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## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Date Written	27 <sup>th</sup> May 2021
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Service Area	Social Services
Committee Date	8 <sup>th</sup> June 2021

*To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen*

# **Social Services Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan Update**

## **1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

1.1 Scrutiny members have requested the Chief Officer of Social Services provide a position statement on the Social Services Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan along with any details of issues/barriers experienced and how these have been overcome. The report will also outline the four completed projects from the RTI plan.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

2.1 That the scrutiny committee discusses and comments on the issues set out in the report.

## **3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

3.1 The last year has had a significant impact on Health and Social Care. The Coronavirus (Covid-19) has had a devastating impact on many people's lives. The need to lockdown for periods of time, self-isolation and shielding have had a serious impact on well-being and quality of life in local communities.

3.2 Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 Merthyr Tydfil was working with the 'Improvement Board' to consider areas of Transformation and Improvement. Social Services already had plans in place to look at future service delivery and were in the process of drawing up plans to take the service forward. Some areas we have been able to progress, but others have been delayed due to the pandemic, which as we move out of restrictions we will start to address now. We are now focussing on recovery from

the pandemic. We have been able to make positive progress in some areas with some projects being completed, within this report I would like to update Scrutiny on those projects.

- 3.3 Over the past year to eighteen months we have worked hard to ensure that the public still receive a service when required. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, along with partners from other public bodies and third and independent sectors, have continued to provide targeted front-line responses to the constantly changing situation that the Coronavirus pandemic has presented. We have worked within the guidance provided by Welsh Government and the Council has continued to deliver core services with a shared commitment to work in partnership. Where required we have worked in different ways to meet emerging and existing needs.
- 3.4 The virus did not alter Social Services duties to vulnerable children or adults. Safeguarding has remained a priority throughout the past year. Managers and staff have worked closely together to ensure that we have discharged our duties to the public, whilst promoting both public and staff safety.
- 3.5 Restrictions have been in place now for over twelve months and services have had to adapt to these changes in guidance and legislation. It is fair to say that the pandemic has put Social Care provision under strain in the past months. We are also mindful of future additional pressures and demands once lockdown restrictions start to lift. This is something we need to plan for now.

## **4.0 RECOVERY, TRANSFORMATION AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

- 4.1 As outlined in previous scrutiny reports the Social Services element of the RTI plan is focussed on improving resilience. This will be the focus of the areas for development and improvement in 2021/22. It is broken down into three areas:
- Recovery;
  - Resources and Service Improvement; and
  - Resilience and Sustainability.
- 4.2 Covid-19 will be a big part of our day-to-day work for some time and we need to continue being mindful of this as we move forward.
- 4.3 In relation to resilience in Social Services, overarching priorities will be to manage demand, performance and budget. We will continue to monitor and review Children Looked After figures as this has had a huge impact on the budget previously. We will also monitor and review the high demands on Adult Services eg. discharges from hospital and an increase in Learning Disability Placements breaking down.

## **5.0 WHERE WE WERE**

- 5.1 Safeguarding has always remained a priority for Social Services. It is imperative that we protect the most vulnerable Adults and Children in our community.

- 5.2 Prior to the Pandemic in March 2020, Social Services was embarking on a journey of change and improvement. The introduction of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 had been embedded into the way we were working, ensuring that Social Care were being more inclusive with the people they serve and ensuring that we were improving outcomes for each individual we worked with.
- 5.3 We had outlined improvement plans within the Corporate Plan, the Social Services Annual Report and within the Council's Improvement Plan. However as outlined above there are some areas of the Improvement Plan that we have been able to take forward, but others where there has been a delay due to the Pandemic.
- 5.4 Regional working ceased for a significant period and recommenced prior to Christmas 2020 and there was significant delay in some of the transformation and regional work.
- 5.5 Welsh Government supported Local Authorities with hardship funding, which has greatly assisted our care homes and allowed us to continue to offer a good service to all, with no financial penalty. It is important to note that whilst it is positive that Local Authorities have been able to access support of this nature, there have been costs incurred within Social Services that cannot be recuperated via hardship funding.
- 5.6 There were high numbers of staff having to isolate or testing positive for Covid-19 in the first six months of the pandemic, which impacted greatly on service delivery and saw an increase in reliance on agency staff.

