

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	10 th February 2022
Report Author	Sue Walker
Service Area	Education
Committee Date	1 st March 2022

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Best Start to Life Thematic Report – Delivery of Key Objectives in the Corporate Plan: Focus on the Future: wellbeing in our community

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Committee has requested a report outlining progress made against the **Best Start to Life** theme across the lifetime of the current Corporate Plan (Focus on the Future: wellbeing in our community). The Committee seeks to measure the impact and progress of the Best Start to Life objective set out in the Plan: *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.*
- 1.2 The report responds to Members request to outline progress made against delivering the Best Start Wellbeing objective; and contains, where available, relevant data and information to provide evidence to support achieved outcomes. The report will also include information on the key challenges faced and how these have been managed.
- 1.3 The report makes explicit links to other key corporate strategies and policies that have been used to deliver the services. It shows evidence of how progress towards more integrated ways of working have developed over the lifetime of the Plan and will clearly outline key lessons learned to provide intelligence that can be used when developing the next iteration of the Corporate Well-being Plan.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 The content of this report is to be discussed by Committee Members, and performance data carefully scrutinised.

2.2 Scrutiny Committee Members provide appropriate challenge on the report content and offer feedback to officers, which can be considered and utilised when planning for the next iteration of the Corporate Well-being Plan begins.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 Legislative Context

3.1.1 The [Well-being 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 national well-being goals.

3.1.2 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 adopt in order to show that we have applied the sustainable development principle; the five ways of working are:

- Long-term
- Collaborative
- Preventative
- Involvement; and
- Integrated

3.1.3 We will reflect on how we have developed our use of the five ways of working within the body of the report.

3.2 Strategic Context and Service Delivery

3.2.1 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. There are a number of key strategies and plans that focus on delivering excellent services in Education but the key strategy in which all of our work is strategically aligned to and underpinned by is the Raising Aspirations Raising Standards (RARS) Strategy.

3.2.2 One of the two key themes within the RARS Strategy focuses on Partnership and Collaboration. As a directorate, we work collaboratively with both internal and external partners. We have developed and expanded our partnership working arrangements over the lifetime of the Corporate Plan; and we continue to explore further opportunities to integrate our key strategies and plans in order to strengthen our service delivery and continuously improve. Sections 5.6 and 8.0 of this report will provide more detailed information on our partnership arrangements and how these have been strengthened over the course of the Plan.

3.2.3 The Director of Education is accountable for reporting on the **Best Start to Life** objective. The report will ensure that the outcomes clearly describe what the Best Start objective seeks to achieve. The key long-term outcomes for Best Start are:

- Children live in a nurturing and stimulating home environment
- Children have access to high quality pre-school
- Improve the educational outcomes for all children and young people
- Children and young people have good health and wellbeing

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

4.1 Initial Development of the Corporate Wellbeing Plan

- 4.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act is about improving the environmental, economic, cultural and social wellbeing of Wales. Under this Act, the Council has a duty to ensure its wellbeing objectives are designed to maximise its contribution to achieving each of the seven wellbeing goals. In doing so, the Council must take all reasonable steps in exercising its functions to meet those objectives.
- 4.1.2 The population assessment provides public services with an overview of the care and support needs of the people of Cwm Taf and the range and level of services required to meet those needs. A [population assessment](#) of wellbeing was carried out by partnership organisations that make up the Cwm Taf Public Service Board (PSB) to establish an overview of the care and support needs of the people of Cwm Taf and the range of services required to meet those needs. A [needs assessment](#) was published in March 2017 and can be accessed on Our Cwm Taf¹ website. In addition, the Council worked together with residents to establish a baseline understanding of wellbeing in Merthyr Tydfil. This knowledge helped shape the wellbeing objectives and to understand potential responses to improve wellbeing.
- 4.1.3 Our Statement of Wellbeing was published on 22nd March 2017 and was revised in our final publication on 28th June 2017. The Statement explains how meeting our objectives will maximise our contribution to the achievement of the seven national wellbeing goals. The Focus on the Future: Wellbeing in our Community Plan was approved by Elected Members at the Full Council meeting on 26th July 2017. The document outlined the Council's wellbeing objectives and listed what the Council proposed to do to support an improvement in community wellbeing across the County Borough.
- 4.1.4 The Annual Performance Reports have demonstrated the progress made against the wellbeing objectives from the time when Focus on the Future was rolled out in 2017. The links to each of the Annual Performance Reports have been placed in the 'Background Papers' section of this report.
- 4.1.5 The current Corporate Plan (found in the 'Background Papers' section of this report) shows some of the key lessons learned over the lifetime of the Corporate Plan, along with highlighted progress on a year-by-year basis. The Corporate Plan also outlines how we have continued to adapt and change our working practices in order to maintain and improve services, especially when dealing with pressures such as the Coronavirus pandemic. A detailed report outlining the impact of the pandemic can be found in the 'Background Papers' of this report under **Post Pandemic Recovery**.

