

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	26 th May 2021
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Service Area	Children's Services
Committee Date	8 th June 2021

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Supporting Change

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

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

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

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 The Children's Services Strategy is made up of six key 'Building Blocks to 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.
- **Quality Assurance** - 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.
 - **Sustainable Children's Services** - a 3-year plan setting out the services' approach to delivering short and long term efficiencies.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 This report sets out the conception and development of the Supporting Change Building Block which delivers our edge of care offer. This offer consists of a specific Supporting Change Team and commissioned services.
- 3.4 In 2019, Children's Services reviewed its edge of care offer, in line with this consideration an evaluation was undertaken of our regional arrangement for Intensive Family Support Team hosted by Rhondda Cynon Taf. Following the evaluation, and Cabinet's approval, Merthyr Tydfil withdrew from the previous delivery mechanism and reconfigured the funding to develop the Supporting Change Assessment and Intervention arm of the team.
- 3.5 The Supporting Change Team has three 'arms':
- Assessment and intervention that offers assessments and intensive interventions to support children safely remaining within the care of their families, where possible.
 - Outreach Service that delivers a range of support to families including direct work with children and young people, parenting support and out of hours support. This arm of the service operates 365 days a year between 8:30 am to 9:00 pm.
 - Family Time Service (formerly named contact service) that provides supervision of family time for families whose children live other than with their parents eg. foster care and contributes to court required assessments of parenting, provides parenting support and assists reunification packages of work.
- 3.6 The team works intensively with families to prevent children becoming looked after and to reunify children with their families when it is safe to do so. The team works alongside the case holding Children's Services Teams and is not a case holding team.
- 3.7 The majority of the families that are referred to the Supporting Change Team are affected by domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and/or parental mental health. Recent data reports show that these factors are present (sometimes more than one of the factors) in more than 70% of referrals to the team.
- 3.8 Under this element of the Children's Services Strategy ICF funding and Welsh Government Grant funding has supported the commissioning and delivery of Family Group Meetings. This is an essential intervention that allows families to meet and discuss the difficulties and how they think they should resolve them as a family.

These are required for families in public law proceedings and recommended by the Lord Chief Justice as to be used in creative ways to support families staying together or reunifying.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

4.1 During 2019/20 Children's Services, following a period of reflection and evaluation, developed and updated its edge of care offer. Subsequently in 2019 the Supporting Change Team was formed and Family Group Conferences were commissioned. The financial year of 2020/21 has been the first full operational year under the enhanced offer. Whilst this report will illustrate the value that the developments have had, it is imperative to consider this within the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic being a clear barrier to the Supporting Change Service and Family Group Conferences functioning their optimum modes of service delivery.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

5.1 Supporting Change services have continued to deliver throughout the pandemic. They have adapted their working models to adhere to changing restrictions, whilst continuing to promote work with families that support children and young people to safely remain within their family unit.

5.2 The Supporting Change Team receive case work through a referral system, with the referring agency being case holding teams within Children's Services. The staffing compliment for each area of the Supporting Change Team arms is as follows:

- Supporting Change Assessment and Intervention arm - 1 Consultant Social Worker, 4 Assessment and Intervention Social Workers, 1 Health post.
- Outreach Team - 6 Outreach Workers.
- Family Time Team - 4.5 Family Time Workers and 1 Business Support Worker.

The above is overseen by 1 full time Team Manager.

Supporting Change Assessment and Intervention Team

5.3 During 2020/21 the Supporting Change Assessment and Intervention arm of the service accepted 79 referrals. 38 of the referrals were referrals under the Intensive Family Support element of the team, 17 were pre-birth packages of assessment and intervention support, 13 referrals were supporting the assessment and rehabilitation home of children who were looked after and a further 11 packages were bespoke.

5.4 Of those referrals where support has concluded 79% of the interventions were closed as successful packages of support. 57% of families who accessed the service reported an improvement in their family life and 18% reported a reduction in their substance misuse. In terms of substance misuse, it is important to consider this information within the context of not all referrals being substance misuse related.

5.5 Through the year the Quality Assurance Framework identified areas of good practice and learning for the service. In order to support the service's continual improvement trajectory a number of targeted pilot exercises have been undertaken to inform future planning. These include:

- A Placement with Parent Pod - the purpose was to consider the appropriateness of revoking Care Orders for children placed at home with parents or further intervention support required. The pod that was supported via core and Integrated Care Fund (ICF) funding supported a 36% reduction in young people open under a Care Order. Pilot learning has also supported a robust review system for cases where placement with parents is required.
- Developed a pre-birth pathway in August 2020 aimed at identifying unborn children at risk of coming into care at the earliest point so an assessment and intervention can take place before the baby is born, thus reducing the likelihood of the child coming into care. So far 17 families have been referred to the team.