## **6.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW**

- 6.1 Planning is now being focussed on recovery and how we deal with extra demand in Social Care in the future. This will require a whole Council approach.
- 6.2 Hardship funding continues for Quarter 1 of this financial year and there is regular dialogue with Welsh Government about market stability within the care home sector.
- 6.3 Numbers of staff having to isolate has reduced in recent weeks. The Care Home sector has no cases of Covid-19 currently and twice weekly testing has been introduced across the service, including social work teams to continue to offer safe care and support to people when they need it.
- 6.4 Referrals across Adult's and Children's Services have increased with pre covid levels being seen. Adult Services are supporting individuals to be discharged from hospital in a timely manner with packages of support or being placed in a care home setting if required. Within Children's Services the referrals being received are of a more complex nature although numbers are consistent with pre Covid levels. We have also seen an increase in requests for assistance through the Early Help Hub, a 44% increase in self-referrals was seen in Quarter 4, compared with the average of the first three quarters.

6.5 In respect of the improvement plan the following table gives you an overview of the summary updates of each project line:

Project	Original deadline	New deadline	Reasons / Comments
Review, reset or renew all service models across social services <b>(LCJ)</b>	March 2021	March 2022	<p>Impact of Covid has delayed progress. Additionally, the recovery from Covid could lead to changes in service delivery which will not be evident yet.</p> <p>NB. This project also links to new ways of working linked to the corporate project around agile and digital working. Deadlines for this element will be aligned to the corporate deadlines.</p>
Review existing programmes for impact of pandemic and risk mitigation <b>(LCJ)</b>	March 2021	March 2023	<p>Review of governance across the Region (since Bridgend joined) has led to new regional priorities.</p> <p>Regional priority areas identified for Children's Services over 3 years:</p> <p>Priority 1: Integrated approach to accommodation and care and support for those with complex needs.</p> <p>Priority 2: Integrated approach to promote emotional and physical resilience.</p> <p>Regional priority areas identified for Adult Services over 3 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Care Homes</li> <li>- Community Services Model review</li> <li>- Mental Health</li> <li>- Learning Disabilities</li> <li>- Carers</li> </ul>
Develop Advocacy Services <b>(AE)</b>	March 2021	May 2021	Slight extension to deadline linked to training in new approaches.

Project	Original deadline	New deadline	Reasons / Comments
Continue to work with Housing colleagues to develop an additional extra care facility for adults <b>(AE)</b>	March 2025	No change	In progress.
Launch the new service to support people with dementia in collaboration with Meaningful Care Matters <b>(AE)</b>	March 2021	March 2022	Project has been severely hampered by Covid 19. Day Services closed for a number of months during 2020 and once reopened they were located in an unsuitable environment to undertake the project. This was due to a delay in moving a different service to a new location (also caused by covid) which would have freed up a suitable site to undertake this work. With the covid restrictions on social distancing we were also unable to support the number of people that would be needed to implement the project.
Increase the number of foster carers in Merthyr Tydfil and implement the Placement Commissioning Strategy Action Plan <b>(TS)</b>	March 2021	No change	Process to be clarified re marking the project as Complete.
Analyse and understand our children looked after cohort (CLA) and continue implementation of the CLA strategy and closer to home project <b>(TS)</b>	March 2021	No change	Process to be clarified re marking the project as Complete.
Implement the action plan for the Care Leavers Strategy including Pathway to Work <b>(TS)</b>	March 2021	No change	Process to be clarified re marking the project as Complete.
Work with partners in the council and the	March 2021	No change	Process to be clarified re marking the project as Complete