¹ The wellbeing assessment documents can be accessed via the [Cwm Taf Hub](#)

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 Well-being of our children and young people is of paramount importance, even more so as we move out of the coronavirus pandemic. When children and young people have better health and well-being, they are more likely to be ready to learn and ultimately achieve better academic standards. Raising standards of attainment is a key priority for the Council but this has to be set in the context of post pandemic recovery and partnership working.
- 5.2 From the earliest possible opportunity, we recognise the need to work with families to ensure that our children have the best support to be equipped with the skills they need to reach their goals and their academic potential. It is important to realise this ambition is everyone's business. Early years settings, families, youth settings, schools and wider partners have a key role in supporting our children and young people to achieve the very **Best Start to life**.
- 5.3 Reflecting on the lessons learned throughout the life of the current Corporate Plan (please see background paper) has helped us shape our priorities for the next iteration of the Corporate Plan. Education is one of the clearest predictors of life outcomes, such as employment, income and social status, and is a predictor of attitudes and well-being. The objective integrates the complete educational journey, from early years through to compulsory schooling and post-16 and seeks to provide children and young people with the skills and attributes to help them improve their own lives.
- 5.4 The key outcomes that Best Start to Life wants to achieve are:
- Children live in a nurturing and stimulating home environment;
 - Children have access to high quality pre-school and school education;
 - Improve the educational outcomes for all children and young people; and
 - Children and young people have good health and emotional well-being
- 5.5 The outcomes for Best Start to Life have been integrated into the Raising Aspirations Raising Standards (RARS) strategy. The strategy aims to deliver the primary outcome of improving the educational outcomes for all children and young people through the following themes and goals.

Theme 1: Partnership and Collaboration	Theme 2: Post Pandemic Recovery
Goal 1: Performance Management & Systems Governance	
Goal 2: Developing the Education Workforce	
Goal 3: Supporting Learners' Health and Well-being	
Goal 4: Improving Achievement and Progression	
Goal 5: Developing the Environment for Learning	

5.6 Partnership and Collaboration

- 5.6.1 To help achieve the RARS objectives, we have explored opportunities to strengthen our existing partnership working arrangements, whilst developing our level of engagement with exiting stakeholders.

- 5.6.2 Engagement with Children's Services: A Headteachers Working Group has been set up to address concerns from both schools and Children's Services about systems and processes – this will meet monthly and has representation from all primary clusters and from secondary schools.
- A pilot programme with Social Services is being rolled out in two schools to support families and their children as they recover from the pandemic.
- 5.6.3 Engagement with Central South Consortium (CSC): it is recognised within Merthyr Tydfil that there needs to be a robust framework to support schools giving the local authority confidence that all children and young people are progressing and achieving at least at the expected level if not higher. A group of Headteachers have begun to deliver on this framework.
- 5.6.4 Introduction of the Business and Education Together Partnership (BETP): the BETP concept was introduced to form a collaborative working partnership that will seek to engage with the local business community to form and sustain links that provide children and young people with an insight into the workplace, helping them to make informed choices about their future. The BETP membership consists of local authority officers from Learning & Economic Growth, Careers Wales, The College, Merthyr, First Campus from University of South Wales and several businesses.
- 5.6.5 A secondary Governors' Strategic Working Party has been set up as well as a Headteachers' Strategic Reference Group.
- 5.6.6 A link with Jesus College Oxford for Year 8 pupils: this has culminated in visits to Jesus College. The College Merthyr Tydfil will continue to support these learners through their 'More Able and Talented' programmes. These learners will also act as ambassadors to future year groups.
- 5.6.7 Capacity Building: there have been a number of appointments in the department to support Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and additional staff in both the Capita One Team and 21st Century Schools. This will support us in meeting the requirements of the ALNET Act, and the delivery of the Capita One Development Plan and Service Asset Management Plan (AMP).