Outreach Team

5.6 During 2020/21 the Outreach Team arm of the service provided 148 packages of intervention to families, including out of hours intervention, direct work with children and foster care placement stability sessions. Additionally, 527 hours of unplanned crisis intervention work was undertaken by the team. They provided outreach support for a number of families whose children have a disability during the summer of 2020 as all usual provision was shut due to the pandemic.

5.7 Outreach staff have engaged in training to jointly deliver a parental conflict programme with Families First partners which will commence in May 2021.

5.8 Planning for a piloted outreach support for foster carers and kinship carers out of hours to provide respite and prevent destabilisation of the placement has been undertaken, this will commence in 2021.

Family Time Team

5.9 The Family Time Team are experienced skilled support staff. They provide a contact service 5 days a week and work 1 in 4 Saturdays to accommodate CLA contacts. They undertake supervised contact between a child(ren), their parent(s) and family members, within the Merthyr Tydfil Family Centre. They offer hands on support and advice for families alongside a variety of play activities, managing behaviours, healthy eating, safety and routines and boundaries within a safe comfortable environment. Practical support for families including facilitating messy play, family mealtimes, ages and stages support.

- 5.10 The team has remained primarily open throughout COVID with stringent risk assessments in place and risk management of the building and staff. Each person who attended the centre was triaged via telephone on the day of his or her contact and on entering the building - full PPE was provided. The contacts were reduced in line with Welsh Government guidance, Court ordered contacts for newborn babies, and young children were prioritised initially. Alternative methods of contact were undertaken such as using digital technology and foster carers were supportive to ensure some form of contact was undertaken.
- 5.11 During 2020/21 there were 42 new referrals for family time to the team and the team supported 4 successful rehabilitation home plans.

Supporting Change Commissioned Services

- 5.12 Children's Services developed a Service Level Agreement with Tros Gynnal to deliver Family Group Meetings in March 2020. Since then, they have received 26 referrals of which they have closed 16 and 10 families remain involved. Of the cases closed, 56% of cases closed with a positive outcome. We have since commissioned additional Family Group Meetings and training for staff to enable them to facilitate which was made available with additional funding from Welsh Government. Children's Services are currently appraising options for sustainable Family Group Conferencing.
- 5.13 Children's Services have recently commissioned a pilot programme of parental advocacy. Parental advocacy can help parents:
- Understand information being shared by a range of professionals involved in the child protection and family court.
 - Enhance meaningful participation and inclusion within meetings.
 - Understand and secure their rights within statutory processes.
 - Make informed choices.
 - Have their voice heard by supporting them to express their views and wishes.

Impact and Influence of Supporting Change

- 5.14 It is important to highlight that the pandemic has been a clear barrier to the service functioning in the most optimum manner for families. However, the service continues to function well despite the pandemic and has achieved some very successful outcomes in respect of its aim to reduce the number of children becoming looked after, reduce the requirement for high-cost placements and increase reunifying children with their families where it is safe to do so.
- 5.15 In 2018/19 the average monthly rate of young people becoming looked after was 7.7. For 2019/20 this reduced to 4.5 and for 2020/21 the rate of BLA at the end of the year was 4.25. This is linked with developments in the Supporting Change Service (Edge of Care Service) established in 2019.
- 5.16 Overall across the year 2020/21 there has been a 7% reduction in children looked after numbers.

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.
- 6.3 We want to ensure that our young people and their families:
- have access to the right support at the right time to reduce their escalation in needs and support them in remaining in the care of their family where safe to do so.
 - Children and young people are supported to return to the care of their family where safe and in line with their desired outcomes.
 - Our children looked after have good quality family time.
 - Decisions are made at the right time to support young people in meeting their potential.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

- 7.1 We will continue to work in line with the Supporting Change action plan that sits under the Children's Services Strategy.
- 7.2 Key areas of work under the action plan in 2021/22 include:
- Embedding the learning identified within our Placement with Placement Pilot undertaken in 2020/21.
 - Continue to develop the support that families are offered based upon learning from the Quality Assurance Framework and service user feedback.
 - Undertake the Parental Advocacy pilot and reflect upon its learning.
 - Develop a sustainable Family Group Conferencing model.
 - Embed the Pre-birth pilot model into standard service delivery.
 - Work with partners such as Health, to develop pre-conception work.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

- 8.1 The contents of this report relate to the following Wellbeing Objectives:

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
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SOCIAL SERVICES

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