Third Sector to finalise revised transition arrangements <b>(TS)</b>			
Project	Original deadline	New deadline	Reasons / Comments
Develop further support for carers <b>(AE)</b>	March 2022	No change	In progress.
Develop a cultural change programme across Social Services that fits with the wider council transformation <b>(LCJ)</b>	March 2022	Need to align timescales to corporate project - JB	This project is linked to the corporate project around agile and digital working. Deadlines for this element will be aligned to the corporate deadlines.
Work with the Third Sector and social enterprise organisations to improve the range of community-based support available <b>(AE)</b>	March 2022	No change	In progress.
Agree with partners how we need to commission accommodation services in the future that reflects the needs of the people living here <b>(AE)</b>	March 2023	No change	In progress.
Strengthen MTCBC's contribution to, and benefits from, working within the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership <b>(AE)</b>	March 2023	No change	In progress.

6.6 As outlined above four of these projects have now been completed:

- Increase the number of foster carers in Merthyr Tydfil and implement the Placement Commissioning Strategy Action Plan.
- Analyse and understand our children looked after cohort (CLA) and continue implementation of the CLA strategy and closer to home project.
- Work with partners in the council and the Third Sector to finalise revised transition arrangements.
- Implement the action plan for the Care Leavers Strategy including Pathway to Work.

- 6.7 In respect of the increase in the number of foster carers in Merthyr Tydfil and implementing the Placement Commissioning Strategy Action Plan, the aim of this project was to increase the cohort of local foster carers to enable children to be looked after locally. Evidence suggests this would improve their outcomes. In the longer term this could lead to potential financial improvement related to the cost avoidance of expensive out of county placements and a reduction in any potential overspend of the budget.

There were a number of specific actions identified:

- Continue to implement recruitment drive.
- Review Regional front door.
- Agree Regional model that reflects new Regional footprint.
- Implement new Regional front door.
- Implement Placement strategy.
- Work with the private sector to increase in area capacity and shape their services based on Merthyr needs.
- Review and develop the support provided to Kinship and SGO Carers.
- Consult with carers on enhanced qualitative support to maintain complex young people in LA provisions.
- Utilise ICF capital to increase capacity of suitable local residential care.
- Implement MAPSS.
- Develop arrangement with IFA for an emergency fostering provision for Regional Emergency Duty Team (EDT).
- Better use of data and intelligence to inform commissioning.
- Better accommodation and support for care leavers.
- Develop emergency fostering provision in another way.

All of the above actions have either been completed or have specific project plans/action plans in place which are monitored, for example - in relation to increasing the capacity of local residential care, an ICF bid has been submitted. Also, MAPSS contract is being awarded this month, and we are seeing an increase in our in-house foster carers compared to the use of Independent Foster Carers.

On 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019, Cabinet approved a proposal that the Council offer mainstream foster carers living in Merthyr Tydfil a Council Tax reduction of 50%, and a detriment payment to Merthyr Tydfil mainstream foster carers living outside the Authority. This was instigated by the desire to increase the number of Merthyr Tydfil foster carers. This, together with a strong local and regional recruitment campaign, has, and will continue to, ensure there is a resilient foster care provision.

- 6.8 When analysing and understanding our children looked after cohort (CLA) and continuing to implement the CLA strategy and closer to home project the aim of this project was to ensure that we safely reduce Children Looked After numbers whilst improving outcomes. In the longer term, this should have a positive budget impact.

There were specific actions identified in the RTI Plan:

- Review Placement with parents/Adoption/Permanence cases.

- Undertake audit of Placement With Parent (PWP) cases to identify good practice and learning.
- Undertake PWP planning and revocation exercise as per Terms of Reference.
- Complete Phase 2 Closer to Home
- Review impact of coronavirus on numbers – high demand on Children Services at present with higher level risk cases being referred.
- Monitor weekly referral and strategy rate to allow for a planned response to changing demand.
- Implement social work pod to move across services as a response to demand.
- Implement and action *Children’s Services Re-Set For Resilience*.
- Review *Children’s Services Re-Set For Resilience* outcome and develop plan for the future.