5.7 Post Pandemic Recovery

- 5.7.1 Recovery Planning: there is still much to do in respect of recovery. Additional monies from Welsh Government (WG) for the now statutory Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing will support additional counselling in schools and the continued rollout of the Nurture Approach across schools.
- 5.7.2 The Whole School Approach to emotional and mental wellbeing was launched in March 2021 and is a key driver for schools. We held a workshop with Headteachers and Governors to look at how the local authority, Public Health and the Consortia will support this agenda, and of course in Merthyr Tydfil we will also have support from Lloyds Foundation in this.

5.7.3 During summer 2021/22 there were two SHEP (Summer Holiday Enrichment Programmes) running across the local authority covering four schools (one programme encompassed the three faith schools in the County Borough) and we have worked with third sector youth-based provisions to secure activity-based provision for learners during the summer holiday period.

5.7.4 Schools have had additional money from WG to employ additional staff to support the recovery process.

5.7.5 Through additional funding from WG into Early Years, there has been bespoke provision into Nursery/ Reception to support Speech and Language.

5.8 Data and Accountability Framework

5.8.1 Each objective uses a consistent performance management framework which is captured on a resource known as SOAP – Strategy On A Page (Appendix A). The SOAP identifies the well-being objective, outcomes and key performance indicators (KPIs) and forms the basis of self-evaluation and the departments Business Improvement Plans (BIPs).

5.8.2 It is important to note that for the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21, WG will **not** publish a range of performance measures across services, including all attainment measures (Flying Start, Schools, Youth Services) and attendance figures. This affects the current KPIs as identified on the SOAP.

5.8.3 We are in the process of developing a new Accountability Framework to enable us to report on key outcomes using local data. The aim is to include both quantitative and qualitative measures that we can use to formulate a robust Accountability Framework that can be built into the Council's corporate dashboard.

5.8.4 The Framework is being developed through engagement with our key stakeholders including the CSC, WG and officers within the Council. We also engaged with Members on this at a joint committee workshop (Learning & LGES and Transformation, Commercialisation & Corporate Centre) in April 2021.

6.0 **WHERE WE WANT TO BE**

6.1 It is the ambition of the local authority to be closer to or above the modelled outcomes in all performance measures by 2022, and at or above the modelled outcomes in 2024. However, given the changes in data publication, there is no way of measuring performance against Welsh averages, as WG is no longer publishing this data. Additionally, the collecting and publication of various measures including attendance data, has been suspended as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

We will know things are better when all children and young people:

- have high aspirations and expectations for themselves;
- begin statutory education having experienced a good start to learning both at home and in pre-school education where appropriate;
- are provided with education experiences that excite them and inspire them to learn and achieve;
- are educated in settings that are relevant and appropriate to meeting the needs of a 21st century curriculum;

- leave primary schools' literate, numerate and digitally competent, ready to continue their education confidently and successfully;
- leave statutory schooling with the necessary attributes and life skills to enable them to make a successful transition to employment, education or training;
- feel safe and have strong emotional well-being;
- have a voice in plans that impact on their own future health and well-being and plans for future developments of their local environment; and
- have the skills to adapt to challenges and are able to work as independent and interdependent citizens.

6.2 By the end of the academic year 2021/22, there will be an Accountability Framework in place for all schools allowing progress to be detailed.

6.3 Support for schools from CSC is having a positive impact on progress and outcomes.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

7.1 Continue to explore opportunities to integrate and align our work to help improve service delivery by working with both internal and external stakeholders.

