services. However, the long-term investment in preventative services to reduce statutory demand remains essential.</li> <li>- Closer 2 Home phase 2 has been completed and supported the step down of three young people from residential placements. This supported better outcomes for these young people but also offered financial efficiency.</li> <li>- The service's action plan under the strategy for sustainability has been updated to incorporate the actions identified in the short-term capacity review.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Next steps:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Closer 2 Home phase 3 to be implemented and the learning from phase 2 to be embedded.</li> <li>- Given the changing demands due to the pandemic consideration to be given to further revisiting the strategy for sustainability.</li> <li>- Continue twin track planning of short and long term efficiencies.</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.
- 6.2 Merthyr Tydfil's Children's Services is a service with a clear learning culture that means we will always continue to develop to best meet the needs of those who need our support.

## 7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

7.1 Each building block has designated action plans. We will continue to monitor the progress of each action plan quarterly. Action plans 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 (SOCIAL SERVICES)**

**COUNCILLOR CHRIS DAVIES**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR**  
**SOCIAL SERVICES**

<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>		
<b>Title of Document(s)</b>	<b>Document(s) Date</b>	<b>Document Location</b>
Children's Services Strategy Scrutiny Report March 2020	10 <sup>th</sup> March 2020	Online
<b>Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?</b>		No