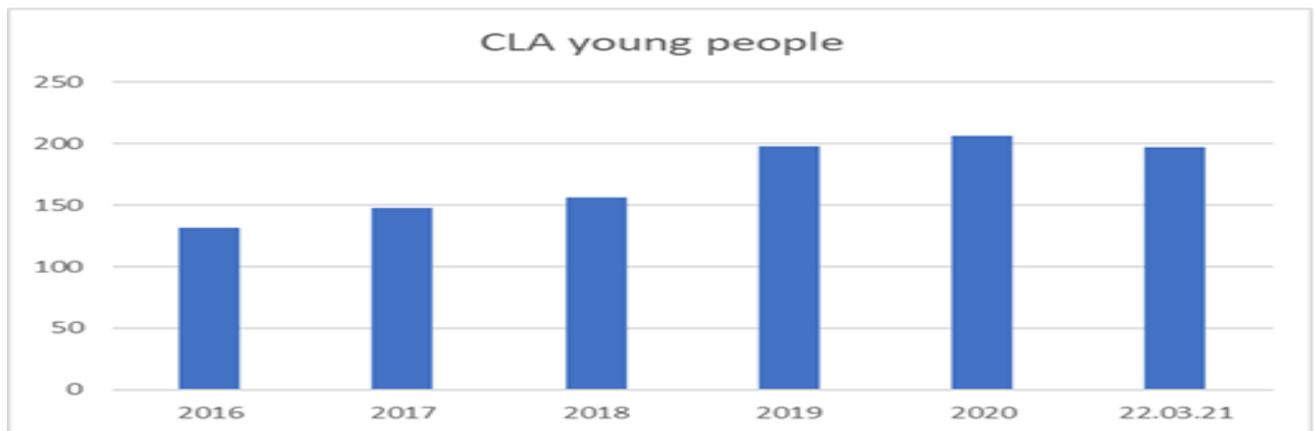
The overall end date for the project was set as 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, and although the elements have been achieved, it must be recognised that ensuring we continue to analyse and understand our children looked after cohort (CLA), continue the implementation of the CLA strategy and closer to home project are all ongoing (business as usual) area of work which will continue to be monitored by the Children’s Services and Directorate management teams, plus through reports to Scrutiny and Cabinet as required.

**In year CLA number mapping:**



**CLA 31.03.20 = 206    CLA 31.03.21 = 193**

**Five-year CLA figure picture:**



### **Changes in Children Looked After Population:**

- When reflecting over the last five years of CLA data this is the first year that CLA numbers have reduced in Merthyr Tydfil. This is not a pattern that has been replicated by the majority of Local Authorities during 2020/21, with a number seeing a significant increase.
- You will note from the graph demonstrating in year CLA reduction, that targeting PWP arrangements and promoting the utilisation of SGOs, has been highly influential in changes in our CLA population. Further work with kinship carers will be undertaken in 2021/22 to consider if a Care Order remains appropriate or if a Special Guardianship Order would be in the best interests of the young persons they care for.
- Whilst an increase is undesirable, it is important to consider this within the current context of court conclusions being delayed and adoptions not progressing at the pre-covid rate. Furthermore, revocation assessments being delayed during the first quarter due to safeguarding responsibilities being covered by Children's Services staff as different ways of working were required during an unprecedented national lockdown period. Also, we want to ensure children are safe and it may mean they need to be looked after for a period of time, safeguarding children and young people will always be our priority.

### **Becoming Looked After (BLA) Rate:**

- In 2018/19 the average monthly rate of young people becoming looked after was 7.7. For 2019/20 this reduced to 4.5. For 2020/21 the rate of BLA at the end of the year was 4.25.
- These figures come with the caveat that whilst we wish to continue to reduce the BLA rate through robust and early support services ensuring it is safe for children to remain within their family unit, there remains a significant number of unknowns in terms of our population's needs in light of a decline in referrals during the pandemic. The levels of proportionate assessments during 2020/21 evidences a decline in Proportionate Assessments being undertaken. This data has been explored further and it is relevant to share that the decline in assessments is due to a reduction in preventative proportionate assessments. The rate of assessment allocation within Children's Services remains steady and in line with pre-covid levels.
- During the Q4 referral rates into Children's Services have replicated the same period for Q4 2020/21, with, for a number of weeks, an increase being noted.