7.2 Continue to monitor progress against key commitments and goals set out in the RARS Strategy; as well as delivering on our priorities set out in the Corporate Plan, RTI and our BIPs.

7.3 Continue to measure and evaluate the impact of the pandemic through robust self-evaluation and through appropriate measures within the Accountability Framework once established.

7.4 Work with and hold CSC to account for delivery against objectives set out in the RARS commitments to action plan and to ensure the service provided is effective and good value for money.

7.5 Establish working groups to deliver against 6.2.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

8.1 The improvement activities identified in this report directly contribute to our 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. As a result of our ways of working changing over the lifetime of the plan, the services and activities delivered now clearly link with the other objectives within the Corporate Well-being Plan.

8.2 The Best Start objective also supports the **Living Well** objective: (People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they are safe and enjoy good physical and mental health). Some examples of this are:

- MTCBC working in collaboration with RCTCBC to deliver the regional work programme as set out by the National Fostering Framework through the Regional Development Manager for Fostering Services to create a regional front door for fostering recruitment. This allows for an increase in the number of enquiries to fostering for MTCBC as well as improving response times to potential applicants and promoting a customer focussed response, which in turn can result in creating a better start to life for children throughout the County Borough.
- Work within the Children's Looked After Team (CLA) has helped individuals make positive changes to meet the needs of their children providing them with a stable, loving home environment. The positive progress and rehabilitation plan gives the children a sense of normality and demonstrates to them as a family, that positive outcomes can be achieved.
- The Pre-Birth Pathway has been developed across the service to enhance our work with families at a pre-birth stage to support children having the best start to life.
- Family Group Conferencing has been embedded across Children's Services to support families working together to support children and young people to safely remain at home.
- Parental advocacy has been piloted to support families in communicating their views to promote them in coproducing care and support planning for their families to promote achieving better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

8.3 A number of positive contributions have also been made towards the **Working Life** objective: (People feel supported to develop the skills required to meet the needs of businesses, with a developing, safe infrastructure that establishes Merthyr Tydfil as an attractive destination). A few examples of these are stated below:

- When developing and constructing the Merthyr Tydfil's Bus Interchange, work was undertaken with the primary contractors to deliver 'taster' sessions with local schools around topics such as engineering.
- The Business and Education Partnership (BETP) will engage with children and young people across our schools for them to experience the world of work.
- Schools and other settings introduce children and young people to the concept of place, and help broaden their understanding of their heritage and culture.
- Supporting children and young people to attain higher skills supports a more skilled labour market.

8.4 Best Start also works closely with colleagues in Neighbourhood Services (Environmental Wellbeing). Some of the ongoing work activities to support this wellbeing theme include:

- Awareness raising in relation to the need to ensure they recycle materials.
- Provision and upkeep of green spaces which can be used by children, young people and their families free of charge.
- Re-fit energy efficiency scheme reducing carbon emissions in schools and improving financial sustainability of energy use.
- Provision of sustainable, low carbon and energy efficient school buildings with low maintenance costs through the 21st Century Schools Programme.

SUE WALKER
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

COUNCILLOR LISA MYTTON
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND
PORTFOLIO MEMBER FOR EDUCATION

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Annual Performance Reports		
Focus On The Future: Well-being in our Community - Annual Performance Report 2017 - 2018		MTCBC Website - Annual Performance Report 2017 - 2018
Focus On The Future: Well-being in our Community - Annual Performance Report 2018 - 2019		MTCBC Website – Annual Performance Report 2018/19
Focus On The Future: Well-being in our Community - Annual Performance Report 2019 - 2020		MTCBC Website – Annual Performance Report 2019/20
Focus On The Future: Well-being in Our Community - Annual Performance Report 2020 - 2021		MTCBC Website – Annual Performance Report 2020/21
Post Pandemic Recovery		
Covid-19 Recovery and Pupil Wellbeing	8 th November 2021	Covid-19 Recovery and Pupil Wellbeing
Update on Activity - Pandemic	21 st September 2020	Update on Activity - Pandemic
Do these reports contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No