- 6.9 In respect of the project 'working with partners in the council and the Third Sector to finalise revised transition arrangements', the aim of this project was to finalise the policy and process to enable care-experienced children and young people to move safely into adulthood, with improved outcomes.

There were key actions identified in the RTI plan to take this work forward:

- Meeting with partner agencies to be convened.
- Engage with young people to ensure that their views are included in the final guidance.
- Gather evidence and good practice including a review of partners strategies with regards to transition arrangements and devise policy.
- Finalise with partners, the Transition Policy guidance.
- Finalise a transition service model to help children and young people move smoothly into adulthood.

The above actions have been completed.

The overall end date for the project was set as 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, and although the elements have been achieved, it must be recognised that enabling children and young people to smoothly transition into adulthood is an ongoing (business as usual) area of work, the outcomes of which will continue to be monitored by the Children's Services and Directorate management teams, plus through reports to Scrutiny and Cabinet as required.

A report to Scrutiny on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020, stated that in 2020/21 we have continued to build upon the ethos of early transition planning for our looked after young people. Subsequently Children's and Adult's Services have worked with multi-agency partners to establish a Transition Planning Panel. The purpose of the Transition Planning Panel is to bring relevant professionals together to enhance the transition process to achieve the best outcomes for young people who are transitioning to adulthood.

The panel aims to achieve this through:

- Identifying those individuals who will be transitioning from Children's Services.
- Support and agree how in the future young people will be supported to achieve their individual outcomes, if required through a multiagency discussion.
- Providing oversight of the transitional process.
- Providing a mechanism for identifying future commissioning requirements.
- Providing a forum for oversight and co-ordination of complex transition arrangements.
- Children's Services and Adult's Services have worked closely together and with partners to develop Transition Guidance which will be ratified by Council in 2021/22.

A full review of the Living Well element of the RTI plan was undertaken by the Directorate SMT in March 2021 and it was agreed that this project be marked as completed.

6.10 In respect of the project 'Implement the action plan for the Care Leavers Strategy including Pathway to Work', the aim of this project was to ensure that, through the implementation of the Pathway to Work strategy and action plan, care experienced young people were supported upon leaving care to gain training and employment.

There were key actions identified in the RTI plan to take this work forward:

- Work with colleagues and partners to implement the Strategy.
- Review Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference.
- Operational Group to oversee Make My Own Decision Strategy.
- Involve care leavers in the development, delivery and improvement of services.
- Develop apprenticeship opportunities within the Council for care experienced young people.
- Develop improved transition planning and pathways.
- Revised Policy for transition to be signed off.
- Revised contracts with IFAs in line with transition pathway guidance.
- Implement 'Work Opportunities for Young People in our Care or Leaving our Care' Policy Document.
- Revise 'Work Opportunities for Young People in our Care or Leaving our Care' Policy Document.

The above actions have been completed.

Merthyr Tydfil Children's Services, following consultation with care experienced young people, has produced a Care Leavers Strategy - 'Make My Own Decision'. The strategy and its corresponding action plan is underpinned by the national priorities to realising the ambitions of young people leaving care in Wales and to achieving the best for them. The overall national commitment to young people leaving care is having somewhere safe to live with financial security, an active offer of education, work or training and ongoing social and emotional support.

The strategy and subsequent action plan are focused around the key themes from our joint strategic commitments:

- Involvement of care leavers in the development, delivery and improvement of the services.
- Early preparation and planning for independence.
- Somewhere safe to live.
- An active offer of education, training and/or employment.
- Enough money to live on.
- Access to Mental Health support and specialist support.
- Prepare and plan early for independence together.

In February 2020, a report was presented to Council on the Pathway to Work Project, an extract of which is below:

*'In July 2019 there was a change in the provider of our Care Leaving Service to Llamau. When commissioning a provider for our Care Leavers Service our care experienced young people's views were central. The*

*information they shared with us, including strengths and areas for improvement, informed the tender and specification for commissioning.*

*In 2020 the 'Work opportunities for young people in our care or leaving our care' policy document was launched. It outlines our targets over the next 3 years as part of our Pathway to Work Project.*

- In Year 1, 2020/21 we aim to place 4 care experienced young people in Council settings to undertake work experience.*
- In Year 2, 2021/22 we aim to have created one traineeship for a care experienced young person.*
- In Year 3, 2022/23 we aim to have one care experienced young person completing an apprenticeship with the Council.*

*There was a risk that the pandemic could impact on these targets.*

*In line with our Pathway to Work Project, through the Integrated Care Fund, an Employment Mentoring & Support Officer role has been developed to support care experienced young people. During 2020/21 the role has been embedded within the Employability Team in the Local Authority, working in conjunction with the children looked after team to enhance the opportunities for CLA and Care Leavers. The role of this post is to build relationships with the internal CLA team, Employability Service staff and local training providers. In order to achieve and maximise opportunities, the Employment Mentoring & Support Officer works closely with Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus to identify additional support for participants that can assist them in moving closer to the labour market. The COVID pandemic has detrimentally impacted the reach of this post to support the transition of our young people into paid employment, given the level of employers who have needed to reduce operations. Despite this there have still been clear successes.*

*We have continued to work collaboratively with Voices from Care Cymru who facilitate local group meetings, and opportunities to meet, albeit virtually at this time. This forum offers extensive opportunities for Children's Services to listen to, hear and consult with our looked after children in order to understand their experience of transition to further inform service developments.'*

The overall end date for the project was set as 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, and although the elements have been achieved, it must be recognised that ensuring the care experienced young people were supported upon leaving care to gain training and employment is an ongoing (business as usual) area of work which will continue to be monitored by the Children's Services and Directorate management teams, plus through reports to Scrutiny and Cabinet as required.

- 6.11 Details of the four completed projects are outlined above. These will form part of our business as usual within social services and will continue to develop and evolve in the future to ensure we recover and improve services.

## **7.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE**

- 7.1 We want to provide an excellent service to the public of Merthyr Tydfil.
- 7.2 We wish to be resilient in future and ensure we are in a stable position financially to continue to provide the service that people need, when they need it.
- 7.3 We wish to continue to improve our services and change and adapt when required. We are aware that prevention work continues to need to be addressed longer term in both Adult's and Children's Services.
- 7.4 Partnership working is important, so we need to build on the positive partnership working that has taken place over the past 15 months.

## **8.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT**

- 8.1 As we look to recover from the Pandemic then we need to address all aspects of the Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan. We need to revisit timescales and ensure we get back on track addressing all areas of the Plan.
- 8.2 Work with our partners across Cwm Taf Morgannwg. Regional working has been re-established since December 2020 with clear priorities being set for Children and Adult Services.
- 8.3 Ensure we support staff in recovering from the pandemic. Staff are tired and it's been a tough year/14 months, we need to ensure they receive support. Regular testing for Covid-19 is available across the service, vaccines have been rolled out and there has been excellent take up of this. HR and Care First have offered support around Counselling for staff.
- 8.4 A new Principal Officer in Adult Services has been recruited and is due to commence employment in June. The Pandemic highlighted the need for extra resources in Adult Services.
- 8.5 Early Help and Prevent work needs to be a key focus in future and not just within social care but across the whole Council, along with the third sector and Health colleagues.

## **9.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES**

- 9.1 This report specifically links to the Living Well objective within the Council's Corporate Wellbeing Plan: People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they are safe and enjoy good physical and mental health.
- 9.2 Through the continued provision of services through the Pandemic we will also be able to demonstrate the team's contribution to support progress against other

wellbeing objectives set down by the Council in focus in the Corporate Wellbeing Plan. That is:

- Best Start in 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.

**LISA CURTIS JONES**  
**CHIEF OFFICER (SOCIAL SERVICES)**

**COUNCILLOR CHRIS DAVIES**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR**  
**SOCIAL SERVICES & DEPUTY LEADER**

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